

*Solution through Planning and Design:*

The great importance of neighbourhood design as a means of getting economical low-cost housing was emphasized at the recent conference held by the Canadian Construction Association in Ottawa. That conference placed emphasis on the need for good design of groups of buildings—for both small single-family houses and multiple units. The C.C.A. and its associates are to be congratulated for putting forward a suggestion that every possible step should be taken to give community planners and architects an opportunity to put their talents to work on neighbourhood layout for low-cost housing. Apparently they feel that the secret of making civilized, marketable and durable neighbourhoods of small homes depends to a very great degree, not on the architecture of the house or the block alone, but on the architecture of the entire neighbourhood of buildings and space.

To give full scope to the architects, planners and landscape architects, we must not only see that they are drawn into the planning of all low-cost neighbourhoods, but that the municipalities, where necessary, should free them from the rigid zoning requirements which now hamper good design or even make it impossible. Traditional geometric street-patterns and traditional rules regarding such matters as set-backs and side-yards are quite incompatible with good design, particularly in the arrangement of small houses, row houses, or apartment blocks. There will have to be a pretty general scrapping of these negative concepts of zoning. Town planning and good architectural design will provide positive solutions.

So wherever small houses or row houses or low-rental apartment blocks are to be constructed, economy and good design are primary objective. The project must therefore be sufficiently large to make possible not only the economies of construction but the economies of street and service layout and the aesthetic advantages of good design. It may be regrettable, but we might as well admit that there is no way to attain satisfactory economies or aesthetic standards in low-cost housing except in sizeable projects.

*The "Basic" or "Stripped-down" House:*

A comment should be made here upon the much-discussed recent efforts to design an inexpensive "stripped-down" or "basic" house. If we are striving for economy, should we not make sure first of all that we have done everything we can to economize through sound methods of land subdivision and the planning of local services, streets and other external features? We often forget that a great deal of the cost of a home lies in the land and services. We should look carefully at these costs before we squeeze out all the internal amenities of the house and reduce room space to the absolute minimum. We shall come to grief if we design a "basic" house and then plan units of it on the land as we plant a cornfield. Structurally it may last fifty years, but the neighbourhood may become obsolescent as a result of the failure of planning and design.

There is another urgent reason for looking askance at a "basic" house. If we mean what we say about our economic future—if we expect, as we well might, to increase substantially our productivity and our real per capita income, we must be consistent and supply homes which will not be substandard and unmarketable when our increased living standard is achieved!

There may be some areas where a "basic" house, good for low income occupants for twenty to thirty years, is appropriate—perhaps in some remote small areas where the real need is to get something better than the woeful shacks now in use, or in some single-enterprise communities where, because of the nature of the resources or some other circumstance, a permanent and stable settlement is not assured. But surely in most of our rapidly growing