

analysis of the new law, and the regulations and procedures emanating from it, is reserved for observation later in this chapter. Suffice to say here that at long last some of the improvements urgently recommended thirty years earlier have been achieved. It remains to be seen, of course, whether the changes will indeed be salutary.

The last two decades have seen the Board of Public Works become, in truth, a microcosm of state government itself. Its expanded role has mirrored the expanded role of the larger entity. To some extent that had been the case for many years, but what marks this last period for special consideration is not so much the quantitative increase in board activity as its immersion into entirely new, and not entirely calm, waters.

The 1960s and 1970s were activist years for state government. People demanded more and varied services from their government, and the reapportionment of state legislatures in response to Supreme Court edicts created bodies willing to provide those services. In part, at least in Maryland, this expansion was into entirely new areas not formerly subject to governmental intrusion at any level; in part it involved picking up activities that local governments for fiscal reasons found necessary to shed.

All of this, fortuitously or otherwise, happened to coincide with two other major phenomena of the period—the growing demand for affirmative action programs as a means of implementing the equality of treatment guaranteed both by law and public morality, and an increasing concern, especially after the revelations collectively referred to as “Watergate,” over ethics in government. At some point people began to realize that in addition to its political authority, the state had become a significant economic entity and that its economic power could be marshaled as effectively as its political power to achieve desired social goals. One principal method of so utilizing the state was, alternatively, to restrict or to mandate the types of people and firms with whom the state would do business. As in Maryland the Board of Public Works was the fulcrum for awarding major state contracts, and to that extent was a principal exerciser of the state’s economic power, it soon became the legislature’s designee for enforcing these various social policies, some of which were occasionally in conflict.

The intrusion of state government into new areas or those of traditionally local concern and the task of enforcing social policy by means of state contracting created a new range of vexing problems for the board. A wider spectrum of political considerations crept into the decision-making process as the political subdivisions, minority groups, labor unions, small business enterprises, and others all scrambled for bigger shares of the state’s largesse; these political considerations, in turn, caused public interest (and in particular the interest of the news media) to focus more intensely on board activities.

The origin of the state’s (and the board’s) involvement with public school construction has already been mentioned briefly.¹⁵ It came about as part of the post-World War II capital reconstruction program, beginning in 1947 with a modest subsidy to the counties from the state budget. The more massive program began in 1949 with \$20 million in capital grants and \$50 million in loans. The loan program involved not

15. See chapter 7. For a more comprehensive history, see Commission to Study Revision of the School Construction Program, *Maryland School Capital Program* (Annapolis, 15 January 1977), MdHR 789304 (hereafter *Maryland School Capital Program*).