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City planning: an introductory address delivered by Fredrick Law Olmsted at the second National conference on city planning and congestion of population, at Rochester, New York, May 2, 1910. Department of City Making, Fredrick L. Ford, chairman, Hartford, Conn

Fredrick Law Olmstead

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American Civic Association

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JUNE, 1910

CITY PLANNING

BY

FREDERICK LAW OLMSTED

DEPARTMENT OF CITY MAKING

Frederick L. Ford, Chairman

GENERAL HEADQUARTERS

Union Trust Building, Washington, D. C.

American Civic Association

DEPARTMENT OF CITY MAKING

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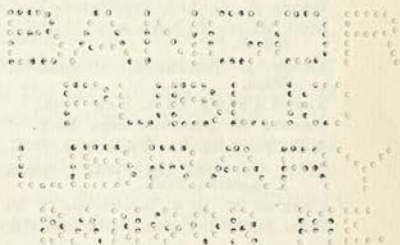
JUNE, 1910

CITY PLANNING

AN INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS
DELIVERED BY

FREDERICK LAW OLMSTED

AT THE
SECOND NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON CITY PLANNING AND
CONGESTION OF POPULATION,
AT ROCHESTER, NEW YORK, MAY 2, 1910



Department of City Making

FREDERICK L. FORD, Chairman, Hartford, Conn.

(Address all general communications to the AMERICAN CIVIC
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CITY PLANNING

Introductory Address Delivered by Frederick Law Olmsted, at the Second National Conference on City Planning and Congestion of Population, at Rochester, New York, May 2, 1910.

THIS subject of City Planning, which we come hither to discuss in some of its varied aspects, is no recent development. There is hardly one of its principal phases that has not been represented as a practical art ever since cities themselves began to be; and as a science, as a subject for theoretical discussion, it is probably but little less ancient. Yet such a conference as this is a new sort of thing, and there is something new about the subject today to account for such a conference. This new thing is a growing appreciation of the close and vitally important interrelations between these varied lines of activity; of the profound influence which activities carried on in one part of the field and with a view to one set of purposes may have upon the conditions in another part of the field. There is a growing realization of such things as the influence of street plans and depths of block upon the type of building, and thus upon the amount of light and air in the people's dwellings; such as the effect of railroad locations on the distribution of factories and on the congestion of population and character of housing; such as the effect of ordinances devised to meet structural or sanitary requirements upon the comeliness of the city; and such as the interrelation of transportation systems and methods of taxation in their influence upon the kind of homes in which the people shall find that they can afford to live.

The complex unity, the appalling breadth and ramification, of real city planning is being borne in upon us as never before, and one of the main purposes of such a conference as this, I take it, is to assist workers in all the different parts of this complex field to understand these interrelationships more clearly. The ideal of city planning is one in which all these activities—all the plannings that shape each one of the fragments that go to make up the physical city—shall be so harmonized as to reduce 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.

We are dealing here with the play of enormously complex forces, which no one clearly understands and few pretend to; and our efforts to control them so often lead to unexpected and deplorable results that sober-minded people are often tempted to give up trying to exercise a large control, and to confine themselves to the day's obvious duty and let these remoter matters take their course. And it is true that some sort of shifting equilibrium is sure to be reached in any case. Congestion, like most other evils, is self-limited. After congestion of population and the attendant ills reach a certain point (as they must have done in a good many medieval towns), the increasing death rate and the decreased attraction of town life, owing to the misery offsetting its advantages, must check any further increase, must produce an equilibrium.

Or, take the simpler case of local congestion of street traffic. When, with increasing congestion at any point, the loss of time and other objections to passing through that point become so great as to neutralize the advantages to be gained by enduring them, the limit has been reached, and additional people will cease to go there; other centers of concentration will tend to be developed, having relatively greater advantages and less tendency to become congested, and the congestion at the original center will tend to decline. Some fifty years ago, one of the down-town street corners in New York became so congested, and the congestion tended so to increase, that it was felt to be quite intolerable. The city prepared plans for bridges to carry foot passengers across the streets from sidewalk to sidewalk, and it was generally regarded as inevitable that some such grade separation should be made. But the congestion had become so great that teamsters and others found it more convenient to go elsewhere; business readjusted its habits; and presently the intolerable trouble was found to have cured itself.

