

TOWN PLANNING AND CIVIC IMPROVEMENT.

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That the towns and smaller cities of Ontario are awakening to the importance and advantages of town planning and improvement is a most encouraging sign of the times. The larger cities of Canada and America generally have already become active in this respect, in practice as well as in the planning itself. They have realized within the past few years that if they are to escape the mistakes of older cities, and if they are to avoid the conditions which make possible these mistakes, brought about by the ever changing modern methods of life and work, they will require to meet the new situation by a rapid change of policy as to transportation, housing and sanitation.

It has become plainly evident that the time is here for national and provincial effort and for concerted civic activity in each community. One does not need to tell the citizens of any town or city in this young country that this movement is vital, in some manner or other, to each community because in this wonderful progressive Canada of ours every month sees the commencement of some little new settlement or hamlet, or the sudden rise of a village to cityhood. And how many of us in the years past, looking each at his own small town, has in his mind, seen it grow to a larger town and then to a city and to a great commercial and industrial community? And how many of the older ones amongst us have seen the dream come true, even in a few decades? And who will foretell for the next few years, and what will be the prophesy for that busy part of Ontario which lies between the lakes?

In the larger Canadian and American cities the growth and congestion arising from a rapid development heedless of provision for the future has been recently marked by a sudden realization of the situation and the civic spirit has been aroused. In most large cities nearly everyone—even though he be styled public spirited—has been bent on money-making, an essentially necessary and a practical occupation but a community which is thus absorbed can hardly be expected to give serious thought to the welfare of future generations or to the benefits which might arise from efforts to make the home city attractive to work and live in. Now, however, a change is taking place, and this is evidenced by the fact that over fifty Canadian and American cities have adopted in some degree a course for improvement of existing conditions and systematic plans for the future. In order to provide wide and continuous business thoroughfares, convenient groupings of public buildings, rapid transit, adequate street traffic circulation, parks and squares, parkways and boulevards, children's playgrounds and gardens, clean and attractive streets, pure water supply and efficient sewage disposal, prohibition of sign and noise nuisances, enforcement of laws for structural building and fire safety and for tenement regulation and the encouragement of housing schemes—for all these, enormous financial undertakings are being projected.

Civic effort toward future planning and improvement, while it may be encouraged ever so much in each community, cannot in itself succeed sufficiently to meet the present-day conditions. Such effort must have encouragement from higher up and from the mutual assistance of sister towns and cities, in educating the people and in impressing upon the Provincial and Dominion authorities the great desirability of legislation designed to encourage, if not assist, various

kinds of civic improvement which otherwise might not be rendered possible. This, I take it, is the spirit which brings together at this spontaneous and self-appointed inaugural congress, the many officials and citizens of the cities and towns of Ontario, and it is with such an object that, doubtless out of this meeting, some permanent organization will arise to inquire into the present situation and carry the movement to some conclusion.

Toronto, the "Queen City" of the province is becoming more and more interested each year in practical civic improvement and planning according to the general acceptance of the term. While many of the civic authorities are fully aware of the importance and necessity of changes and provision in anticipation of the future, it has been found that the most effective means of obtaining real action and conclusive legislation by the city government has been through the medium of citizens' organizations such as the "Civic Guild," the "Board of Trade" and the various Rate-payers' Associations which are spread over the city. These bodies have been enabled to study various civic problems without the distorting vision of the prospective candidate for municipal honors at the coming January election, and have brought to bear pressure from the outside, toward improvements either for the immediate present or the future which otherwise would have been overlooked or been incapable of realization owing to local or fractional opposition in various parts of the city. The Civic Guild, which has an active executive committee including prominent business and professional citizens meeting weekly, has been especially making a study of the needs of the city in this respect and has succeeded in inaugurating and in bringing about a great many improvements which all thinking citizens united in approving and supporting. Out of the efforts of the Guild grew the Civic Improvement Committee, appointed by the mayor in 1911, for specially studying and outlining a comprehensive system of civic planning; this report recommends and the Guild strongly urges a permanent commission for the city "clothed with the necessary powers for carrying out a broad, sane and comprehensive scheme of civic improvement."

The general subject of civic planning, which is really as old as the hills and not a recent development, embraces all of those allied subjects such as street routes and widths, depths of blocks and lots, buildings, street circulation and transportation, housing with its light and air problems, sanitation and cleanliness, railroad locations, distribution of factory areas, parks, playgrounds, boulevards and in general all those matters which influence the lives of the people in the community. The ideal, therefore, of city planning is that in which all these branches are harmonized to secure for the people of the city such conditions as will obtain a maximum of efficiency in work of health of body and of enjoyment of life; in other words, to make the city a good place to work and live in.

It has been a common idea in American cities until quite recently that city planning has been almost exclusively identified with city beautifying. This view is not fair to the whole subject because it loses sight of the practical sides of the question, which are very many and complex, as can be readily seen. City planning should mean the acquiring of a city convenient, useful, economical and healthful, as well as a city beautiful.

Civic planning may be divided into three general divisions as affecting the city or town within its boundaries, with perhaps a fourth as affecting it from the outside. These are as follows:—

I. The first division is concerned with the circulation and transportation problem within the city, and embraces

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