

A Plan without a plan and a drawing board that's idle

GOING TO TOWN

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It was a year ago that the Delhi (Special Provisions) Act was promulgated by Parliament holding all action on urban governance issues in abeyance till the government worked out solutions to the planning and governance mess in the capital city. Twelve months later, there seems to be no light at the end of the tunnel.

It's time for a citizens' report card on what we were supposed to get from the government, the legislature and the judiciary during the past year and what

There was a spurt of activity for four months (minus the festive season) during which the court appointed monitoring committees. The MCD shuttled between the central government, Delhi govt and these committees — there was no local area planning efforts (though the initiatives had begun), no reforms in governance systems...nothing.

The third quarter saw a change in guard at Supreme Court. The next bench decided to take a break and pronounced it would hear no more petitions but that all grievances would be routed through an amicus curiae and his assistant, if he needed one. So, a lawyer who had neither any knowledge, nor training of either urban planning or governance began to wield powers.

What is important is that there is

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The zonal plans available today have vague drawings which are not to scale and can be interpreted in any odd way that the DDA's planners would like to. In today's world of satellite imagery and digital mapping, one can buy an accurate Eicher map or look at Google Earth to locate one's house but not find the basic data required to administer a city, leave alone plan it.

So roads are declared commercial without any drawings attached, residents don't know what can be built in their neighbourhoods, court-appointed monitoring committees are doing what they feel is their mandate and now the Plan without a plan has been snipped by the apex court.

Nearing the end of the fourth quarter of the promised year, we have now got a cryptic one-line order issued by the apex court in response to arguments by the amicus curiae that has not left the citizen any wiser.

The order simply says that permission for construction of the additional floor shall not be granted henceforth. It is silent on what will be permitted, how the extra FAR would be built and a whole host of other issues which MPD 2021 should be addressing. The MPD is full of wishlists and suggestions without a concrete plan of action for implementation. Again, no drawings, no calculations and no consultations with citizens.

Would it be sacrilegious to suggest that the honourable courts need professional planning help, and not from the offending government bodies and legal eagles but from those trained for the job?

And while professional urban planners meet in condolence meetings to decry the death of their profession and to dissect the complex Master Plan drafted by DDA, the citizen is clueless.

In a few months, the courts will have the summer break and meet again in July. By then the rains would be playing havoc with the city.

The silver lining is that the Master Plan is now being sold at street corners like tabloids, magazines and pirated books. People call up to ask what FAR means and there is a general awareness of planning language and terminology.

The story of Delhi is the story of virtually every other town and city in the country. While we aim for double digit growth and move towards urbanisation and while we bump and trip through SEZs and real estate mess-ups, can someone please sit down and work out how we are to plan and govern our capital city?



we have actually received.

At the end of the first quarter in August, the city was told the way out was to re-designate some streets for commercial, mixed land and pedestrian usage. No drawings followed, none to show how these roads would be re-designed to take traffic or parking pressures. There were no consultations with neighbourhoods on how the mixed land use regulations would be administered — nothing but a written promulgation which took a few months to interpret.

The second quarter was spent in interpreting these new land use regulations and figuring out whether they violated the orders of the apex court.

no professional planning expertise available to any of the two courts.

Master Plan 2021, finally, appeared in February, the last quarter. In the past three months, various citizen's groups have been trying to interpret this 170-page snakes-and-ladders document. Again, it comes with only one largescale drawing of the whole NCTD, without any detailed zonal plans.

MPD 2021 says zonal development plans must be drafted and notified in 12 months, beginning February 7. Two of the 12 months are gone and yet there is no sign of activity on that front. The urban local bodies, MCD and NDMC have not even begun the exercise.