To take an illustration from another field: There has been much concern for some years, in Massachusetts, over the tendency to rapid increase and congestion of population among the offspring of a certain class of very undesirable immigrants from Europe. Through an exercise of the police powers more ruthless than has been attempted even by the Indiana advocates of eugenics, the State has endeavored to put an arbitrary check upon the propagation of this undesirable class. The immigrants referred to, I ought to explain, are the European gipsy moths. In localities where they have been unchecked by man for a few

years at a time, they have so increased in numbers as to strip all the summer trees as bare as midwinter throughout large tracts of woodland, and by repeating such attacks have completely killed great numbers of trees. Where such congestion occurs, the individual caterpillars making up the nauseous horde, through lack of food, become smaller and feebler, and starve to death in great numbers. It is obvious that, if they could not advance to undespoiled territory on which to feed, they would in a year or two become extinct. If man and other enemies could keep out of the fight entirely, it is presumable that an equilibrium would be reached at about the point where there were just enough trees left alive in the country to feed the moths, and any further increase in the moths would so reduce the food supply as to check reproduction. In reality, the other enemies of the moth make it probable that equilibrium will be reached somewhat short of that point, as it has been in Europe where the moth is a very troublesome pest but trees are still quite numerous.

To interfere with these complex natural forces, to attempt, as we are doing, to infect the moths with imported parasites of whose action we may be only half aware, is to get into very deep waters; it may involve a good many mistakes, and may lead to an unstable equilibrium, perhaps to one that is unexpected and undesired. An equilibrium of some sort is all that can be expected, anyhow. Therefore, why not sit back and wait for the natural equilibrium between the moths, their food and their enemies; and then get used to it?

That is the comfortable, pious, stand-pat attitude; it saves a lot of mental effort and anxiety, it leaves more time for attending to the immediate duties and pleasures of life, and not seldom it leads to just as good results as to contest every step of the way with the half-understood forces that determine the outcome.

This is the old attitude in regard to the larger and more complex problems of what we now refer to as City Planning. But mankind will not be content with such an attitude after the imagination has grasped the larger possibility of control. We cannot be content to let the free interplay of economic forces and social impulses pile up the evils contingent upon city life unchecked until a state of equilibrium is reached like that of the gipsy moths, in which the evils shall have become so great that the people can endure no more and continue to increase. Nor, when we fight these evils singly and begin to see here and there a part of the complex interwoven web of cause and effect that binds them all together with the things that make city life

desirable, can we, as intelligent beings, fail to pluck at the web and try, as best we may, to untangle it, and begin to ask, each one of us in his own corner, Will my cutting away of old threads, and my building up of new, hinder or help my brother who is working at some other tangle in a neighboring part of the field?

But, in addition to thus illuminating the connections which link the planning of all the diverse elements of the physical city together, and to thus giving each of us a more intelligent understanding of the purposes and principles controlling work in the less familiar parts of the field, such conferences as the present ought to open the way for substantial advances in each one of the subdivisions of the field, through better knowledge of facts, through clearer definition of purposes, and through improvements of technique.

It is plainly impossible at any one conference to deal with city planning in any but a superficial or a fragmentary way; and, as most of us have already obtained a good speaking acquaintance with the more important generalities that can be uttered on the subject, we come here mainly, I suppose, to exchange information about specific live questions with which we happen severally to have been brought into responsible contact. Yet, in order that the larger relations may be kept in view, it has seemed best to include one general introductory paper, and I have been chosen as the instrument to rehearse what may be to many of you but familiar generalities.

City Planning may conveniently be considered under three main divisions:

The first concerns the means of circulation,—the distribution and treatment of the spaces devoted to streets, railways, waterways, and all means of transportation and communication. The second concerns the distribution and treatment of the spaces devoted to all other public purposes. The third concerns the remaining or private lands and the character of developments thereon, in so far as it is practicable for the community to control or influence such development.

