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BUREAU OF MUNICIPAL RESEARCH  
SUITE 406  
4 RICHMOND ST. EAST  
TORONTO 1, ONTARIO

## A POSITIVE APPROACH TO URBAN RENEWAL



### CONTENTS

	Page
Summary - - - - -	1
Components of renewal - - - - -	2
Redevelopment - - - - -	3
Rehabilitation - - - - -	3
Conservation - - - - -	7
Conclusion - - - - -	8

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 ANN I. CRAWFORD, B.A. .... *Research Associate*



## A POSITIVE APPROACH TO URBAN RENEWAL

### SUMMARY

Three major causes of blight are overcrowding, inadequate maintenance of buildings and a deficient public environment. Corrective measures for the first two factors require the provision of alternate accommodation for low income groups and vigorous enforcement of regulations to protect health and safety. The third cause of blight involves public open spaces, landscaping, schools, street patterns and the wide range of additional services and facilities provided by public authorities for residential and industrial property owners. Deficiencies in this regard represent the greatest challenge in renewal.

Urban renewal in its various forms seeks to eliminate blight and prevent its occurrence. Redevelopment projects replace areas which are beyond economic repair by development of a similar or more suitable nature; rehabilitation involves the repair of salvable structures and the correction of conditions contributing to blight; conservation seeks to prevent the decay of sound buildings and neighbourhoods.

Deterioration cannot be legislated out of existence. But it is desirable that the community establish standards of housing which are sufficiently high to prevent the onset of blight. At the present time, the municipalities in Metropolitan Toronto can do little to prevent premature deterioration. The measures immediately available to them are, in effect, negative renewal instruments since they are effective only when blight is well advanced.

A positive approach to urban renewal is urgently needed. Age has caught up with our housing stock and in the future it will not be possible to ignore the need

for preventive action. The costs of withholding renewal until massive redevelopment measures are necessary are already exorbitant and will become greater as middle-aged and post-war housing reach maturity.

Total dependence on private initiative for renewal has been found wanting and reliance on the enforcement of existing housing regulations is impractical. Therefore, public authorities must take the lead in inducing maintenance. They can do this in two ways.

First, the need for conservation can be promoted by publicity and regular inspections of all property. According to conditions encountered, property owners can be advised of conservation techniques, minimum standards of occupancy and maintenance, assistance available for rehabilitation, and renewal measures planned by the municipality.

Second, public action can be the catalyst to spark renewal. If areas are not attractive as places in which to live and work, no amount of renewal will prevent their gradual deterioration. For this reason, public authorities must provide the basis for an environment which encourages the preservation of private housing stocks. It is only when open spaces and schools are adequate, traffic and land uses segregated and neighbourhoods visually attractive that residents can be expected to see advantages in maintaining their properties. With such incentives, not only will individual initiative be encouraged but also, public authorities will be justified in insisting upon proper maintenance. In addition, if private enterprise is assured of positive public action in rehabilitation and conservation, investment of private capital will be encouraged.

## A POSITIVE APPROACH TO URBAN RENEWAL

Urban renewal and the protection of housing values are not new concepts. Private renewal and public responsibility for the preservation of health and safety have always played a part in the normal age-cycle of housing. However, the gradual deterioration of our housing stock suggests that reliance on these measures is inadequate to preserve an investment which we can ill afford to lose. We are confronted by a pattern of obsolete, overcrowded slums surrounding the cores of our cities, and extensive rings of what have been termed grey areas in which middle-aged housing, often suffering from inadequate maintenance, is threatened by the same disease of blight which has affected areas closer to the core.

Though the age of residential dwellings is only one index of physical condition, the magnitude of the problem is suggested by a prediction that 42% of the housing stock of the Toronto area will be more than 60 years old by 1980.<sup>1</sup>

The causes of blight and its effect within slums and grey areas are similar. In the grey areas are found older dwellings which, for a number of reasons, have not been maintained: changing social and economic patterns may reduce their appeal; the original grid pattern of development may be such that by today's standards, the areas are no longer attractive; the public plant may be inadequate for contemporary living or have worn out along with the housing it serves.

Slums suffer from all these defects and more, so that today they are little more than cluttered, overcrowded refuges for those on the lowest end of the economic scale. Their sub-standard dwellings offer what is apparently moderate priced accommodation but which turns out to be exorbitant when value is considered. Yet slum housing occupies property whose inflated values often reflect overzoning, speculation and industrial dispersal. Overcrowding is consequently encouraged by the necessity for dense settlement and the intensive use of land.

