

The Future of Ottawa

A capital of capitals—The carrying out of a city plan—The success of the zoning system—Shall we have high buildings?

In the discussions that occasionally take place regarding the future of Ottawa and the planning of its public buildings I do not think the citizens of Canada ever rise to a high enough conception of what that future is likely to be, or appreciate in a sufficient degree the national responsibility.

Ottawa is not only a capital—it is as Viscount Bryce described Washington, a capital of capitals. It is the capital of nine free commonwealths, each with a capital of its own. Its fair site is worthy of its great traditions and greater destiny.

Those who live in the capital should have a high aim for its future and work to achieve that aim. Those who come to it as citizens of Canada should come to it with a sentiment of pride and reverence. Those who come to it as strangers should behold a city that gives true conception of the dignity of Canada.

Paris, Washington and Edinburgh.

There are three cities in the world that should give us inspiration to build up the Ottawa of the future in the right way. They are Paris, Washington and Edinburgh, all of which were planned, and have reaped a material reward more than commensurate with the cost. Washington and Edinburgh were planned at the same time, at the end of the eighteenth century, and Paris was re-planned in the middle of the nineteenth century. We have a better site than either Paris or Washington and as fine a site as Edinburgh. The Germans have made a beautiful, if congested, city of Berlin on sandy waste. London is beautiful with all its disorder, although laid out on a level plain. We can so add to the beauty that has been given to us by nature that this may become one of the most beautiful capitals in the world. That we have done much in the past is only a reason for doing more. Our danger is the danger that came to London in the seventeenth century when Christopher Wren prepared a plan and it was allowed to lie unused, or the danger that threatened Edinburgh when the suggestion was once made to build up its open spaces in the early days of its planning.

From a purely material standpoint London has lost and Paris, Washington and Edinburgh have gained. An American has made the estimate that his countrymen, who visited Paris in the summer months of 1909, spent at least \$2,000,000 per day. As we beautify Ottawa we shall make it the mecca of hundreds of thousands of visitors, for it possesses the natural advantages to draw them here. Whereas Paris has spent hundreds of millions on replanning, we need only spend a few millions in giving execution to our plan—for we need only preserve, whereas they had to create—we can prevent what they had to cure.

Immediate Duty.

Our immediate duty is to study the plan we have prepared and to carry out our immediate schemes in keeping with the plan, but with due regard to the resources we have available. We must not let ourselves be drawn into extravagant projects that frighten the people and do as much harm as doing nothing. There is no need for stampeding the citizens into schemes that will cost millions at once—we should have an ideal to work to and build up gradually towards its attainment.

The worst part of Ottawa is the disorderly development on the water-front of the Canada—what everybody sees as he enters the city. We should not have a backyard at our front entrance. The old Greeks knew better when they made the portals of the most beautiful parts of their cities. We need to make the backyard of our City Hall

into the frontyard of the city. We need co-operation between the Federal Government, the City Council and the citizens, and the citizens should be the first to organize.

The Ottawa Plan.

The plan prepared for Ottawa has many satisfactory features which seem to be definitely approved by the Government and the city. It seems a great misfortune that the plan has been so completely ignored since its preparation at a great cost in money. Many of these features would not involve either the Government or the city in any expense over and above what would be necessary in any case if no plan were followed.

Other features that involve a large expenditure of money and are, therefore, regarded as somewhat impractical, should be studied with a view to adjustment to what is practical.

Like the plans of Washington and Chicago, the Ottawa plan is not complete. In the case of Washington the plan of L'Enfant has been followed by the American Government with some unfortunate modifications in detail. Latterly there has been a tendency to refer back to the original plan and get rid of the objectionable features that have been permitted to creep in.

Success of Zoning.

But the plans of Washington and of Ottawa do not deal with the important question of zoning the cities into districts for the purpose of controlling the character, height and density of buildings in the cities. This defect is being removed in Washington, and a commission in control of the city's affairs, under the United States Government, is now authorized to employ experts to prepare a zoning plan of the city to supplement the lay-out plan of L'Enfant.