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 success 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 25 and 40 per cent of the whole, and the improvement and use of all the remainder of the city area, both in public and in pri-

vate 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. Indeed, until recently, in the minds of most public men in America general planning applied to cities has included nothing but the streets. But even as to streets, plans drawn primarily in the interest of easy communication, with a view to the common welfare of all the citizens and by agents responsible to them, have been unusual.

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. I do not mean to suggest that William Penn and his surveyors, in laying out the original plan of Philadelphia, consciously sacrificed the interests of its future inhabitants for the sake of their own convenience and profit in laying out and disposing of the property, or that Washington and Jefferson and Major L'Enfant and their associates, in preparing the plans for the Federal City and putting the land thereof upon the market, were consciously so influenced. I mean merely to call attention to the fact that the original layouts of practically all our cities and most of the "additions" thereto, except those which grew up without definite plans along lines developed to meet the temporary convenience of their inhabitants, have been drawn up by or for the original proprietors. 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 inevitably dominated in large measure those official street-planning agencies which the people of some cities have subsequently established with the purpose 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 or-

ganized as to have any strong initiative and to accomplish important 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.

And, in this connection, let me point out that the real effective work of city planning—not only in respect to streets but in all respects—must be done, not in spasms or once for all by special temporary commissions which make a report with great éclat and then go out of existence, but by the steady, patient, continuous work of the regular administrative officers of each city, meeting every new question as it comes up and settling it in the light of a far-sighted general plan, not one that is fixed and immutable nor yet one that is vacillating, but one that is constantly adjusted and brought up to date, as new lights are thrown upon the future needs and conditions of the city, so that it shall at all times represent the mature judgment of the period as to the best aim, all things considered, for the city to keep before it. Outside experts and special commissions may be valuable to arouse or educate public opinion, or to stimulate and inform local officials, or to confirm or correct the judgment of the latter; but the real work of getting the results, toward which any paper plan is but a step, depends mainly upon the right sort of unremitting, never-ending work by the proper administrative officials.

Returning from this digression to the specific subject of the planning of the means of circulation, it is to be noted that the ruts in which the platters of street plans have generally been running in America were deeply worn before the beginning of the modern revolution in means of transportation which dates

from the introduction of metal rails and the development of the steam-engine. Yet that revolution has been made by such moderate successive steps, and the men to whom the improved transportation is due have so seldom had any responsibility for street planning, and have so generally had their attention absorbed in the immediate practical problems of getting improved means of transportation as easily and cheaply as they could under the actual conditions which they found confronting them, that street planning has gone along in the same old routine way, and each improvement in the means of urban transportation has been fitted to the old Procrustean bed of the street planner.

Steam railroads, it is true, developing as they did mostly in the open country, early began to learn the extent to which their efficiency depended upon a standard as to ease of curvature and lightness of gradient that put their planning in a wholly different category from that of the old type of thoroughfare; and somewhat more slowly they began to learn the importance of a complete separation from other kinds of traffic even at crossings. Although in the earlier days the existing streets were often used by the railroad in entering or passing through a town, as in the familiar cases along the New York Central, the tendency became gradually stronger to disregard the hampering streets, and lay out steam railroads, even in cities, upon functional lines suitable to great long-distance thoroughfares operated at high speed. This divorce meant a great improvement as to the railroads, but it left the street system to stagnate in the old ruts, and tended to a total disregard of the relation between the streets and the railroads as distinct but complementary parts of one system of circulation. Yet, even so, one of the most important influences in securing departures from the gridiron plan in the direction of more varied and convenient lines of communication, has been the reluctant recognition in street layout of the obstacles to a wholly arbitrary plan offered by the presence of radial and other functional lines of railroads established before the extension of the city. Accompanying this influence, of course, has been that of the old country highways, which were often laid out with an eye single to their convenience as direct transportation routes, especially on radial lines, unhampered by what I have called the proprietary point of view. Only in those regions where the proprietary point of view distorted everything through rigid adherence to the rectangular system of government surveys and land-sales, are these radial thoroughfares entirely lacking.