The visible effects of sub-standard housing are apparent enough, while costs of decay, though less easily determined, are familiar. The need for fire and police protection, health facilities and welfare services is intensified. Added to these charges are costs of traffic congestion and low municipal tax receipts as a result of depressed improvement assessments. These higher charges and lower revenues are conspicuous in slum areas and must be met by the remainder of the community.

Blight is seen in its most dramatic light in slums but is of greatest concern in the grey areas since their decay

would increase the problem of renewal many times over. Consequently, vigorous renewal measures must be undertaken both in areas that now contain sound housing but which are faced with deterioration, and in areas of obsolete housing which require the major surgery of redevelopment if their blight is to be prevented from spreading.

Urban renewal is one means of effecting the achievement of the community's aspirations and objectives for development as codified in an official plan. Such a plan forecasts and guides development so as to improve the opportunities and environment of the entire community. In its application to both raw land and older areas, the objectives stated in the plan are the same but different techniques are required for their realization. The built-up areas of the community often exhibit improperly segregated land uses; their buildings may be blighted or imperfectly maintained; their street systems unplanned in relation to residential and industrial growth; their physical plant deteriorated and public amenities inadequate. The implementation of the official plan must take into account the presence of existing development: integrating its desirable features into the plan, altering those that conflict, and making up deficiencies in the public plant. Urban renewal is a continuous process that seeks to co-ordinate public and private redevelopment, rehabilitation and conservation of built up areas.

### THE COMPONENTS OF RENEWAL

The first of three elements comprising the process of renewal is redevelopment in which buildings or areas beyond economic repair are replaced by development of a similar or more suitable nature. At the same time, factors contributing to blight can be eradicated.

The second element, rehabilitation, is a less dramatic, less well-known and probably less understood form of renewal. It involves the repair of salvable buildings whose maintenance has been neglected to the point where restoration would be impossible unless undertaken within a short space of time. Rehabilitation also seeks to eliminate the forces contributing to blight by ensuring that the condition of public facilities encourages property owners to maintain their dwellings.

The third facet of renewal is conservation—the prevention of blight. The traditional responsibility of municipalities for the maintenance of housing has been limited to ensuring a minimum standard of health and safety. This has been accomplished by enforcing

building by-laws, health and fire codes. But such are the provisions of these regulations that their enforcement is confined to the very worst conditions. A programme of conservation must be directed at areas which, though they contain sound housing, are susceptible to obsolescence and decay. It is useless to expend vast sums on redevelopment and rehabilitation, if at the same time, steps are not taken to prevent the premature onset of blight.

Renewal programmes, however, will not by themselves eliminate slums since they cannot correct a major cause of decay. Whenever there are inadequacies in the range of housing available to all income groups, it is inevitable that overcrowding will result and bear most heavily upon those whose choice of accommodation is restricted by economic constraint. A shortage of housing results in overcrowding in sub-standard dwellings so that low income families may obtain rents that are within their means.

Until suitably priced accommodation is available to these groups, the enforcement of standards of occupancy will do little more than transfer the problem of overcrowding from one neighbourhood to another. Redevelopment projects rarely increase the number of low rental dwelling units and rehabilitation and conservation measures reduce such accommodation. The success of renewal turns upon the elimination of overcrowding through the provision of an adequate supply of low rental housing. A recent policy statement by the Prime Minister of Ontario, introducing a series of proposals for public housing, promises to bring a new approach to the problem of accommodating low income groups.

### REDEVELOPMENT

The public concept of urban renewal probably is most closely identified with the clearance and reconstruction of hopelessly deteriorated areas. The redevelopment of slums permits the elimination of intolerable conditions and such contributing factors as inadequacies in space, design, street pattern and environment.

Slum clearance must be accompanied by a programme for the relocation of those dislodged by redevelopment. As a result, reconstruction of cleared areas often takes the form of low rental housing projects though other land uses may be desirable. In many instances, intermingling of incompatible land uses, due to expansion of the urban core, accelerates the deterioration of residential areas. If, in accordance with an official plan, housing should be replaced with industrial development or open space, redevelopment planning should permit such changes in land use while at the same time providing alternate accommodation for displaced residents.

Hitherto, public redevelopment has been financed by Federal-Provincial-Municipal partnerships but the National Housing Act also provides for the participation of private enterprise in redevelopment. A number

of obstacles have stood in the way of private investment however. The difficulty of assembling sufficient land for redevelopment schemes and the propriety of using municipal expropriation powers for the benefit of private developers has retarded their participation. In addition, problems associated with site design control and the provision of housing for low income groups on expensive land by private enterprise has limited massive redevelopment to that undertaken by public authorities and extraordinary private investment.

