

# An Enduring Alliance



PHOTO: JIM PRISCHING

## THE BARRINGTON AREA COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

BY BARBARA L. BENSON

SOME 47 YEARS AFTER A GROUP OF LOCAL LEADERS CAME TOGETHER with a sense of urgency about the challenges facing their growing communities, Janet Agnoletti is in her office at the Barrington Hills Village Hall, and is discussing the current concerns and work of the Barrington Area Council of Governments (BACOG), without which, current residents of the Barrington area might not be afforded the quality of life found today in the greater community. As she talks, she goes through the intricacies of the scientific efforts she has spearheaded to determine water quality and sustainability in an area that is almost 80 percent served by private wells and septic systems. She speaks of contact with local legislators at a time when so many communities are trying to work with the stalemate in Springfield. She is often providing background for decisions that each BACOG member community is faced with daily to preserve their borders and the precepts of the lifestyles and zoning parameters set forth in their individual comprehensive plans.

Agnoletti is only the second executive director in BACOG's history. In 2000, she succeeded Donald P. Klein, who held the post for almost 30 years since BACOG's inception. Klein came on board as the individual villages were gaining a sense of their own identities, but he nurtured them into an awareness of the possible damage if unrestricted development was allowed to overrun the extraordinary natural resources and open spaces that were and are the hallmark of the Barrington area.

Community leaders in the 1960s had not been entirely naïve about the advancing urbanization around them. Forest Preserves and large private landholdings still dominated a countryside into which small communities had incorporated themselves around pre-existing features, such as North Barrington with Biltmore and its country club, founded in 1926, and the charming houses originally built as summer cottages, becoming more permanent residences after the Second World War. Most of the first villages to incorporate, Barrington Hills, and Lake Barrington, North Barrington, and South Barrington in 1959, had little or no commercial zoning. The place for shopping was in the Village of Barrington, the market town founded by the railroad in 1854 and incorporated in 1865.

For today's residents, that time over 50 years ago can be put into perspective by the former talented and exuberant founding executive director of the Barrington Area Chamber of Commerce, Carol Beese. She said, "Just think, when my husband and I came here in 1958, the Emergency Room was in Elgin!"

The mid-1960s was the time that "Barrington area" began to define the greater community. In 1966, when more people were escaping the deterioration of the cities, and seeking "God's Little Acre" especially to the north and northwest of Chicago, there was little community organizational fabric to address the needs of this new population. Thus was created the first "Area" organization, when the Barrington Area Development Council (BADC) came into being through the enlightened efforts of concerned citizens.

The new organization worked quickly, sponsoring a series of studies to identify area-wide planning issues, and to evaluate future growth and governmental alternatives. Out of those studies, two of them done by the highly-regarded planning firm of Barton Aschman Associates, came recommendations for immediate local action. Among them was the creation of a council of governments, a single area-wide decision-making body, representing all local elected bodies, and an area-wide environmental group—Citizens for Conservation.

It wasn't easy, because as noted, the individual villages had to be convinced that they were not losing their internal autonomy, but rather, gaining power in numbers to confront the external pressures of advancing development. By 1969, armed with state enabling legislation, the Regional Councils Act—the legal basis for Councils of Government or COGs—BADC began the process of establishing BACOG.

The catalyst for accelerating new efforts to implement area-wide land-



BACOG in 1970: From left: Bob Kosin, planner, Donald Klein, BACOG's first executive director, and Bev Geyer, BACOG's first administrative assistant.

use policies and common goals to sustain those policies came in 1969, when some 7,000 housing units were proposed for communities and unincorporated areas in and around the Barrington area. Of the 7,000, 1,800 units were to occupy a 500-acre site that now includes South Barrington Lakes. This was the Centex Development. In those now far-off days, a group of determined novices at dealing with proposals of such enormity mustered their connections and their arguments, especially the lack of public utilities, services, and transportation to defeat the proposal.

The Barrington Area Council of Governments met for the first time on April 25, 1970. The Executive Board, then, as now, consists of the Village Presidents of the member villages. In 2004, the Council was joined by the Supervisors of Barrington and Cuba Townships to include the unincorporated areas, which, falling under county jurisdiction, still faced development pressures.

