

The Replanning of Montreal

The cost of faulty planning—Growth of Montreal—Are the streets too narrow?—Making Mount Royal accessible to all—The role of the engineer.

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Montreal spent fourteen and a half millions of dollars in expropriations for street widenings, extensions, etc., during the six years ending 1916. In addition to this the actual operations of carrying out these schemes must have amounted to several million more.

This may be described as Montreal's medicine bill, taken on account of some of the troubles affecting her as the result of bad planning.

The disease itself, however, continues to run its course unarrested, and every year is taking a deeper and firmer hold.

The Cost of Faulty Planning.

What the ravages of this disease has cost the City of Montreal in cold cash during the last quarter of a century is not easy to estimate. That is not like the fourteen and a half millions or more entered in the ledger, it cannot be expressed in figures, but it is none the less real and substantial. It is the unseen and unrelenting daily drain which week by week, month by month, and year by year piles up to an astonishing aggregate, besides which the fourteen and a half millions appear paltry and insignificant.

When one thinks for instance of the tremendous cost of street cartage every day in a city like Montreal and realizes that by reason of congestion and delays, indirect routes, short loading on account of steep grades, and so forth, there must be a loss of something approaching one third on the cost of that cartage, we might profitably inquire into a question like that, but we are not very inquisitive.

When one considers the needless waste of land, of grading and of paving in our streets, because it is our wont to accept them exactly as laid down for us by the land owner or the real estate man, every new subdivision thickly seeded with on embryo crop of future expropriations, this might well afford us food for deliberation, but we do not deliberate.

And when we see, as we can hardly help seeing, the most prodigal, almost incalculable needless expenditure on the paving and maintenance of our streets, and the installation of water, sewerage, power and other services, because we indiscriminately scatter our factories and industrial establishments all over the place, regardless of their baneful effects on nearby business and residential properties, surely all this might teach us wisdom. But it doesn't.

And when we observe everywhere around us the chaotic conditions, the general state of instability and makeshift, the putting up and pulling down, building and rebuilding, all of this the result of hap-hazard and indiscriminate development, and through the want of planning with a purpose, we might well if we had not become callous and inured to it all determine to find a better way.

Of course we know in our hearts that some day or other the reckoning must be paid, some day we must face the inevitable and tackle the question with grim resolution, in the meantime the most we care about doing is to—temporize.

The Growth of Montreal.

It seems indeed that Montreal is asleep and relatively a back number amongst its compeers, since it was recently stated here by Thomas

Adams that it was only one of all the cities approaching its size and importance on the North American Continent that is still without a general and comprehensive scheme of civic betterment. This, moreover, in face of the fact that by reason of its unique and strategic situation as an ocean port in the heart of a continent its destiny is so plainly manifest. For Montreal in spite of all its disabilities has progressed in a most marvellous way, if mere increase in bulk can be called progress.

Its growth has been coincident with that of the Dominion of Canada, and while during the last thirty years the population of the Dominion has barely doubled, that of its largest city has more than quadrupled.

It does not seem therefore that there is very much of a gamble about the future of Montreal, and it could hardly be called too optimistic to surmise that within the next ten or twelve years we should reach a population of a million and a half.

Mere bulk however is not everything, and one hesitates to think of what kind of a city it will be by that time if such development should take place along existing lines and not on more sane and rational ones. What will our central streets then be like since they are crowded and congested now? Will our railroad crossings continue to block our street traffic in still more accentuated form? Will there be four times the number of killings at these crossings since there will be twice the number of people and twice the number of trains? Will our factories all have moved away indiscriminately to the outskirts, there to create a new plethora of slums in addition to the old ones left behind? Will our present provision of parks and playgrounds then be sufficient, and how many incline elevators will be necessary to take the "rabble" up to the top of Mount Royal, or will they still congregate thick as flies on the plain below? Where shall we then park our automobiles since they will have multiplied ten times over, and it is doubtful if all the public squares and breathing places will be able to contain them?

These are questions suggested in rather a light vein it is true, but still requiring serious reflection, and careful and laborious working out.

If we look at the map of Montreal and begin with that section skirting the river, we observe first a number of somewhat irregular and rather narrow streets, which constituted the old town of Ville Marie. As a matter of fact that is the only portion of the city which has really been planned or shows any clear evidence of design; the rest is only a patchwork of subdivisions hitched together, which is a very different thing.

About Craig Street the character of the layout changes and becomes practically rectangular with what may be called the uptown streets predominating over the crosstown ones in the proportion of about three to one, which is just the reverse of what it should be considering that the city is spreading along the river and is about twice as long as it is broad.

This is where we got away from the town planning, and into the subdivision business, and we have been getting worse and worse ever since. For it is simply a case of laying out the streets according to the farm lots, without relation to the shaping of the town itself or the trend of traffic within, and very little correlation of adjoining subdivisions one with the other.

Question of Street Widths.

But we are not altogether at the mercy of the real estate dictator, there is at least one reservation our laws have laid down in the Province of Quebec, and that is that within an incorporated town the minimum width of street shall be 66 feet. On the other hand it is doubtful if they could have made a worse selection, for this is too wide for any purely residential street, and much too narrow for a main traffic thoroughfare, especially with double track tramways. And the effect has been that we have practically no main thoroughfares except those that have been widened at tremendous cost, while all our streets have become more or less through traffic streets, necessitating wasteful and expensive paving and maintenance.

Of course outside of an incorporated town this stipulated minimum is of no effect. There they can be anything the proprietor pleases, and our real estate friends are enterprising enough to see that nearly all our subdivisions are made long in advance, and become part of some minor municipality which by Act of Parliament is annexed holus-bolus to the city.

The extent to which this sore of thing aggregates may be gathered from a glance at a tabulation of total street mileage of the city since 1907, in which year we observe the total was 40 miles. In 1910 it was 70; in 1914, 177; in 1916, 222; and in 1919 had reached the astonishing total of 584; or in twelve years in which the population had about doubled, the street mileage had multiplied itself fourteen times over. At first sight this may appear something to boast about, but it really should give us the gravest concern; for it is evident that the hitherto fairly compact nature of the city's growth is giving place to thin and scattered development, with its attendant obligations but without corresponding resources.

The great outstanding shame, for it is doubtful if any other word can express it, is that the City itself should have so little to say regarding the nature and disposition of its own streets, until they are practically past remedy. Yet it should be remembered that the main reason is not that Montreal is without the power, but because she does not exercise it.

The Importance of the General Plan.

Unless we are misinformed, Montreal is quite exceptional and very fortunate in having the power and authority to require that all new subdivisions shall conform to the general plan. The unfortunate thing about it is that she has not got the PLAN. And further more we are told that Montreal is too poor and has no money to pay for it; so we are forced to the conclusion that Concordia Salus is in the sad and somewhat paradoxical predicament of not having enough money to pay for a plan, and never will have enough money until she gets one.

Senator L. O. David the late veteran City Clerk, in citing the principal causes which have contributed to bring the city into financial straits, among others mentioned the following:—

"Absence of a general plan showing the manner of laying out the streets and the width thereof, not only in the city but also in the adjoining municipalities, which will, sooner or later, form part of the city. Owing to the lack of such a plan, the streets have been laid out according to the caprice of the interested proprietors and, as a result, there have been effected costly expropriations which have increased our debt by several millions of dollars.

Acceptance by the city of streets which only existed on plans and, therefore, obligation of performing all municipal works in such streets at the expense of the citizens generally. In all the large cities of Canada and the United States those who desire to divide an immovable into building lots have to make their divisions according to the general plan of the city and they must,