



# CIVIC AFFAIRS

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## A PRACTICAL APPROACH TO CITY PLANNING

Fellow Citizens:

The City Planning Board has been making headlines this month with the publication of a proposed Official Plan to guide and foster Toronto's development throughout the next thirty years. This master blueprint is neither the first such document to be placed before the City Council, nor the one that can claim top honours for boldness or originality. Nevertheless, if the report stands a better chance of adoption than its predecessors, as many feel it does, there is more to support this viewpoint than the favourable climate in which the plan has been launched. For the report itself incorporates a practical approach that should do much to encourage its acceptance. Certainly it merits earnest consideration by our elected representatives and the serious attention of the citizen-body.

Over the past forty-one years, Toronto citizens acting through their City Hall representatives have dealt with no less than six comprehensive or partial planning documents. While some of their contents have since been utilized, action was suspended, at the time, on all six plans. It is a shocking and costly record--costly, not only in the waste of voluntary services and the out-of-pocket expenditures involved, but above all in a haphazard growth that has intensified such problems as traffic congestion and deteriorating residential and business areas, and has resulted besides in a reduced return for the tax dollar. If for no other reason than the cumulative bad record of earlier Councils, our present representatives will hesitate to reject the proposed Official Plan. They will also find added incentive for constructive action in the growing urgency of urban problems, in the stronger encouragement afforded by Provincial planning legislation, and in increased grants that may be anticipated for proposed capital undertakings.

### How the Plan Rates

But how good or bad is the plan itself? Much of what is now proposed has been repeated or adapted from previous plans; a great deal is work already approved, in progress, or completed; almost every point in the plan has been talked about and mooted for several months or even

years. Actually, this is what gives the plan its strength, for it brings together the established needs and wants of the City in one document, estimates their approximate cost and shows how the City should logically set about realizing a balanced programme of improvements. The stress placed on a sound method of financing is, indeed, a most valuable aspect of the report.

The proposed plan is based very largely on submissions from various civic Departments. Some submissions, as incorporated, are too brief and would benefit by greater detail and supporting arguments. Then, too, there are discrepancies between the information on the maps and in the related text that should have been cleared up. These shortcomings are only incidental; for before proceeding to carry out specific projects, more detailed information will certainly be made available. The important fact is that the plan is not super-imposed on the programmes of the operating divisions of the civic administration but rather coordinates departmental planning in an overall blueprint. Surely the method is a sound one.

Additional weight is given to the plan by its emphasis on co-ordinated regional planning and development within the City. The now defunct Master Plan of 1943 divided the municipality into 75 neighbourhood areas which the present Official Plan has retained. The redesigning of neighbourhoods to close a number of streets to through traffic, as proposed in 1943, has not been repeated in the present report. Nor is a definite project included for rehabilitation of sub-standard housing. (It is worth recalling that the 1943 report laid plans for the Regent Park housing scheme that is now under way.) However, the present Planning Board has succeeded in securing excellent Departmental support for neighbourhood planning. Administrative divisions will be tied in with neighbourhood areas and in improvement of parks, libraries and other facilities these divisions will be recognized in order to foster more satisfactory community living. Departmental records will be kept on the basis of 145 smaller areas established since 1943--called census tracts--that fit into neighbourhood areas. Research on which to determine and rate future needs will be facilitated by the use of these uniform regional divisions for assessment, health, welfare, police, fire and other records. Moreover, closer coordination of the work of separate departments should follow from their adoption of parallel operating divisions. Already embodied in the plan are four combined health and welfare centres and a regional headquarters in the west end to include police, fire-fighting and other services.

Based on the above considerations, the Bureau, which has long been committed to the principle of comprehensive planning, urges the Council and all citizens to put their combined weight behind the proposed Official Plan. Amendments and additions to its terms will surely be needed, but to allow it to go by default would be a serious blow to the well-being of our City.

The more detailed commentary that follows should be set, then, against this background of broad support for the plan.