At the first meeting, those signing the agreement were Fred Voss of Barrington;

Cy Wagner, Tower Lakes; the senior Thomas Hayward, Barrington Hills; Robert Skamfer, Deer Park; Elwood Caldwell, North Barrington; and Arthur Hogfelt, South Barrington. Lake Barrington joined in 1987, and for some years, Inverness was a member. Recognizing the need for a leader who could articulate the challenges facing the almost 90-square mile area, and the need for regional planning as an overlay of their individual planning, the search began for an executive director. After several meetings, Cy Wagner offered the job to Donald P. Klein, a planner working in Chicago, but who fortunately lived in South Barrington.

BACOG was charged with several primary functions, including maintenance of a continuing land-use information system; promotion of inter-governmental co-operation; formulation of area-wide goals; and comprehensive area-wide planning. And the work began quickly. By 1971, a comprehensive planning policies report was produced by Barton Aschman, focusing on environment, land-use, transportation, and housing. It established groundwork for an intensive program of citizen involvement and participation, a key factor in those early years.

The report was extensively reviewed by BACOG members and citizens groups, leading to a consensus, and resulting in the adoption of an area-wide comprehensive plan in February 1973. Updated through the years to reflect changing circumstances, in all four of the primary concerns originally identified by Barton Aschman, those early days of BACOG were inspiring, the common goals for the area identified. The intrepid Donald Klein, along



with local elected officials and volunteer citizens, became veterans of giving testimony to a variety of government bodies that would help to preserve the unique character of the Barrington area.

Before he retired, Don Klein offered a nostalgic memory of those early days in a speech to the Greater North Barrington Area Association in 1997. Part of his remarks included the following: “There are images from that time still fixed, we were so full of ourselves it seemed, I see Bill Miller and Frank Spreyer cleaning recycling bins, Ruth Moor breaking her leg at the first blood drive, the crude oil cloth signs Sam Oliver and I hung to advertise the Folk festival, Bill Brough and Al Borah testifying at the Centex hearing, Cy Wagner everywhere it seemed, Nelson Forrest almost as ubiquitous. The ladies at Lake Barrington Shores with their signs, “Save the Deer” and many of you at the Draper hearing on Cuba Marsh, at the Draper hearing on the Stone property, the Smith Clinic debate, Match Point tennis complex, and later the hospital. We rehashed our successes and failures at the Bank Tavern, those it seems now were heady times, all of us were new to the fight-little did we know, how long battles would last.”

But it had been an extraordinary journey, and the list of “What Might Have Been” is astounding (see side article). Was there still work to do when Janet Agnoletti took over in 2000? A chance remark of Don Klein’s offered a direction for Agnoletti as she looked at issues still facing the area. Land-use policies were now well-established. Conservation organizations and their holdings had become the envy of the entire country. But Klein said that the issue of groundwater, its quality and sustainability, in an area where only two of the communities, the Village of Barrington and Tower Lakes, had municipal water supplies, had not been studied.

By 2001, BACOG had acquired the volunteer services of hydro-geologist Dr. Kurt Thomsen, and a series of meetings began with representatives of the BACOG communities and organizations out of which grew a formula for a Board sanctioned program of groundwater mapping in the BACOG area. The Water Resources Initiative was to become one of the most comprehensive evaluations of water supply, quality, and sustainability undertaken with partnerships established by Agnoletti with the Illinois State Water Survey, the Illinois Geological Survey, and the U.S. Geological Survey.

Besides the mapping of the aquifers produced by BACOG staff with Dr. Thomsen, an outstanding achievement was the agreement reached with USGS to install transducers and satellite monitoring equipment on three specific wells on village properties, one in North Barrington and one in Lake Barrington, both in 2014, and one, first in Deer Park, and in 2016 relocated to the South Barrington Conservancy. The USGS website continuously monitors water level measurements in these BACOG wells, and Agnoletti can view these measurements daily. With other groundwater measurements compiled by the BACOG office, this information is establishing trends in aquifer water levels



Top left: In Sept. 2004, the Illinois State Geological Survey (ISGS) staff drill a monitoring well in the Deer Grove Forest Preserve that will help BACOG study groundwater and recharge activity.

Bottom left: USGS personnel install well monitoring equipment for a well at the South Barrington Conservancy.

## Water Testing

Through BACOG, residents who get their water from individual wells can get their water tested for two different results.

The week before October 11, testing kits are available at Village and Township offices for \$16. Bring the kit, with water from a home faucet per the instructions, to The Garlands of Barrington on October 11, and the water will be tested by the Lake County Health Department for bacteria and nitrates. Stay for a presentation about wells and how to maintain them.

