

# BUREAU OF MUNICIPAL RESEARCH

TORONTO'S CITIZENS CAN CONTROL TORONTO'S AFFAIRS ONLY THROUGH FREQUENT, PROMPT, ACCURATE AND PERTINENT INFORMATION WITH REGARD TO TORONTO'S BUSINESS.

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TORONTO  
CANADA

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## OPEN LETTER ON THE HOUSING BY-LAW

To the Citizens and  
Taxpayers of Toronto:

In 1917 the Provincial Legislature passed the Planning and Development Act authorizing a Municipal Council to prepare, or to establish a Town Planning Commission to prepare, a comprehensive plan for the future development of the municipality, and to adopt it subject to the approval of the Ontario Municipal Board. Any change of a comprehensive plan so adopted would require the recommendation of the Town Planning Commission and approval of the Municipal Board. Toronto has not availed itself of this permissive legislation.

Also Section 398 of the Municipal Act empowers a Municipal Council to divide the municipality into zones and designates the purpose for which the land in each zone may be used. By-laws passed under this section come into force, and may be repealed or amended only on approval of the provincial Municipal Board. The Council is now having prepared a zoning by-law under this legislation, but failure to act previously has accelerated, or at least not reduced, the rate of deterioration of districts except for so-called "residential restrictions", which, as administered and enforced, have largely failed to restrict. In May, 1936, the

## RESIDENTIAL BY-LAWS NOW BEING REVISED.

City Council directed the Commissioner of City Planning and the Property Commissioner to prepare a consolidation and revision of all existing residential by-laws. This work is proceeding as rapidly as possible. An interim report recommending three residential and four commercial zones has been made by the Commissioners and adopted by Council. So far so good, but is there any guarantee that the final by-law will be adopted by Council?

### PLANNING AND ZONING SHOULD PRECEDE HOUSING SCHEME.

As the result of lack of zoning and other causes a considerable amount of sub-standard housing has accumulated in Toronto. According to many authorities this property could hardly be called slum property in the technical sense, but those who dwell in such property are or may be subject to extra hazards of health and are deprived of those amenities which it is to the interests of all citizens that they should have. It is, of course, true that a certain amount of deterioration of districts is unavoidable even with the most thorough-going planning and zoning revisable only on recommendation of competent and trained authorities.

Without city planning, including zoning, any new housing becomes subject to the same deteriorating conditions and will itself tend to become sub-standard or slum, with the result that from the standpoint of the community, the capital used in the undertaking is largely or entirely wasted.

Before any housing scheme is adopted, the appointment of a City Planning Commission and a comprehensive zoning plan are essential, and before any question as to housing is submitted to the people they should have a definite scheme before them and should have the advice thereon of a City or Town Planning Commission and of the Commissioner of City Planning.

### WHAT THE BY-LAW STATES.

To ask the people to vote simply on a proposal to spend \$2,000,000 on housing is like asking a man whether or not he is in favour of spending \$5,000 on a house. He naturally asks, "What kind of a house?" "Where?" "When?" "Where is the money coming from?"

The question to be submitted reads as follows:

"Are you in favour of the City issuing debentures to raise \$2,000,000.00 to be used in the demolition of sub-standard houses and in the construction of low-cost houses, providing that the Provincial and Federal Governments contribute a like amount?"

Does this mean that the provincial contribution is to be \$2,000,000 and the Dominion contribution is to be \$2,000,000, or that the sum of

the contributions of the two governments is to be \$2,000,000.00? It would seem to be the latter, but many claim it means the former, and this was probably the intent of the original proposers. It makes quite a difference whether the city is to borrow 33 1/3% of the total or 50% of the total. If a citizen votes for the by-law, what is he voting for? If he votes against it, what is he voting against? After the vote is taken, what will it mean as to the opinion of the electors on the principle of housing? In any event, on account of the waste of time for the last year, the people are not now in a position to express a considered opinion on the by-law.

### WHAT THE BY-LAW DOES NOT STATE.

The by-law does not even state which plan, A, B, or C, as outlined by the Advisory Committee on Housing, is to be the basis of the programme, although some assure us that it is plan C. Before citizens are asked to vote on a housing by-law, they should **know**:

1. Where the development is to be, in old down-town deteriorated districts or in new areas, in widely scattered units, or in one or two centres.
2. What steps are being taken to prevent the deterioration which sets in at once if plans are not made to prevent it.
3. What steps have been and are being taken to ensure that the Federal and Provincial Governments will each contribute to the cost of the project a sum equal to that to be spent by the city.
4. What the city is already doing and has done to improve housing conditions, and with what success. (See reports.)
5. How far \$2,000,000, \$4,000,000 or \$6,000,000 would go toward meeting the total need. (See report of Advisory Housing Committee.)
6. What the annual charges would be for operating losses, if any, and what additional burden on real estate will be involved. (See report of Advisory Committee on Housing.)
7. Why this is the most urgent capital project facing the city at this time.
8. What steps are being taken to meet the problem of modern sewage disposal of such vital importance to all citizens of Toronto.
9. What relation have this blanket proposal to spend \$2,000,000 of the city's money on housing and other projected capital expenditures to the borrowing margin of the city.
10. What the proper proportions of cost are as between the Municipality, the Province and the Dominion.

## COMMENT OF ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON HOUSING.

The report of the Advisory Committee on housing to the Mayor and Board of Control contains the following statement:

**"Your Committee find that Housing Reform in Toronto is both necessary and desirable, but is definitely of the opinion that Toronto cannot undertake alone what it feels to be a national responsibility."**

This is signed by the Chairman, a prominent, experienced and public-spirited citizen who is an architect by profession, and by the Secretary, who is a tried and experienced official of the city and Commissioner of City Planning. In view of this, the absence of specific leadership on this question from the city's Board of Directors, the lack of detailed information as to the project, and possible additional burden on real estate if it is to bear any share of the cost, the failure during the years (which failure exists to the present day) to establish controls which would at least retard the development of sub-standard housing, the friends of progress are placed in an almost impossible position. One believing in "re-housing" naturally asks, "What can I do but vote against such a blind proposal?" until he realizes that a negative vote may be taken quite improperly to mean that Toronto does not believe in housing.

To one who says, "We must make a start," the natural reply is, "The city cannot afford to make a false start which may set the housing movement back ten or twenty years." Why not start now by putting first things first?

President,

T. G. ROGERS.

Managing Director,

H. L. BRITTAIN.

For over twenty-three years the Bureau of Municipal Research has maintained a service of independent fact telling and suggestion to the citizens and taxpayers of Toronto. Under present conditions it is impossible for an individual unaided to devote the time necessary to keep in touch with the actual tendencies in municipal affairs. The Bureau offers a real opportunity to citizens to co-operate effectively in civic government by helping to maintain an independent fact finding agency of constructive criticism which is so necessary for citizen control of the citizens' business.