## Merits of Individual Planning Proposals

A point-by-point examination of each individual suggested improvement is much beyond the scope of this bulletin. In many cases, the main factor governing approval or rejection is the views of Toronto citizens on how the City should develop. Some people may seriously doubt, for example, the wisdom as it stands of one of the more colourful recommendations, the Island development programme. We are not thinking of opposition that might be raised, on sectional grounds, to any disturbance of the properties of present Island residents. But opinion is divided as to whether access to the Island by motor should be allowed even with the proposed restrictions. Again, there may be arguments for amending the highway plan in some of its details or for varying the estimates between say parks and libraries. Members of Council would assuredly welcome expressions of opinion from many more citizens on these questions and others.

There is, however, one detail that the Bureau must seriously question: the fate of the Belt Line railway. The recommended arterial routes do not call for elimination of the present trackage crossing Yonge Street at Merton Street. Moreover the section south-west of this intersection, classified on the land-use map as industrial, would appear to cover a larger area than required by the T.T.C. for its rapid transit shops. Of course, a large part of the Belt Line lies beyond the limits of the City proper and is a matter for metropolitan planning. Additionally, there is no thought that this industrial spur line should be abandoned immediately. Yet control should surely be exercised to prevent the influx of new industries, while elimination of the line might well have been provided for in a thirty-year projection.

For some time the Bureau has been advocating amalgamation of Toronto with its suburban neighbours as the best solution to the problems of metropolitan government in the area. Strong backing for this viewpoint has come recently from the Provincial Government, and now it is further supported in the Planning Board's recommendations. From their intensive study of land uses in Toronto they have rejected as inadequate "any hitherto tried method of metropolitan control such as the borough system or metropolitan utilities commission" and reached the definite conclusion that "a single municipal jurisdiction....alone is capable of providing within its boundaries a proper distribution of land uses".

## Coverage

Although improvements such as new arterial highways and expanded water and sewage services will undoubtedly benefit adjacent suburbs, the recommendation favouring metropolitan amalgamation serves as a reminder that the Official Plan deals directly with only the area of the City proper. There is, consequently, the possibility of the City's plan being made less effective by lack of planning or conflicting developments in adjacent municipalities. The level of urban planning in the metropolitan area is and will probably continue to be uneven. Yet this is no reason for the City to delay its job; Toronto, you will agree, should be in a position to give leadership. As to conflicting plans, the status of the

Toronto and York Planning Board offers a safeguard against these and an opportunity for cooperative achievement. This Board, on which Toronto Planning Board members are well represented, has been authorized to make proposals for inter-municipal planning in the metropolitan area and it maintains a "supervisory attitude with regard to matters of local planning that might prove contrary to the interest of the whole Planning Area." Even so, until amalgamation is achieved, metropolitan planning is bound to be handicapped.

Within the accepted geographic framework we find three substantial gaps in the coverage of the report. No programme or financial estimates are given for the Toronto Hydro, the T.T.C., or the Board of Education. The 1943 Master Plan included sections on the rapid transit plans of the T.T.C. and the Hydro programme for underground wiring. This time, however, T.T.C. developments are only mentioned in relation to highway improvements, while the capital projects of the Hydro are entirely omitted. Granting that the debt of these enterprises is self-liquidating, a statement of their plans is every bit as necessary as the section on waterworks. The absence of any forecast of educational needs indicates, according to the report, no lack of cooperation. The Board of Education explained that future school requirements were too uncertain pending the report of the Royal Commission on Education. Yet it is perhaps not unfair to suggest that some provisional plans could have been set down. The very fact that supervision of education, transportation and electricity lies outside the regular City Departments, makes it doubly important to project their activities in the master plan.

The final section of the report gives a rough estimate of the cost of capital expenditures included in the Official Plan. The total comes to \$179 million and, allowing for government grants, the Board concludes that over the thirty year period the entire programme might be carried out at a cost of not more than \$145 million from local revenues. But, without explanation, several large items are left out of this calculation. No estimate is set down for the Market Block Square, or for the City's share of the Queen Street Expressway; and the cost of the Island development, aside from the recreational facilities recommended under the Parks programme, is entirely omitted. Let us hear from the Planning Board how these projects, running well into the millions, are to be paid for.