But if the long-distance and suburban steam railroads thus divorced themselves from the antiquated methods of the street planners, all other improved means of transit have been, as a rule, bound hand and foot by them. Horse-cars, mechanically propelled street cars of all sorts, and rapid transit railways, whether above or below the street grade, have generally been limited to streets laid out on plans that embodied scarcely any features that had not been common in city street plans for many centuries. The one important exception was that the average width of street became greater. The routes which transit lines have had to follow have often been full of angular turns, have seldom been well distributed in relation to the area and the population, and, in the case of surface lines, have been encumbered by a large amount of general vehicular traffic for which adequate provision separate from the car tracks has been lacking.

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. Croes which included, in addition to the streets, a system of rapid-transit routes on separate rights of way, arranged with a view to avoiding grade crossings 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 bridle-path and four rows of trees, was included a separate grassed reservation for electric cars, with infrequent street crossings,—the whole forming an important 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.

It has thus been the tendency of street-planners, whether acting for the city or for landowners, to give quite inadequate attention to the need of the public for various types of main thoroughfares laid out with sole regard to the problems of transportation, and to permit the supposed interests of landowners and the fear of heavy damages to limit the width of thoroughfares and force them out of the best lines in order to conform to the owners' preferences as to land subdivision—usually conforming to a gridiron plan. But, at the same time, there has been, on the other hand, a decided tendency on the part of official street planners to insist with a quite needless and undesirable rigidity upon certain fixed standards of width and arrangement in regard to purely local streets, leading inevitably in many cases to the formation of blocks and of lots of a size and shape ill adapted to the local uses to which they need to be put. The typical instance of the latter tendency is that of insisting on wide blocks and deep lots in a district occupied by people whose rents must be low and accommodations correspondingly limited; narrow, deep, dark buildings or rear tenements, or both, are the almost inevitable economic result. Another instance is that of fixing a minimum width of street and minimum requirements as to the cross section and construction thereof, which make the cost needlessly high for purely local streets, and thus inflict a wholly needless and wasteful burden of annual cost upon the people.

Without more than alluding to the immensely important and complex relations between the railroad freight lines and terminals, the wharves, the water-ways, 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. Functionally, it is important to class with these, as far as practicable, similar institutions of a quasi-public sort, even though owned and operated by private individuals or corporations,—such as the leading establishments devoted to public recreation, dramatic, musical and otherwise, with a clientele covering the whole city. 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 repeated in many different places throughout the city. Such are schools, playgrounds, gymnasias 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, so 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 location and character, the selection of sites is ordinarily determined by separate departments, without the slightest regard to the selections of other departments or the possibilities of economy, convenience and esthetic effect that might result from combination or grouping. Even in the separate departments, it appears to be a rare exception that any considerable degree of comprehensive foresight is exercised in selecting sites with a view to economy of purchase, or to securing a convenient and equitable distribution.

We shall not have intelligent city planning until the several departments responsible for the selection of sites for all the different public purposes of a local character get together in laying out a general plan and method of securing such sites, forming in many cases local civic centers in which the respective neighborhoods can take pride.

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. In every case, the adaptability of the site to its particular purpose needs to be considered with the best of expert advice; but, in addition, those which occupy considerable areas, like the large parks and cemeteries, need to be considered from a double point of view, as obstructions to the free development of the street and transit systems, and as places to and from which large numbers of people must be carried by those systems.

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. These methods 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. Exemption from taxation for a certain period, or other similar bonus, is a familiar device in some cities

to encourage a desired class of developments, such as new factories.

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. Tenement-house laws, factory laws, and other special provisions operating in addition to the general building code of a city, are directed mainly toward the protection of people using special kinds of buildings against unhealthful conditions and against personal risk from fire and accident. Buildings are classified according to the purposes for which they are used, according to their location with respect to arbitrary boundaries (such as "fire limits"), according to the materials of which they are built, and in dozens of other ways; and for each class minute and varied prescriptions and prohibitions are made which, in the aggregate, play an important controlling part in determining the size, height, purposes, plan, general appearance and cost of building, which the owner of any given lot can afford to erect within the law. While these regulations are intended only to guard against the evil results of ignorance and greed on the part of landowners and builders, they also limit and control the operations of those who are neither ignorant nor greedy; and it is clear that the purpose in framing and enforcing them should be to leave open the maximum scope for individual enterprise, initiative and ingenuity that is compatible with adequate protection of the public interests. Such regulations are, and always will be, in a state of flux and adjustment,—on the one hand, with a view to preventing newly discovered abuses, and, on the other hand, with a view to opening a wider opportunity of individual discretion at points where the law is found to be unwisely restrictive.