Redevelopment is necessary when the normal renewal processes of the community have proven inadequate. As municipalities face up to the job of redevelopment, the high costs of slum clearance emphasize the logic of pursuing measures which combat the causes of blight. Rehabilitation and conservation are of this nature.

### REHABILITATION

A programme of rehabilitation seeks to restore, by public and private action, individual properties and areas which have become blighted. Consequently, the objective is to raise the standard of deteriorated, but salvable property, with a view to establishing an environment which is conducive to residential or industrial development. A comprehensive rehabilitation programme therefore must provide for the enforcement of a strong complement of regulations relating to occupancy and minimum standards of maintenance, the provision of adequate public facilities and services, a campaign to enlist the participation of the public, and the assistance of private enterprise.

#### *Planning for rehabilitation*

A rehabilitation programme is just one facet of the renewal process but it probably is the most complex. Whereas redevelopment entails the relatively simple steps of clearance and reconstruction, rehabilitation, since it seeks to improve, and at the same time retain much of the existing development must be based on intensive studies to determine what is to be restored, retained, altered and replaced. Such information is basic to a proposed programme.

A number of studies which are similar to, but less extensive than those required for a rehabilitation programme, have been completed in the City of Toronto. "Neighbourhood Appraisals" in Deer Park, Rosedale and the Annex, though undertaken in areas needing relatively little physical rehabilitation, represent the type of preliminary studies which are requisite to the undertaking of any renewal plan.

Studies of a different nature have been conducted in the Jarvis and Riverdale sections of Toronto. These comprise inventories of the existing housing stock made in conjunction with the enforcement of the City's Housing Standards By-law. Information relating to the

<sup>1</sup> City of Toronto Planning Board, *The Changing City*, Toronto, p. 25.

occupancy, and interior and exterior maintenance of dwellings was gathered with a view to its forming a basis for further detailed studies leading to the area's designation for purposes of a 'pilot' rehabilitation scheme. Subsequent events led to the substitution of the Alexandra Park area for such purposes and studies are now proceeding which will lead to this area's designation as a renewal project.

#### *The initiation of a rehabilitation project*

Procedure for the initiation of a rehabilitation programme is laid down in the Ontario Planning Act. Under its provisions, only those municipalities possessing an approved Official Plan may apply to the Minister of Municipal Affairs for permission to designate an area for redevelopment purposes; that is, for the reconstruction, rehabilitation, clearance, or redesign of an area because of its present delapidation, faulty arrangement, or overcrowding, and the area's subsequent reconstruction with similar or alternate land uses. Once the area has been approved, the municipality may acquire and hold land within the area and prepare it for renewal. Following this, the municipality, by by-law, may prepare a redevelopment plan for the area which, based on the broad objectives stated in the Official Plan, examines in detail the needs and future development of the area. This plan is subject to the approval of the Ontario Municipal Board. The municipality then can construct, rehabilitate, or improve any buildings in the redevelopment area and either sell or lease such buildings, or any unimproved land, to any person for use in conformity with the redevelopment plan subject to the adoption by the municipality of a 'restricted area by-law' giving the public authority wide powers to regulate development in the designated area. The provision for the disposal of land or buildings to 'any person' makes way for the participation of private enterprise in the renewal scheme.

Though the Act specifically refers to rehabilitation, the question of whether sufficient provision exists for the undertaking of such activities has not been determined since the available discretionary powers have never been tested.

#### *Difficulties associated with a project's initiation*

Though the enabling legislation appears to allow wide scope for renewal activities, there is a question of whether in practice there would not be undesirable side effects from the procedures as laid down.

In accordance with the Act, the first objective of a municipality is to obtain the Minister's approval of an area designated for redevelopment. Before any renewal measures may be initiated, approval of the Ontario Municipal Board of a detailed redevelopment plan is required if such plan does not conform with the Official Plan. Although the renewal proposals are based on the broad provisions of the Official Plan, it is likely that they will expand considerably on it, to include such detailed individual studies as:

residential densities	land use studies
quality of housing	traffic patterns
schools	required public works
parks	

and thus require submission of the renewal proposals to the O.M.B. Consequently, there could be a considerable time lapse between the time of designation and receipt of O.M.B. approval permitting the municipality to proceed with its plan. The interim could have a detrimental effect upon the stability of the area and aggravate the rehabilitation problem. The uncertainty of the situation would discourage owners from maintaining their properties, mortgage funds and loans from credit agencies would dry up, and normal renewal activities of private enterprise would cease pending finalization of redevelopment plans. It would appear that provision for simultaneous designation and Municipal Board approval would allow the presentation of detailed redevelopment proposals at a time much closer to the effective date of implementation.

