

Commission of Conservation  
Canada

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REPORT  
OF  
THE THIRD  
ANNUAL MEETING

HELD AT OTTAWA

JANUARY 16th

1912



JOHN LOVELL & SON, LIMITED, MONTREAL

# Housing and Town Planning

By

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**W**E have been devoting much attention in Canada during the past few years, to that omnipresent plague, tuberculosis; but as a nation, we should, and must, do much more. While endeavouring to assist the sufferer and prevent infection, we have been doing nothing to better the homes of our people. Consumption is largely a homebred disease, and it logically follows that if we are to obtain any permanent reduction of its ravages, we must see to it that each home is a health resort to which a cured consumptive may return after education in a sanitarium, there to live out his life in the most sanitary environment.

**Housing and Tuberculosis**

It is from the standpoint of the health of the people that the all-important question of housing must be approached. Housing conditions should be regulated and supervised in a strong and almost imperative manner by a central national health authority. By such means much may be done towards conserving the nation's most valuable asset.

**Urban Life in Canada**

It is quite true that Canada has not the dense urban population to be found in the older lands of Europe, or in the United States. We have unsanitary conditions, however, which are not a credit to us, and which simulate very much those found in Great Britain and Germany. In those countries, efforts have been made for some time to eradicate these evils, while we, up to the present, have failed to recognize them, and therefore have made but faint efforts either to prevent or remove them. That we should have unsanitary conditions in our cities similar to those prevailing in Europe may at first sight seem strange. But when it is remembered that we have derived most of our inspirations and ideas of urban life from older countries, it is not so surprising that many European methods have entered into the

housing of our people and the planning of our cities. Indeed, it can be seen that, with but slight modification of the methods there so common, we have simply adapted them to Canadian conditions.

The early French settlers built in Quebec upon the lines of old French towns similarly situated. Montreal has followed upon both French and Scotch methods, but Toronto is planned more on an English model. Winnipeg has improved in its town planning over any of the older cities of Canada, and, unconsciously perhaps, adopted more generous lines in its town layout and development.

**Errors in  
Canadian  
Town Planning**

It is only some forty-five years since Canada's era of national development began and rapid indeed has been the growth of the older centres of population. Innumerable cities and towns have also grown up, particularly during the last two decades. Largely owing to increased immigration, the development of towns has been chaotic, and tens of thousands of so-called houses have been thrown together, which must, sooner or later, be condemned for sanitary reasons. As for town planning, there has been none. The speculative owner of property has, with the aid of the provincial land surveyor, mapped out streets and lots so as to make the most for the owners, while no thought or heed has been given to the question of how the work should be done in the best interests of the health or convenience of the community. As a result, we find that already cities and towns upon acquiring additional areas, have been put to expense in righting mistakes which should never have been permitted—errors in the manner of planning roads and streets, the failure to provide parks and playgrounds, and the non-enforcement of proper restrictions in respect to the height of buildings, and the area to be built on.

That conditions such as these should grow up in a young country without the people becoming conscious of them, is not strange, but the time is come when we can no longer plead ignorance. Fortunately, thus early in our national life, we have come to realize, at least in part, some of our errors. We may not be able to right all these mistakes, yet we may, before property in the centres of our larger cities becomes too congested and valuable, make provision that, in the near future at least, some of the errors may be remedied at the minimum cost to the ratepayer.

It is most important that the work should be undertaken at once, since the tremendous tide of immigration is constantly bringing a large number of town dwellers from all portions of Europe,

who gravitate to the cities and towns. This settlement in cities has already led to overcrowding in the older centres, and to the development of shacktowns in their environs. The increased demand for houses has bred an army of land speculators and jerry builders, who are a detriment to the community and a curse to the mechanic and artisan classes.

In comparing the results obtained through the methods adopted to meet the difficulties in European countries, one is struck with the great difference in present day conditions in Great Britain as compared with Germany.

