

CITY PLANNING, A FORECAST OF THE CITY TO BE*

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LIKE any live, productive organism, every city that is not moribund is in a constant state of change and growth. Numerical increase of population, in the current phase of human history, is so regular a feature of live and productive cities that it is generally accepted as the chief index of their vigor. It is so obvious that this increase of population necessitates additions to the physical equipment of the city (such as more houses, more stores, more streets, sewers, water pipes, telephone lines, etc.), and we are so accustomed to the sight of new construction going on actively under the stimulus of this necessity, in a manner calculated to meet many of these demands, that we are apt to ignore two considerations very important to the healthy outcome of this active growth.

The first of these is that the need for additional equipment caused by the increase of population stimulates the supply of some kinds of equipment very directly and almost automatically, but in the case of other kinds only very indirectly and often so tardily as to cause serious hardship and economic loss.

Of course the demand is most promptly and automatically met in the cases where there is likely to be a prompt, direct and rapid return of the capital invested in supplying the new equipment and facilities. The establishment of places for the retail supply of food and drink and other common supplies of daily life follows with astonishing promptitude on the rise of a demand. Under normal conditions the supply of dwellings of some sort keeps pace with the demand in quantity tolerably well, although in respect to kind and quality there is a lack of that nice adjustment of the supply to the demand which abstract economic law would seem to promise. This is partly due to the fact that the standards which people tend to demand in regard to many features of a dwelling

shift, and in most respects advance, much more rapidly than it is possible to recover the capital invested in out-of-date types of building, except by charging prohibitive rents. This creates a relative plethora of old and inferior buildings which necessarily lowers the average standard at which supply and demand will meet. But the condition is due also in large measure to the very many and complicated influences of a wholly artificial and controllable kind, such as the presence or absence of various building regulations and other exercises of the police power defining arbitrarily what must and what must not be done, and also the varying incidence of taxation upon land and buildings.

It is notorious that these artificial influences, absolutely under the control of the people, are often such as to retard rather than to stimulate the adjustment of supply to demand in housing. Here we come to one of the basic features of intelligent city planning, namely, the careful scrutiny of these exercises of the police power and of the taxing power which have any decided influence upon the form and character of buildings or other features of the city's physical equipment, and their deliberate and careful, but courageous alteration, if their influence can thereby be exerted toward a healthier, more desirable and economically sound development.

The opportunity for profit in supplying the demand for additional buildings which accompanies increase of population carries with it the motive for supplying just such other needs of the additional population as are necessary to the marketing of the buildings. In some localities, especially in suburban municipalities, just outside the limits of a large city, where the taxes may be low for the time being, and but little control is yet exerted under the police power, buildings may be sold and occu-

* Portion of an address delivered before the Third National Conference on City Planning.

pied without the provision of a single one of those facilities which are commonly provided or maintained in modern cities by collective action. Water may be furnished by a well on the premises, subject to inevitable contamination as the district fills up with houses; waste may be turned into a cesspool, beginning at once its share of the contamination of the soil. The access to the buildings may be merely by a path or wagon track on the natural surface of the ground over a narrow right-of-way extending from the nearest public road. Yet the price of the buildings and the lots they stand upon will be based upon the reasonable expectation that all these deficiencies will be made good without serious burden to the purchaser in the course of a comparatively few years, presumably before the increasing density of population makes such rural arrangements seriously detrimental to the property. The price is fixed by the expectation that the prospective urban equipment will come in large part without any additional or higher charge to the occupants of these buildings for the services rendered than is made in the case of those for whom the full equipment is already in existence and paid for. In some communities even the grading and the proper permanent paving of the local street in front of the buildings and the construction of the sewer (local) which connects them with the main are put in, whenever the belated time comes for putting them in, at the cost of the city. Generally these two expenses are recognized as being so clearly a necessary incident of the proper utilization of the buildings that the cost is by one means or another charged in whole or in part upon the owners of the abutting lots; but it very frequently happens that this burden falls upon ignorant purchasers who have paid a price that did not take fairly into consideration this impending burden.