It is to be hoped that, with increasing precision and scope

of knowledge, these regulations will become gradually less changeable. Especially in regard to structural stability, it will certainly become possible, with improvements in the scientific basis for the regulations, to ensure the needful strength with a much smaller margin of wasted material and money than is now demanded to cover the vague doubt of the public authorities as to what the safe limit really is. So, also, in regard to the important detail of plumbing regulations, it seems likely that the future will bring a simplification and lessening of the present costly requirements rather than increased stringency. It is different with the regulations governing the obstructions to light and air, regulations which have the most important effect upon the heights and widths and general plan of buildings, upon their relations to each other and to the streets, and thus upon the whole fabric of the city plan. These regulations are among the newer additions to the building laws, they are as yet tentative, unsystematic, half-hearted, and based upon no adequate recognition of the evils to be met. It is therefore likely that in this field there will be numerous changes for some time to come, and a tendency to much more radical requirements.

The amount of light entering any given window in a city, and, up to certain limits, the amount of air, is dependent mainly upon the distance to the next opposite building wall and the height to which that wall rises above the level of the window. An examination of the building codes and tenement-house laws of thirty-five American cities shows a confusing diversity in the regulations 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 the street to $2\frac{1}{2}$ times the width of the street.

A most profitable and fertile subject for study and discussion in this part of the field, to which some attention will be given at this Conference, is that of the zone or district system of building regulations, under which the outcome of unrestrained economic competition in producing tall, crowded buildings, with badly lighted lower stories, is recognized and accepted to a certain degree in the central parts of a city; but increasingly better standards of light and airiness are fixed in the outer regions where congestion has not yet progressed so far. The

principle is an eminently sound one, but it is no child's play to apply it intelligently. 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.

As to the influence of methods of taxation in determining the physical improvements undertaken on private property, it will be enough here to cite a single example. In Pennsylvania the law provides for a classification of land as agricultural, rural and urban; of which rural is taxed twice as much and urban is taxed three times as much as agricultural in proportion to its value. As applied within city boundaries, vacant fields held for speculative purposes are commonly taxed as agricultural property. Under these circumstances, the man who draws his savings out of concealed and untaxed intangible investments and builds a house is not only punished by a tax on the money he puts into his house, but is taxed two or three times as much on the land as his speculative neighbor who does nothing but play dog-in-the-manger and wait for "unearned increment."

The principle of classifying taxable property and discriminating in rates is closely akin to the protective tariff system, and is plainly open to the same sort of abuse of special privilege, as instanced by the above example from one of the strongholds of Protection and of special privilege, but it is undeniably a convenient and useful means of controlling in the public inter-

est certain things which it is impossible or undesirable to reach through the police power. There is now pending an amendment to the Massachusetts Constitution to authorize the legislature to permit such discriminatory taxation. It is a very dangerous two-edged weapon. But so is nearly every weapon that is sharp enough to cut! The drafting and enforcement of building codes reek with graft where they are not under the intelligent scrutiny of an awakened public conscience; there is no means of advance that is guaranteed to be safe, painless and untainted.

Bound up with the effect of taxation upon the physical constitution of cities, upon housing conditions and congestion, is the still more controversial subject of customs of land tenure; of the policy of long-term building-leases with their great encouragement to new building on small capital, as in Baltimore, and with their tendency to strangle any further improvements or changes as the term of the lease draws on; of the advantages and disadvantages and controlling conditions of the habit prevailing in many cities of home-ownership, and of the contrary habit elsewhere among people of the same standing of living in hired houses or tenements; of the relation of these habits to the desirable type of house and size of lot and of block in each city; of the copartnership system of owning and leasing; of the position of the City as an active factor in the real estate market; of municipal tenements and municipal cottages; and so on. No thorough discussion of congestion or of city planning, in the broad sense, can long avoid such questions as these, and to take them up means touching some very live wires.