Washington has experienced the bad results of indiscriminate mixing of buildings, and, in spite of its plan, factories are being put in the wrong place, to the injury of industry and the greater injury of residences and real estate value. Businesses, including stores and public garages, have been erected in position that have destroyed values in whole neighborhoods. The New York example of a zoning plan, with its success in preventing depreciation of property, has stimulated the authorities in Washington to action.

Among other things, it is proposed to control the erection of apartment houses in residential districts, so as to prevent the injury they cause to private residences.

Washington, however, has really less reason for a zoning plan than Ottawa. It is doubtful if there is any city upon this continent that has suffered more from indiscriminate mixing of different classes of building, and particularly from the crowding of apartment houses in residential streets. The apartment house that covers from seventy-five to one hundred per cent. of the lot, that is built out to the street line, and rises from four to six storeys in height, has been allowed to blight nearly every residential street in the city. The result is that there is no security for those who own separate dwellings, and serious depreciation has taken place which could have been avoided by proper restrictions.

It is estimated by Mr. Edward Bassett that New York will save one billion dollars in the next twenty years in real estate values as a result of its zoning regulations. Meanwhile, in Ottawa, everyone who wants to erect a home is discouraged by the fact that he has no security for his investment owing to the latitude given to owners of adjacent lots who take away his light and air and destroy his surroundings.

In one American city which I recently visited the lots facing the street where the surroundings were open and under control were valued at \$12,000 while similar lots that were not under control as to their surroundings could be obtained for about one-sixth of that amount.

This indicates the enormous value of proper restrictions and the loss that accrues from their absence. The value of any house is about as much a matter of the surroundings as it is a matter of building construction. The depreciation caused by the lack of control of the surroundings cannot be prevented by individual citizens but only by regulations under a plan.

It is not suggested that apartment houses are undesirable any more than factories. It is merely contended that they should be put in a place where they will not injure other classes of building and that they should have ample provision for light and air on the lots on which they are erected.

Shall We Have High Buildings?

Ottawa being a capital city, having large sums of money invested in public buildings, should also have protection provided for the surroundings of these buildings. The view from the front of the ten million-dollar Parliament building just erected is seriously impaired by the excessive height of two or three buildings fronting on Sparks Street.

In the United States, the view is gaining ground among real estate interests that the most satisfactory height is eight storeys, and that no building should be higher than the width of the street on which it fronts. High buildings are not objected to from aesthetic grounds but on the grounds of economy.

The deleterious effect of the high building on its surroundings, however artistic a building may be, may be gathered from the story of the Equitable Life building in New York. This building is about four storeys in height, and has streets on all four sides. It is a beautiful building, and, unlike some of the high buildings in Ottawa, it has no "Mary Ann" back. Before it was erected the owners of adjacent property asked the Equitable Life Company what it would take as compensation to limit the height of the building to ten storeys. The answer was \$2,500,000. The adjacent owners collected \$2,250,000 among them, but one owner was unable to find the other quarter million owing to uncertainty of tenure, or some similar reason. The negotiations fell through and the high building was erected, casting a shadow over seven and one-half acres, with the sun at its height. The result has not only been enormous congestion, with great response to the community in dealing with the traffic but, as the above figures show, has meant depreciation of adjoining property, quoted at \$2,500,000. It is questionable if the Equitable Life Company has really derived any benefit from erecting the high building and a better return of its investment than could have been obtained with a much lower building.

The point, however, is that owing to lack of restrictions one company was permitted to do such serious injury to the owners of adjoining lots and to the community as a whole. Since the building was erected New York has been zoned to prevent this kind of thing happening in the future. Ottawa has no regulations to give similar security to the community and the owners of property.

It may be that the formation of a **Committee of One Hundred** will cause the citizens of Ottawa to discuss their plan and to find some remedy for the present anarchy in regard to building construction. With proper building regulations capital will be less timid and will be attracted to the city. The prevailing assumption that town planning is merely an aesthetic fad is shown by these statements to be entirely wrong. It is on economic grounds that we need town planning and proper zoning. Orderly development and health will produce beauty without seeking beauty as an end in itself.—By Thomas Adams in "Town Planning and Conservation of Life."