The equipment for the supply of water, electricity, gas and other services which are supplied on a commercial basis and require only such space as is generally available in the streets above or below ground, are provided like the streets of access, in response to increasing demand. But in the case of such features of the equipment of a civilized city as school

sites and schoolhouses, playgrounds, parks, squares, and main traffic thoroughfares for the larger movements of materials and passengers, all of which in some degree are expected and the expectation of which largely gives marketable value to every building site, there is no commercial mechanism by which the demand can ordinarily beget a supply. Houses and streets for house frontage *will* come into existence, well or ill, by individualistic commercial enterprise, to meet the demand created in a town of growing population; but schools and other public buildings and their grounds, together with public open spaces for every general public purpose from parks to traffic thoroughfares and canals, can only be provided by deliberate conscious co-operative action. Ordinarily such action lags so far behind the demand for facilities in a growing city that a considerable part of the population is at all times waiting in a very ill-provided condition, and labors under a severe and needless handicap. What is more serious, such collective action, occurring as it does only in response to long-continued and clamorous demands, lags very far, indeed, behind the development of private property, which occurs largely in speculative anticipation of demands; and therefore it frequently becomes impossible for the community when it does move, to obtain any adequate and satisfactory provision for those needs except by destroying previous private developments at a cost which may be altogether prohibitive.

Here we come to the second basic feature of intelligent city planning, that of forecasting as well as our knowledge permits what the reasonably expectable needs of the future will demand in the way of land for all sorts of collective purposes, and then deciding in view of this forecast just what it will pay to do in the way of reserving all or a part of this land from obstructive occupation by private improvements. . . .

There is another important consideration which, I think, has often been overlooked even by ardent advocates of city planning and by those engaged in developing city plans. This consideration is that there is a great deal of growth and change in a city quite independent of increase of population. It is possible

to conceive of a healthy, prosperous, productive city the inhabitants of which would not vary much in number from decade to decade. If such a phenomenon is unknown today it may not be so abnormal a few centuries hence. But it would not follow from the substantially unchanging size of the city that its physical make-up would remain without change, any more than its inhabitants would become a company of unchanging immortals because their number remained about the same. Just as new generations replace the old with individuals who differ from their predecessors to some extent in body and in mind, so in such a city old buildings, old streets, old institutions must give way, more slowly but no less certainly, to new and different generations. New conditions in commerce, industry, art, fashion and government would constantly give rise to changes in the physical equipment for their prosecution. Quarters built for people with a given set of standards would continue to be abandoned either because that particular combination of standards had been outgrown or because that class of people had found it convenient to move elsewhere. New industries with unforeseen requirements as to transportation facilities, or extent of plant, or otherwise, would be compelled to displace older and less productive occupants, often requiring radical changes in streets, railways, waterfront developments and the like. Large blocks of land devoted to outgrown uses would have to be subdivided for the erection of dwellings. Such changes of use and the reconstructions and readjustments of the city plan which they involve, are much intensified by rapid growth of population, but they are not merely accidental accompaniments of that growth. They are absolutely normal features of healthy, vigorous municipal life. To ignore them or to regard them as exceptional and extraordinary interferences with the normal execution of a rigid city plan, made once for all, is perhaps the worst as it is the commonest mistake in regard to the whole subject. No city plan is a thoroughly good one which does not recognize the need for flexibility and alteration. . . .

Perhaps the most important principle in the planning of a street system or the extension of a street system, in order to make possible a proper flexibility of plan, is that there should be a marked differentiation between the thoroughfares and the local streets; the former dividing the city into big blocks that may be regarded as normally permanent and rigid in outline; the latter subdividing these big blocks into minor blocks of varying sizes and shapes, which can in the future be further subdivided or thrown together into larger units by closing certain streets or otherwise modified. . . .

We must disabuse the public mind of the idea that a city plan means a fixed record upon paper of a desire by some group of individuals prescribing, out of their wisdom and authority, where and how the more important changes and improvements in the physical layout of the city are to be made—a plan to be completed and put on file and followed more or less faithfully and mechanically, much as a contractor follows the architect's drawings for a house. We must cultivate in our own minds and in the mind of the people, the conception of a city plan as a device or piece of administration machinery for preparing and keeping constantly up to date, a unified forecast and definition of all the important changes, additions and extensions of the physical equipment and arrangement of the city which a sound judgment holds likely to become desirable and practicable in the course of time, so as to avoid, as far as possible, both ignorantly wasteful action and ignorantly wasteful inaction in the control of the city's physical growth. It is not a means by which one group of men or one generation may dictate to their successors or relieve the latter of responsibility. It is a means by which those who become at any time responsible for decisions affecting the city's plan may be prevented from acting in ignorance of what their predecessors and their colleagues in other departments of city life have believed to be the reasonable contingencies. . . .