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 these 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. At this conference several parts of the field will be touched upon, and they will be considered, sometimes from the point of view of one step of progression, sometimes from another. I hope that these very general and superficial remarks of mine

may help to make clearer the relationship between the apparently diverse matters that will be discussed.

In all that I have said, you may 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 mainly 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 the 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.

Regard for beauty must neither follow after regard for the practical ends to be obtained nor precede it, but must inseparably accompany it.

In his admirable and inspiring book on "Town Planning in Practice," Raymond Unwin says:

"So long as art is regarded as a trimming, a species of crochetwork to be stitched in ever-increasing quantities to the garments of life, it is vain to expect its true importance to be recognized. Civic art is too often understood to consist in filling our streets with marble fountains, dotting our squares with groups of statuary, twining our lamp-posts with wriggling acanthus leaves or dolphins' tails, and our buildings with meaningless bunches of fruit and flowers tied up with impossible stone ribbons."

That puts the point negatively as well as it could be put. To state it positively is very difficult, but it is well suggested by an example used by my father many years ago in discussing village improvement.

"Let a thing be supposed, of greater bulk than the largest of our fine Fifth Avenue private habitations, to have been made for a mere common purpose of trade by the work of many men,—not one of them ranking among artists, not one of liberal education, men not at all delicate, not nice-fingered, not often even clean-handed; muscular, sweaty, and horny-handed; no small part of them rude and clumsy in their ways, tobacco-chewing, given to liquor, slang, and profane swearing. Suppose

the thing so produced to have no beauty of carving or color, to be mainly smeared black and white, and any touch of decoration upon it to be more than barbarously childish and clumsy.

"It can hardly be easy for those who represent what we have been more particularly gaining of late in esthetic culture to believe that such can have given the world a thing of supreme beauty. It will be still harder to realize that the coarse, rude, sensual men producing it had, in general, a deep artistic sense of its characteristic beauty, so that they would protest, in stronger terms than Mr. Ruskin ever used, against the putting upon it of anything by which the rare refinement of it might be marred.

"Alas! that I must speak of this as of a lost art; for it is of the "Baltimore Clipper" of fifty years ago, the like of which will never again be seen, that I speak. What is this admirable-ness, dependent on no single thing done for admiration, no decoration, no ornament, no color of splendor, of a sailing ship?

"Whatever else it may be in the last analysis, it cannot be separated from this fact, that a fine clipper ship, such as we had in America just come to build and rightly sail when the age of such things passed away, was as ideally perfect for its essential purpose as a Phidian statue for the essential purpose of its sculptor. And it so happened, in much greater degree than it can happen in a steamship, or in the grandest architecture, that the ideal means to this purpose were of exceeding grace, not of color, but of form and outline, light and shade, and of the play of light in shadow and of shadow in light. Because of this coincidence it was possible to express the purpose of the ship and the relation and contribution to that purpose of every part and article of her, from cleaving stem to fluttering pennant, with exquisite refinement.

"No writer, poet, or painter can ever have told in what degree it lay in a thousand matters of choice—choice made in view of ideal refinements of detail, in adaptation to particular services, studied as thoughtfully and as feelingly as ever a modification of tints on painter's palette. One needed but a little understanding of the motives of seamanship to feel how in the hull every shaving had been counted, and how in the complicated work aloft every spar and cloth, block and bull's-eye, line and seam, had been shaped and fined and fitted to do the duty required of it in the most sinewy way. These qualities, with the natural stateliness of the ship's motion set off by the tuneful accompaniment of the dancing waves, made the sailing

ship in its last form the most admirably beautiful thing in the world,—not a work of nature nor a work of fine art.”

Let us hope that, as time goes on, our cities will grow unceasingly in that beauty of fitness which made the sailing ship so wonderful, and in this hope let us welcome every such effort at clearer understanding as the Conference now before us.

On application to the General Office of the American Civic Association, Washington, D. C., it is usually possible to obtain, at cost, important detailed plans for the making over of specific cities. Such Reports, as they are generally called, are for local circulation primarily, but are always most helpful and instructive to those interested in real city advance.