After July 19, testing kits are available at the BACOG office to test natural water quality. Obtain an untreated water sample and a second sample after water softening. These samples are returned directly to BACOG for testing by the Illinois State Water Survey. The cost for this more extensive analysis is \$65. Many residents have found this to be an efficient way of determining if there are any quality problems with their well water.

and groundwater quality for the region.

Citizens can participate in water testing programs developed by BACOG with the assistance of the state agencies and Lake County to monitor the quality of water in their individual wells (see above sidebar). BACOG has taken public education about understanding where our water comes from into the schools. Fifth-graders in Barrington 220 School District get to see a video on the topic prepared by BACOG and this is followed by “Skype With a Scientist”, a live session where ISGS and ISWS scientists answer the students questions. They also receive a groundwater recharge map. So far some 250 students in five elementary schools have participated in the program.

The Barrington area communities, while seeing their numbers grow (with the resulting increase in the student population at all levels) did not all have impact fees to offset some of the increased pressure on school, park, library, and fire district finances; those that did have impact fees were not consistent. In 2002, a Development Impact Fee Task Force completed work to produce a model ordinance gradually adopted by most BACOG member villages to impose uniform



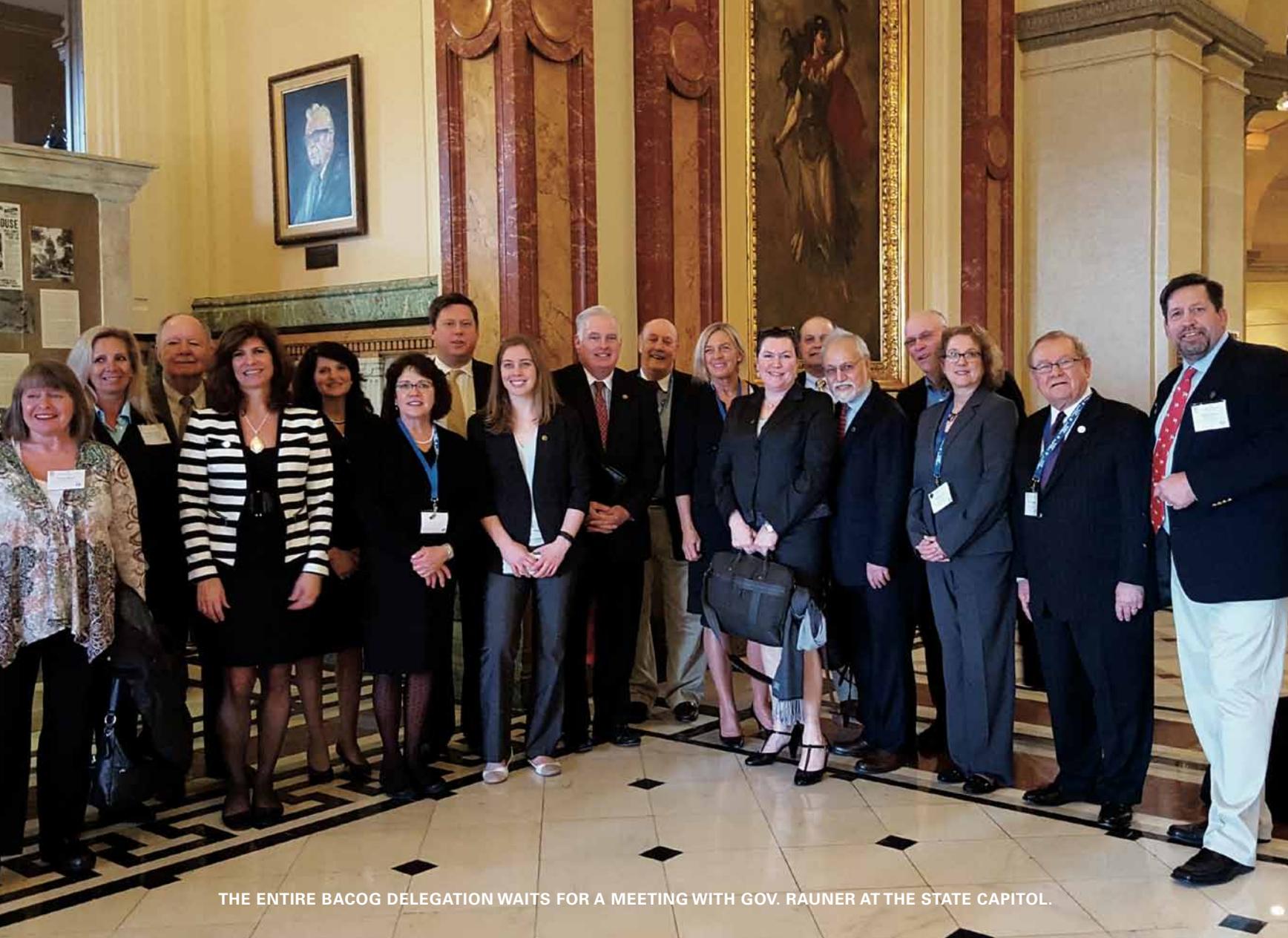
Top: In a Capitol committee hearing room are (from left) Senator Tom Rooney, David Parro, Jenny Zales, Amy Nyzaka, and Janet Agnoletti.

