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CITY PLANNING

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The ideal of city planning is one in which all city activities—all the plan- nings that shape each one of the frag- ments that go to make up the physical city—shall be so harmonized as to re- duce the conflict of purposes and the waste of constructive effort to a minimum, and thus secure for the people of the city conditions adapted to their attaining the maximum of productive efficiency, of health and of enjoyment of life.

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City Planning may conveniently be considered under three main divisions.

The first concerns the means of cir- culation; the distribution and treatment of the spaces devoted to streets, railways, waterways, and all means of transporta- tion and communication. The second concerns the distribution and treatment of the spaces devoted to all other public purposes. The third concerns the re- maining or private lands and the char- acter of developments thereon, in so far as it is practicable for the community to control or influence such develop- ment.

Facility of communication is the very basis for the existence of cities; improved methods of general transportation are at the root of the modern phenomenon of rapid city growth; and the succee- of a city is more dependent upon good means of circulation than upon any other physical factor under its control.

Moreover the area devoted to streets in most cities (excluding those regions that are still undeveloped) amounts to between twenty-five and forty per cent. of the whole, and the improvement and use of all the remainder of the city area, both in public and in private hands, is so largely controlled by the network of subdividing and communicating streets that the street plan has always been regarded as the foundation of all city planning.

It is an interesting consideration that most of the street planning in America and until recently in Europe has been done from the proprietary point of view. Nearly all new city and town sites that have been deliberately planned, whether well or ill, have been planned by or for the proprietors of the site, largely with a view to successful immediate sales. Regard for the remoter interests of the community has commonly been dictated more by an optimistic opinion of the intelligence of prospective purchasers than by a disinterested desire to promote their future welfare.

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Naturally where the proprietor or his agent has been enlightened and wise, even with a selfish enlightenment, the results have been relatively good for the community and where he has been short-sighted and ignorant and mean in his selfishness the results have been bad; but the proprietary point of view must have colored and narrowed the outlook of the designers throughout. Moreover the methods, traditions and habits created in this school have in- evitably dominated in large measure those official street planning agencies which the people of some cities have subsequently established with the pur- pose of exercising a control in the interest of the whole community over the street layouts of individual proprietors.

Such agencies, equipped with adequate powers and so organized as to have any strong initiative and to accomplish im- portant results on the general plan of the city have been comparatively few in this country; but many people whose interest in this fundamental aspect of city planning has been only recently aroused seem to be quite unaware what a great amount of long-continued, patient, laborious effort has been spent and is being spent daily on such work

by intelligent and well-intentioned city officials. Their hands are often tied by lack of adequate power and by lack of any supporting public opinion; they often fail to show that breadth of outlook and strength of initiative that would be desirable; too often their ideals of street planning are formed in a narrow school and a bad one; and sometimes they are unrighteously influenced by speculative and proprietary interests against the general welfare; but taken by and large they are doing the best they can to control the street development of their cities wisely. What is needed is more power for them, more public understanding of their work, and the development of a better and broader knowledge and appreciation on their part of the technique of city planning.

The long distance and suburban steam railroads * * * * divorced themselves from the antiquated methods of the street planners but all other improved means of transit have been as a rule bound hand and foot by them.

Street-planners whether working for cities or for land proprietors have generally stuck in the old ruts and have failed to attack the problem from the railway point of view, while the enterprising men who have developed the traction systems have generally felt compelled to ask for franchises on existing streets. A few exceptions to this attitude may be noted. As long ago as 1877 a plan was prepared for the northern wards of the City of New York by Frederick Law Olmsted and James R. Cross which included, in addition to the streets, a system of rapid transit routes on separate rights-of-way arranged with a view to avoiding grad crossing of streets. The plan was officially approved but was subsequently abandoned. In 1889 a group of investors under the leadership of Henry M. Whitney, operating through the West End Street Railway and the West End Land Company, induced the Town of Brookline, Massachusetts, to widen the old Beacon Street into a new type of thoroughfare, in which, along with two roadways, footways, a bride path and four rows of trees, was included a separate grassed reservation for electric cars with infrequent street crossings, the whole forming an im-

portant radial thoroughfare of the Boston Metropolitan District. A considerable number of such broad tree-lined radial thoroughfares with electric car reservations have since been introduced into the street plans of certain American cities; but such thoroughfares as these have generally been the result of some special campaign for some special purpose, usually to stimulate the development of a particular tract of suburban property, and are still exceptional features of our street system.

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Without more than alluding to the immensely important and complex relations between the railroad freight lines and terminals, the wharves, the waterways, the sites for economical warehousing and manufacturing, and the street system, I can say in summary that there is great need of treating all the means of circulation in a city as a single connected system, and at the same time of recognizing clearly the differentiation of all its parts, so that each shall fit its function amply but without waste, from the biggest railroad terminal down to the smallest alley.

The second main division of city planning is a very miscellaneous one, including all the public properties in a city not used primarily for circulation; but they may be grouped for our purposes into three principal classes.

Class A may be called that of central institutions, serving the whole city and requiring for convenience a comparatively central position; such as the city hall and the head offices of public departments and services, both municipal and otherwise, the public library, museums, central educational establishments, and the like, together with the grounds appurtenant to them. * * * * One of the greatest needs in regard to all matters of this sort is the application of intelligent effort to the grouping of such institutions at accessible points in so-called civic centers for the sake of convenience and of increased dignity and beauty.

