

BUREAU OF MUNICIPAL RESEARCH

Monthly



Letter

137 WELLINGTON STREET WEST, TORONTO

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Men and Women:

As a delightful fall season wanes and with winter in the offing, we are all more predisposed to serious consideration of the affairs and problems of our local government. This is the third in a series of monthly letters issued by the Bureau of Municipal Research as a new service to Toronto citizens to assist their understanding of local affairs. For the standard of democratic government can be no better than the standard of public opinion.

When we commenced this publication it was our desire to show what was happening in civic affairs and what, in the opinion of the Bureau, should be done in reference to the various problems that from time to time would confront the City. The letters have, we are glad to say, met with much approval.

The Government of Metropolitan Toronto

Metropolitan Toronto has at present at least eight local governments each having a feeling of independence of its sister governments and each going its own way as far as the law permits when it believes its own interests are served thereby. The recently instituted Town Planning Board will probably bring about a greater degree of coherence, but the multiplicity of local authorities as long as they exist with their present powers will always be a drag on progress and an obstacle to complete community planning.

No one could possibly believe that, if there were now no municipal government in the Toronto area, and if authorities were now to be established and boundaries laid down, they would be exactly as they are now.

Existing boundaries are partly a matter of chance, partly the result of special interests, partly perhaps of planning, but certainly not of community planning in the larger sense. None have existed so long as to have acquired the authority of immemorial right. The rights and best interests of the people making up the community are still paramount and vested and special interests must yield to them. How closely intertwined these sub-communities are is known to everyone. How artificial the boundaries are is known to anyone who has taken a motor ride through the Toronto district. In many cases he would be unaware that he had left one municipality and entered another. Tens of thousands eat two meals a day in one municipality and one in another. Multitudes work in and earn their living in one municipality and sleep in another. Thousands, both

executives and employees, vote in one municipality and have their chief economic interests in another. Their is much taxation - direct or indirect - without representation.

There are two ways to straighten out the existing tangles: One is to have one local government for the whole metropolitan area. The other is to establish a "county" of Toronto under a County Council analogous to the London, England, County Council. The London County Council is charged with the duty of performing overall community services. At the same time the local municipalities of the Greater London area have retained their separate existence with local municipal councils discharging local functions.

The former method of having one local government for the whole metropolitan area is more clear-cut, simpler in operation and probably less wasteful. That existing boundaries need not be inseparable obstacles is shown by the amalgamation of the border municipalities to form the present City of Windsor, Ontario. The latter method of the County Council system is apt to leave the local councils with so few important functions that their personnel will tend to decline in quality with the result that the local functions will become more and more expensive. The "overhead" of a County Council system is accordingly almost certain to be higher.

A Citizens' Emergency Housing Committee

While the Department of Public Welfare, the Veterans' Corps and other voluntary organizations have done much to meet the needs of families requiring living quarters, the housing emergency is so acute that the cooperation of thousands of citizens is necessary. Recent commentaries in the press indicate that the experience of Ottawa with a Citizens' Committee should be carefully considered. If only a few hundred additional quarters are located for veterans and civilians it would be worth-while. Possibly, if funds were provided, the work could be undertaken under the auspices of some existing voluntary organizations. But however the problem is attacked, it should be tackled on a broad and overall basis with the end in view of getting all the facts of the situation and of finding all the possible ways of enabling those families, who lack satisfactory housing accomodation, to find a proper place to live.

The School of Social Work (University of Toronto) has recently completed a valuable study on the housing situation in the Toronto area from the standpoint of measures which are considered necessary in order to provide the much needed housing units. These quantitative and sociological studies will provide an excellent starting point for whatever group, organization or committee takes up this work.

The Civic Elections and the Civic Budget

Light votes at civic elections seem to have become a settled habit. This undesirable condition can be corrected only by treating the causes. One of the causes is undoubtedly a wide spread feeling on the part of the public that voting, under present conditions, is not worth-while. One cause of this feeling is lack of pertinent information as to the City's business. Most of this information is or should be in the annual current budget. This is not passed or even discussed until after the election. What is more worthy of discussion at a civic election than civic business?

There is no reason why a draft budget for the succeeding year, backed by a statement of revenue and expenditure and a balance sheet, estimated for both November and December and actual for the other ten months of the current year, could not be passed tentatively. It could be published in time for the civic campaign, and passed officially in January. Only custom, inertia and a failure to co-operate has so far prevented this business-like approach to city election campaigns.

Our next letter will contain discussions of the two year term for elective bodies and the taxation of crown companies and publicly owned utilities.

Yours sincerely,

J. G. Rogers
President

H. L. Brittain
Managing Director

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as of November 8th, 1946.