**Housing in  
England**

In England, much good work has been accomplished in the old and crowded centres through the activity of the local authorities. Unsanitary houses and areas have been removed and some progress made in reconstruction. This has been carried out largely at the expense of the municipalities, the latter, in many instances, acquiring the land. Perhaps the most marked changes in housing in Britain have been brought about through the activity of private enterprise. Those interested have planned and built upon areas in town suburbs which have been privately owned, controlled by companies or by large employers of labour. In each instance, the promoters have endeavoured to plan and to work upon the most up-to-date methods, looking for an interest yield upon their investments of from four to five per cent., and not expecting speculative profits such as we strive for in Canada.

Examples of rehousing are seen in all the large centres of Britain, such as Glasgow, Liverpool and Birmingham, while housing on the garden-suburb plan is seen in Port Sunlight and Bournville. The latter, in both instances, are the work of large employers of labour. Hampstead Garden Suburbs, Harborne Tenants and other similarly designed suburbs are worked out on the co-operative principle as advocated by such well-known workers as Mr. Henry Vivian and his colleagues. The most interesting and illuminative model for our new Canadian towns is to be found in Letchworth Garden City

In comparing the larger cities of Great Britain, **"Sky Scrapers"** Germany, Belgium and Austria, with those of Canada, and the United States, one is struck with the absence in Europe of what is known on this continent as the "sky scraper." This rank and weedy growth of the buildings in the commercial districts of our cities is producing a condition of overcrowding affecting many thousands of our people during the working

hours, which will prove disastrous to the health of those employed therein. Why should Montreal, Toronto and Winnipeg have sky scrapers? What is there to justify the modern towers of Babel erected by greedy corporations? Monstrosities such as these would not be permitted in Great Britain or Germany, and there is nothing to justify their existence here. They are nothing more nor less than nuisances, and should be treated as such, a menace alike to the health of those who are compelled to work in them, as well as to those who, unfortunately, fall within their overpowering and sepulchral shadow. There is no more reason that this unsanitary condition should continue than that we should revert to the old style of factory buildings which have been supplanted by those of the most modern sanitary construction.

That the evil of high buildings is likely to be perpetuated, however, is evident from the statement made by Mr. Ernest Flagg, in a paper read at the third National City Planning Conference at Philadelphia in 1911. In referring to public buildings, he said, in part:

“Should these buildings, then, be low and massive, of a different type and of a different kind of architecture from the surrounding structures? Or should they out-Herod Herod and dominate them in height and extravagance of design? A true architectural style is capable of every shade of expression, from the most light and fantastic to the most majestic and dignified.

“But the time will soon come when all this will be changed, and when that time does come, I predict that public buildings in the United States will be carried to such amazing heights, that the tallest commercial building will be dwarfed by them. I have no doubt that heights approximating 2,000 feet will be reached within the next twenty-five years, for I see no reason why such heights should not be practical.”

Viewed from the sanitarian's standpoint, such a statement from such an authority must meet with the strongest condemnation, as the emanation of a mind as freakish as the proposition is dangerous. Equally freakish is the opinion expressed by another eminent American city-planning authority,\* who, at the same Congress, spoke as follows:

“There is a popular belief that city planning will solve the housing problem. Nothing could be further from the facts. The housing problem as we know it in America is largely a sanitary

\*Mr. Lawrence Veller.

problem. It is chiefly the problem of good municipal housekeeping.

"That city planning will not solve the housing problem, is readily to be seen when one considers the experience of those cities in America which have developed city plans. Notwithstanding its almost ideal plan, Washington has the unenviable notoriety of possessing some of the worst slums in the entire country.

"When, however, we come to consider one phase of the housing problem, a phase which fortunately has as yet developed in but few American cities, viz., the problem of land overcrowding or congestion, we find there is a deep and vital connection between city planning and housing reform.