Class B consists of institutions serving limited areas and therefore needing to be represented in many different places throughout the city. Such are

schools, playgrounds, gymnasium and baths, branch libraries, branch post offices, police stations, fire engine houses, district offices and yards of the department of public works and other public services, neighborhood parks and recreation grounds, voting places, public and quasi-public halls and social centers, and so on, including in the same class as far as practicable the local institutions conducted by private organizations, such as churches. The most notable thing about this class of institutions is that while most of them belong to the city and are therefore entirely under the city's control as to localities and character, the selection of sites is ordinarily determined by separate departments without the slightest regard to the selection of other departments or the possibilities of economy, convenience and esthetic effect that might result from combination or grouping.

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We must come, I believe, to a full acceptance of the principle, now well established in some of the German states, that when any tract of land in or adjoining a city is opened up for building purposes not only the necessary streets must be set apart and dedicated to the public but also all the other areas that will be required to meet properly and liberally, but without extravagance, *all* the public needs of that locality when fully occupied, just so far as those needs can be foreseen by intelligent and experienced men. In no other way can the sites for these local institutions be placed so well or with so little economic waste.

Class C of public properties consists of many special institutions not demanding a central location but serving more than a local need, such as hospitals, charitable and penal institutions, reservoirs and their grounds, large parks and outlying reservations, parkways, cemeteries, public monuments and certain monumental and decorative features to be found in connection with open spaces that exist primarily for other purposes. In this class the opportunities for economy and better effects through combination and grouping of sites are not so numerous, and what seems to be most needed is a more far-sighted regard

for the relation of each of these important institutions to the probable future distribution of population and to the main transportation routes.

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The third main division of the lands within a city, consisting of all that remains in private ownership, is subject to public control chiefly in three ways.

The street plan absolutely fixes the size and shape of the blocks of land and hence limits and largely controls the size and shape of individual lots and of the buildings which can be most profitably erected upon them.

The methods of taxation and assessment greatly influence the actions of land owners, and of those having money to invest in land, buildings, or building mortgages. [They have a direct influence upon the speculative holding of unproductive property; upon the extent to which development is carried on in a scattered sporadic manner so as to involve relatively large expense to the community for streets, transportation, sewerage, etc., in proportion to the inhabitants served; upon the quality and durability of building; and, in those states where property is classified and taxed at varying rates, upon the class of improvements favored.]

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But the chief means of planning and controlling developments on private property is through the exercise of the police power. The principle upon which are based all building codes, tenement house laws and other such interferences with the exercise of free individual discretion on the part of land owners, is that no one may be permitted so to build or otherwise conduct himself upon his own property as to cause unreasonable danger or annoyance to other people. At what point danger or annoyance becomes unreasonable is a matter of gradually shifting public opinion interpreted by the Courts.

[The first object of building codes and of the system of building permits and inspections through which they are enforced is to ensure proper structural stability. A second object is to reduce the danger of fire to a reasonable point.

A third object is to guard against conditions unreasonably dangerous to health.

* * * * An examination of the building codes and tenement house laws of thirty-five American cities shows a confusing diversity in the regulation limiting building heights and horizontal spaces to be left open, and there are some cities in which there is practically no effective regulation at all. For wooden buildings the limit, where any limit is set, varies from 30 to 60 feet; for other non-fireproof buildings from 60 to 100 feet, for fireproof buildings from 125 to 260 feet; or in the case of regulations dependent on the width of the street the limit of height varies from the same as the width of street to 2 1-4 times the width of the street.

* * * * An arbitrary limitation to a given height or given number of stories accompanied by an arbitrary limitation on the percentage of lot to be occupied by building if applied to a whole city is obviously crude and unfair in its working. At one end of the line it might unduly hamper commercial developments of a desirable sort and yet in the outlying districts permit the construction of tenement houses with a lower standard of light and air than might reasonably be exacted. The district system is a great improvement upon such a uniform system, yet even within a district it is very doubtful whether an arbitrary height limitation is the best requirement. My own impression is that the most promising principle would be to establish for each district some reasonable relation between the maximum height of any part of a new building and its distance from the next opposite building land not controlled by the same owner, whether across a street or in the rear, and also a relation between the maximum height of any part of a new building and the distance to the next opposite wall of a building (if any) upon land controlled by the same owner. This would permit erecting a

building to any height whatsoever provided a sufficient area were kept free to prevent undue interference with light and air.

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I have outlined in a fragmentary sort of way the three main divisions of city planning, dealing respectively with the lands devoted to the means of public circulation, the lands devoted to other public purposes and the lands in private ownership.

Within all of those divisions the actual work of city planning comprises the following steps: a study of conditions and tendencies, a definition of purposes, a planning of physical results suitable to these purposes, and finally the bringing of those plans to execution through suitable legal and administrative machinery. Every one of those steps of progression is vital, every part of the three main divisions of the field is important.

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In all I have said you have noticed the absence of any reference to beauty in city planning; that is because I want in closing to emphasize the relation which it bears to every phase of the subject from beginning to end.

The demands of beauty are in large measure identical with those of efficiency and economy and differ merely in requiring a closer approach to practical perfection in the adaptation of means to ends than is required to meet the merely economic standard. So far as the demands of beauty can be distinguished from those of economy the kind of beauty most to be sought in the planning of cities is that which results from seizing instinctively with a keen and sensitive appreciation the limitless opportunities which present themselves in the course of the most rigorously practical solution of any problem for a choice between decisions of substantially equal economic merit but of widely differing esthetic quality.