Bottom: An April 2017 meeting of BACOG officials with Governor Rauner in his office at the Capitol in Springfield, Ill.

impact fees on developers relative to the size of housing.

Another achievement of recent years has been BAGIS, or the Barrington Area Geographic Information System, a computer mapping and data management system. BACOG provided the auspices whereby the Village of Barrington received \$100,000 to purchase the software for seven villages, and the services of a consultant. With Agnoletti, a newly-established GIS Committee set policies on data distribution and privacy issues and creating an Internet Mapping Service for members. Boundary agreements, village zoning, property information, and water resources data, such as the groundwater recharge area map, are incorporated into BAGIS, as well as legislative district boundary updates.

Illinois Legislature activities are important components of BACOG and Agnoletti's



THE ENTIRE BACOG DELEGATION WAITS FOR A MEETING WITH GOV. RAUNER AT THE STATE CAPITOL.

work. Constant monitoring is necessary for the impacts of new bills on local municipalities and townships, whether it be taxation and revenues, labor law, land-use, or housing; the value of BACOG is to provide unified action and a central clearing house for its members. The executive director will often find herself advocating for the region's interests in Springfield and keeps in close touch with local legislators. Several times a year, BACOG members participate in Lobby Days in Springfield, when local village and township leaders have the opportunity to address their concerns with legislators.

Since 9/11, Emergency Management has been of increased concern, and BACOG has been conducting regional Emergency Preparedness Tabletop Exercises with officials, police, fire, EM, staff, and others, with one presented by Advocate Good Shepherd Hospital last October focusing on a train derailment in Barrington that affected multiple BACOG communities. The advent of the CN Railway has added a new element to readiness for emergency responders.

To look at a BACOG Annual Report is to realize that the surface has only been skimmed here of the daily activities of the organization. While land-use

has fewer crisis events than it did in the early days, communications technology has enabled a governmental organization such as BACOG to function at an even higher and broader level for its member communities. Partnerships is an operative word.

The Barrington Area Development Council created the Barrington Area Council of Governments, which in its turn, through the leadership of its only two directors, and members who bought in to the concept of a cohesive area through umbrella planning policies, has forged what Don Klein called the "warp and woof" of an area. Each village has a distinctive character, but at the same time, they are threaded together by fens, forests, and wildflower fields, by creeks and corrals, by flora and fauna that will inhabit an extraordinary greenway initiative offering a north to south sanctuary.

The Barrington Area Council of Governments is not a relic of the past. It holds a promise for the future to support its communities in sustaining their established and individual characters while standing vigilant over the welfare of all. With accomplished Executive Director Janet Agnoletti, BACOG looks forward with strength to its 50th anniversary.

## What Might Have Been

“what might have been” is an expression of regret, for BACOG it reflects a record of extraordinary success in upholding the goals of carefully controlled development and environmental preservation. • The residential and commercial development proposals that were made through the years and subsequently rejected because of the strength of the BACOG community, are quite simply staggering. For those who are newer to the area, here is a trip down memory lane from some of those who experienced “what might have been.”

◆ As mentioned in the article, Centex was the first of what Harry McCartney would come to call “super-regional projects” and it was defeated even before BACOG formally came in being. A proposed 1,800 units on 500 acres was beaten back and the area is now South Barrington Lakes.

◆ In the early 1970s, another “super” major land use proposal was the Beverly Project. Unincorporated areas between South Barrington and Hoffman Estates would become a new city, with 6,000 housing units, and industrial and office parks along the Northwest Tollway. Eventually much of the land was annexed into Hoffman Estates.