"What are the points, it may be asked, at which city planning touches the housing problem? There are but three—the regulation of the height of the buildings, the depth of lots, and alleys—.... For our large cities and for our industrial towns, I believe lots should not exceed in depth 25 or 30 feet. (No front or back yard).....It would be far better in most cities if the houses were built solidly against each other.

"The faulty conditions of housing and town planning in Great Britain and Germany with their attendant evils of squalor, dirt, poverty, crime and degeneracy have all been clearly set forth in the writings of public health officers and social workers. And a visit to the centres of population in these countries reveals what a burden rests upon the people to remedy them and to prevent their continuance in the highest interests of their civilization."

The conditions under which people live in Great Britain, as well as in Continental countries, differ in so many respects from those of our own country, that it would be manifestly unwise to follow the housing details too closely. We can, however, profitably adopt many of the general principles.

**Height of  
Buildings  
in Europe**

In this connection, it may be said that it is essential that a fixed relationship should exist between the height of buildings and the width of the street. In England, the tendency has always been to prevent the erection of high buildings. The London Building Act of 1894 requires that on a street, for instance, 49 feet 6 inches wide, the buildings may not be higher than the street is wide, whereas a street of 50 feet may be lined with buildings 80 feet in height. On the Continent also, it is made essential in the framing of building by-laws, that due consideration be given to the height of buildings in relation to the width of the streets. Karlsruhe fixes the height of buildings at one and a quarter times the width of the street; Rome, at one

and a half times; Berlin permits the front wall to be equal in height to the width of the street, with a maximum, however, of about 72 feet. In Paris, the height is proportionate to the width of the street.

The following is the schedule of maximum heights for the central part of London:\*

MAXIMUM HEIGHTS OF BUILDINGS, LONDON, ENG.

Width of Street (Feet)	Width of Street Height to Relation of	Approximate Lowest Build- ing (Feet)	Approximate Highest Building (Feet)
40-60	1.0	40	60
60-80	1.125	67	90
80-100	1.25	100	125

The cities of the United States, on the other hand, as a rule, place no limit to the height of buildings or the ratio of their height to the width of the streets. In New York, houses other than public and mercantile, may be 150 feet in height on streets exceeding 79 feet in width, while in streets of less width, they may be as high as 125 feet.

Here is a point where the aesthetic and the hygienic do not agree, for, from the former standpoint, high buildings are less suited for a broad thoroughfare than a narrow one. The question is, which should decide? There can be no doubt but that the health of the community is of paramount importance.

TOWN PLANNING

The primary objects of town planning may be considered under three heads:

1. To encourage and facilitate thorough co-operation in the providing of housing accommodation for town dwellers whereby they will have sufficient light, air and space.

\*Mr. James S. Gibson in *Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects*, December 24, 1907.

2. To ensure the exercise of foresight in reserving plenty of space for the development of main thoroughfares when required.

3. To take into account everything that helps to make town life worth living.

**Essentials of  
Town Planning** It will thus be seen that town planning is of vital interest to the whole community, and the questions involved are more numerous and complicated than the mere building of a house. The various constituent parts of a modern town have to be considered and arranged in such a manner that they will form an harmonious whole, no matter how great that whole may ultimately become. There must be a co-ordination, otherwise the results will be disastrous.

These constituent parts of a town or city may be divided into the following groups or areas:

- (a) Manufactories.
- (b) Warehouses.
- (c) Offices.
- (d) Shops.
- (e) Public parks, open spaces and playgrounds.
- (f) Public buildings.
- (g) Private dwelling houses.
- (h) Streets and highways, and their construction.
- (i) The means of communication.
- (j) The sewerage and water systems.

Having in view all the varied interests, a plan for town extension contemplates and provides for the development as a whole of every urban, suburban and rural area that may be built upon within from thirty to fifty years. Wide streets or avenues must be provided, sufficient to meet the demands of the main traffic, and for this purpose they must extend from the centre to the outskirts, streets of narrower width being provided for ordinary traffic and for residential purposes.