### Parking

One notable omission from the report is any statement as to the steps the City should take to meet the problem of parking in the downtown area. Perhaps it has not been possible to speed up the analysis of last year's traffic survey in order to make use of the information in the planning report. However, one question that has remained unsettled for some years should not have been left open since it may lead to a heavy expenditure from public funds. That is the question of off-street parking facilities. Two years ago, in an interim report, the present Planning Board stated: "It seems likely...that inside of five years the vacant lots in the central area will no longer be available for that purpose." Yet, aside from recommending parking areas in a future Island development, the final report is entirely silent on the point.

## Zoning Regulations

The method of controlling land-use recommended by the Planning Board calls for a broad division into residential, commercial and industrial areas as part of the Official Plan, while leaving the detailed zoning regulations to a separate by-law that can be more readily amended. The zoning by-law is now in preparation and will be submitted to Council "following the approval of the official plan." This delay may well be a tactical decision, for it will not be an easy matter to pilot a comprehensive zoning by-law through Council. Yet what this means is that approval of the Official Plan is only the first stage, since the zoning by-law, as the Planning Board stresses, is crucial to the success of long-term planning.

## Financing

The key point in favour of the proposed Official Plan is the fact that the whole programme is stated in terms of a sound method of financing. Briefly, it recommends that the City Council should lay out its debenture borrowing sufficiently in advance to keep debt charges at or near a safe and constant level. A works programme, drawn mainly from the plan, would be mapped out five years ahead in line with the amount of new capital debt that can be taken on each year. The programme and financing would be reviewed annually in order to maintain a stabilized capital budget, projected always five years in advance. This is by no means a new idea. It has long been advocated by Treasury officials, by your Bureau and others. The important fact is that, as an essential part of the Official Plan, it now stands a better chance of adoption.

While the Planning Board's work in this field incorporates an improvement over previous plans, it might have gone one step further by following the lead of the Parks Department and including annual maintenance costs with its estimates wherever possible.

Additionally, there are two of the Board's financial proposals that should be examined. The first concerns methods of capital financing. The Board considers two alternatives--debenture borrowing and pay-as-you-go. The heavy dependence of Toronto on real estate taxation leads the Board to reject the pay-as-you-go method as excessively burdensome. What we should like to know, then, is why nothing is said about the third alternative, which is partial pay-as-you-go. A ten percent contribution from current revenues today would be good insurance against less prosperous times when the calculated level of debt charges might otherwise become a serious drag on the taxpayer.

Secondly, the role that the Planning Board suggests for itself in the financial control programme is plainly beyond its proper function. It proposes that a two-thirds vote of Council be required to bring in additions to the capital budget that do not carry Planning Board sanction. In our opinion, this check on public spending should remain in the hands of the City's executive--the Board of Control. Perhaps the Planning Board has volunteered for this role because the executive--a five-headed, annually-elected body, has seemed at times to be slightly perplexed by its responsibilities. In any event, the Planning Board, in drafting or screening the capital budget, is in a much sounder position when its job is purely advisory.

Procedure

The City Council has held one special meeting to deal with the proposed plan and it has now been referred to the Standing Committees. This should provide an opportunity for members to satisfy themselves on the details of recommendations. Following the practice in dealing with Board of Control reports, Council should next be permitted to vote on the submission, item by item, preparatory to a vote on the adoption of the complete plan.

Although the total capital programme runs to more than \$179 million, electors are reminded that adoption of the Official Plan will not tie the City down to a capital outlay that may turn out to be more than the taxpayers can afford. To become a definite commitment, every proposed expenditure has later to be programmed and ratified by Council. And, at any stage, the plan can itself be readily amended. But what the Official Plan can ensure is that, as funds become available, the most pressing needs of the City for its long-term development receive proper attention.

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