◆ The east side of town was not immune to a different proposal for land use. On Quentin Road between Long Grove and Lake Cook Roads was a relic of the Cold War, an abandoned Nike missile site which had become a temporary location for the Lake County Museum. Members of the Lake County Board eyed this as an ideal site for adaptation as a juvenile detention center. BACOG’s leaders were now becoming accustomed to public hearings, and their well-crafted objections saw this idea rejected.

◆ Through the 1970s, the “super” plans to co-opt our open spaces continued to emerge. Senator Paul Douglas proposed South Barrington as a site for a National Accelerator Research Lab. At first some were open to the proposal, and local government leaders were receiving congratulatory letters. But Barrington Hills began to be alarmed at the size of the project and questioned whether the area wanted such a large government facility in its midst. A groundswell of opposition emerged and combined with strong political pressure, the proposal was withdrawn. The land is now part of the Spring Creek Forest Preserve.

◆ Next was a landfill proposal for the Klehm Nursery. Claims that the perimeter of the landfill would not impact residences were misleading, and an extensive process was conducted to collect testimony

about the negatives of such a use for the property. Endless columns of garbage trucks on local roads, and the environmental and groundwater contamination threat to an area dependent on individual wells, were factors in thwarting this proposal which was deemed detrimental to South Barrington and Barrington Hills.

◆ In the late 1970s, the Barrington area in Southwest Lake County became the focus for development proposals. Louis Draper looked at the land north from Fox Point to Cuba Road, as ripe for building. In the 1960s, Fox Point itself represented significant growth for the Village of Barrington. And Draper saw those several hundred vacant acres as filled with housing units and an industrial complex. By now, the combined strength of BACOG, Citizens for Conservation, the Greater North Barrington Area Association, and Fox Point residents won this battle. The existence of significant plant and animal communities, with buckthorn strangling the pre-settlement ecology, interested the Lake County Forest Preserve District, which eventually acquired the property. Today, through Forest Preserve restoration programs, supported by Citizens for Conservation and volunteers, the public enjoys the Cuba Marsh with its paths winding through restored pre-settlement habitats, and, dogs are allowed on the leash!

◆ Louis Draper moved on to North Barrington and the extensive holdings of W. Clement Stone along Indian Trail Road and west of Route 12. Draper’s high-density proposal for townhouses and single family homes would have required sewer service from Lake Zurich, which, because of its own rapid growth was experiencing overload on its sewer system. This overload was beginning to seep into the North Branch of Flint Creek which flows through North Barrington and Grassy Lake to the Fox River. Draper was denied, and later North Barrington approved the Wynstone Golf Community for much of this land.

◆ South Barrington still had land-in-waiting, along the Tollway, when a proposal came in for an almost Pentagon-sized World Exposition Center on 1,100 acres with the requisite hotels and support facilities, and needed transportation improvements. Finally, through BACOG’s support, an inter-governmental agreement was signed with Hoffman Estates, the economic unfeasibility of the proposal was recognized, and this latest “super-project” bit the dust!

◆ The Poplar Creek Music Theater was a contentious issue; the provision of water and sewer service was a necessity, but noise, traffic and overall negative impact were raised in a lawsuit brought against the Nederlander Corporation by Barrington Hills and South Barrington. The theater did open, but closed after a few years when Nederlander went bankrupt.

◆ A proposal in the 1980s was yet another attempt to gain outside control and more intensive use of the open space within the Barrington area as represented by BACOG. The Chicago Farmers, with an interest from the Cook County Forest Preserve, came forward with an idea for a Living History Farm in the Spring Creek Forest Preserve designed to attract hundreds of thousands of visitors a year. An outstanding political effort took care of this one, and part of the southern land-use issues were resolved when the Sears headquarters moved from Chicago, and the Prairie Stone Business Park was built.

◆ In 1988, the northern area again came into focus, when Alan Pesman, a developer from the North Shore, proposed a massive hotel and resort complex on the Fox River off Roberts Road. He wanted a sewer connection from the Island Lake Facilities Planning area, and was offering the residents of Fox River Valley Gardens, now Port Barrington, cheap connections to that line. BACOG, CFC, GNBA all mobilized to fight this, and were successful with a follow-up that saw this beautiful land along the river become the Fox River Preserve, with the only boat launch into the river on Forest Preserve land.

Were there failures through the years? A few, but they are not detailed here, because overall the Barrington Area Council of Governments continues to be a successful regional planning organization that, through knowledgeable, skilled, and dedicated members, staff, and volunteers, has helped to nurture an area with a unique balance of residential, limited commercial uses, and a preponderance of open spaces that combine passive recreational uses with active restoration and conservation programs.