Speaking on this subject, an English writer says:

“The first requirement is wide main thoroughfares, and if forethought is exercised, it is comparatively easy and inexpensive to make these main thoroughfares pleasant and healthful; healthful, because they are wide, and therefore act as long ventilators for the town, and pleasant as well as healthful, by planting trees, which are most useful by their property of absorbing noxious gases, as well as being pleasant to the eye.



"In London, the greatest city in the world, the necessity for wide main thoroughfares was not recognized by public opinion until it was too late to provide them, except at overwhelming expense, due to the enormous cost of compensating the owners of the buildings that had to be demolished. In provincial towns, it is not yet too late to provide for the wider distribution of our population, because expensive buildings have not yet been erected very far from the centre."

**Industrial and  
Business  
Sections**

The district for factories should be on the opposite side of the town to that from which the prevailing winds come, and these should be accessible by both rail and water communication, where the latter exist. The warehousing district should be placed convenient to the factories, the business offices, in the centre of the town where the land is dear.

Public offices should be located in commanding positions, not only for the sake of the time and money saved to the public by the convenience of their positions, but because they should be dignified reminders of the corporation's existence, and act as inspirations to the patriotism of the people.

The main thoroughfares are the natural positions for shops, as it is there that pedestrians pass to and fro. The occupation of commanding positions is a permanent advertisement for the proprietors who are prepared to pay for it.

**Residential  
Sections**

The residential portions of the town should be divided into districts which should be graded as to class of houses. The distance between the houses should be greater the further they are removed from the centre of the city or from the main arteries of travel. The character of the road itself should be determined by the amount of traffic on it. In those streets where traffic is light and a sufficient distance is maintained between opposite lines of houses, narrow and inexpensive roadways or drives should be allowed in order to keep down the cost of estate development.

Public parks, playgrounds and open spaces should, as far as possible, be placed on cheap land; for it is a waste of money to use valuable frontage on a main thoroughfare as park land. A park is much more valuable when placed away from the noise and bustle of business thoroughfares: it should be considered as a place for rest and recreation. It is particularly important that playgrounds

for children be located on side streets or at the back of houses, where the little ones can play in safety away from the street.

It is not essential that all the details of a town-planning scheme should be definitely and unalterably fixed upon. On the contrary, it has been found by experience that this is unnecessary, as it often proves a hindrance to the development of the scheme. In the long run, too, it is costly by reason of reduction in the value of land consequent upon alterations which often entail the payment by the rate-payers of heavy compensation to the owners. This can be avoided if the general skeleton plan be adhered to, details being worked out as town development goes on.

One of the great difficulties met with everywhere in respect to the housing of the poorer people is the fact that they cluster around our city centres where land is dear, while the wealthy live on cheap land. To house this class properly in the outskirts should be one of the aims of town planning. This consideration leads up to the equally important one of cheap and rapid transportation for them to and from their work, as well as from one part of the town to the other.

In a comparative study of the question of town planning, one is struck by the different manner in which it has been approached and dealt with in different countries.

In Europe, the work was begun, and is continued with the object of improving the environment of the individual, to better him physically and morally and fit him for his position as a unit in the nation's life, thereby overcoming that degeneracy which decades of unsanitary housing had wrought upon its town dwellers. The work has been taken up from the health standpoint and mainly on the initiative of the medical health officers. With this object in view, it naturally follows that the measures taken would be of a legal character. Progress may have been slow, but it has been of such a character as to be most illuminative to Canadians.

**Town Planning  
in Germany** In Germany, town-planning schemes are made for the future extension of even small towns, as well as the larger cities. Architects, health officers, surveyors, sanitarians and engineers of the highest standing are consulted, as well as the land owners themselves. The plans are subjected to the severest criticism with a view to ensuring adequate provision for the requirements of health, convenience, employment and pleasure. The appeal to a higher authority protects the interests