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Engineers And

Some of the Fundamental Problems of Town Planning

B. Antrim Haldeman, Assistant Engineer, Bureau of Surveys, Philadelphia, Pa.

(Read at the Town-Planning Conference, Winnipeg, Man.)

(Continued)

One of the principal sources of difficulty in the way of remedying the evils that have become manifest in our large cities is the enormous value assumed by land where there is no check put upon its use. The suggestion of public control of the use and occupancy of land is, of course, repugnant to the real estate interests, but it is rapidly becoming apparent to those who are watching, with concern, the rapid and ill-regulated growth of cities that there must be a limit put on the loading of land with both buildings and population. Speculation in land is a legitimate business but the owners or operators have little to do with the appreciation of values; these are fixed by the law of supply and demand, which, in turn, depend upon the increase of population and trade, and the enterprise and energy of the people, and in consideration of the sources from which land value springs, it would seem that the public should exercise larger control over it and obtain greater direct benefit from it.

Under American laws and methods of taxation the immense unearned increment of land value cannot be appropriated or used to the extent it should be for the benefit of the community, but, although it is created by the community, goes to enrich the individual who has but a transitory interest at stake while the interest of the community is permanent and continuing.

Several profits are generally taken by middle men in the transformation of undeveloped land into business or residential property all of which are paid, directly or indirectly, by the community at large and with no adequate compensation therefor. The land and the various owners through whom it passes in the course of development owe a duty to the community which the public ayuthorities should have the power to compel them to perform.

New towns and cities, that are ambitious for future greatness should take measures to control the development of private property in the interest of public economy, to prevent the inordinate inflation of land values which spring from the too intensive use for either business or dwelling purposes, and to appropriate for the public use and service an equitable proportion of the increment of land values created by the common enterprise of the people and the general prosperity of the community.

The temptation to make a grand showing and obtain advantageous advertising through rapid increase of values and the construction of big and costly improvements is very great in a young and ambitious community, but greater stability and economy will be insured if steady progress can be shown along more rational lines, meeting promptly the call of immediate necessity and planning widely for the future. If a town possesses the natural and substantial elements that make for healthy growth and a virile citizenship that believes in it and in its future and gives its best energy and enthusiasm to promoting the common good of all, greater success and permanence will be assured than if it performs a few spectacular acts that create a sudden boom, develop