#### *Local rehabilitation measures*

In the absence of formal renewal plans in Metropolitan Toronto, municipalities of the federation have had to rely on less positive legislative measures to promote rehabilitation. Those available to them permit action only against the worst conditions of overcrowding and blight.

Section 98 of the Public Health Act permits the Medical Officer of Health to condemn any building which in his opinion constitutes a danger to health or is unfit for human habitation. Use of the building may be prevented until the offensive conditions have been rectified. In the past, such action, while protecting the health of occupants, has led owners of defective dwellings simply to permit their properties to remain unoccupied without undertaking remedial action. Buildings then could no longer be classed as dwellings and were exempt from rehabilitation orders. Such evasive action in Toronto resulted in large numbers of derelict structures left in a state of decay while their owners awaited speculative appreciation of land values. This condition led the Council of the City of Toronto to seek special legislation to permit the Medical Officer of Health to demolish structures which, in his opinion, were beyond economic repair. Their request was rejected, but in 1960, the City of Toronto Act was amended to permit Council, on the recommendation of the Medical Officer of Health, to pass by-laws ordering the demolition of structures declared to be unfit for habitation.

Further measures for the remedy of hazardous conditions are contained in the Fire Marshall's Act and municipal building by-laws. The former provides for the correction of potential fire hazards while the latter usually offer some control over defective structures.

#### *The Toronto Housing Standards By-law*

A unique measure for the provision of minimum standards of occupancy and maintenance is provided by the Housing Standards By-law of the City of Toronto. Enacted in 1936, the By-law prevents the perpetuation of the worst housing conditions. Under its provisions, the Building Inspector may enter any dwelling unit to determine whether the soundness of its structure and the facilities and space per occupant are in accordance with the provision of the By-law. Where sub-standard conditions are present, the Inspector may order that repairs be undertaken or that the structure be demolished if it is beyond repair. To a greater extent than is the case with health, fire and building regulations, the By-law reduces the spread of blight by striking at its contributing factors: overcrowding and inadequate maintenance. However, the standards it sets are such that it has application only when deterioration is well advanced. Unless its enforcement is integrated into an overall renewal scheme, the By-law cannot, by itself, do much to retard the onset of blight.

#### *Enforcement of the By-Law*

Weak as the By-law may be in preventing decay, it nevertheless is the most effective means by which some degree of occupancy and maintenance standards can be assured. Compliance with orders made under the By-law is complicated by the fact that, in many instances, inadequate maintenance is due to the financial inability of owners to maintain their properties. In order to assist such owners, the City of Toronto operates a loan fund from which advances ranging from \$500 to \$2,000 can be drawn. These loans are secured by a prior lien and may be collected in the same manner as taxes on real property. The City charges interest at a maximum rate of 6½% and obtains repayment of loans in up to ten annual instalments added to the property tax bill. Though these loans are relatively inexpensive and convenient to repay, the mere act of expending funds upon the repair of property is in many cases too onerous for low income families. In other instances, absentee owners or speculators abstain from maintenance, regarding dwelling units as wasting assets and the land upon which they stand as potential sources of capital gain.

If repair or demolition orders are ignored, the City may force compliance. A number of complications in this regard have just been remedied. Prior to 1960, provisions of the Housing Standards By-law applied only to occupied dwelling units. By vacating a condemned building, an order could be ignored in a similar manner to an order made under the Public Health Act. In 1960, the City of Toronto Act was amended to redefine a dwelling unit as a building which "has been used, is used or is capable of being used for the purposes of human habitation". An order made in pursuance of the Housing Standards By-law then could not be evaded simply by abandoning a condemned structure. The amended definition, however, did exempt structures not

intended for use as dwelling units. All commercial, industrial and institutional buildings consequently are not subject to the By-law.

An owner of property ordered to repair or demolish his premises may appeal the order to the County Court. If the By-law is sustained and the work left undone, the City may take such remedial action as is necessary and charge the expenses thereby incurred to the owner securing its claim against the property by a lien standing ahead of property mortgages.

With increased powers to enforce orders made under the Housing Standards By-law, the City of Toronto now has an effective means to combat housing conditions which are hazardous to health and safety.

#### *Progressive inspection*

Prior to 1956, the administration of the By-law depended primarily upon the receipt of written complaints. Though this method has since been improved, approximately one quarter of all new inspections made by the Department of Buildings and Development still result from this source.

In 1955, a more positive approach to enforcement was taken when a planned programme of housing inspection was instituted, initially in the Riverdale area where the worst conditions of blight were present and later in the Jarvis area. In 1958, City Council adopted a programme of progressive inspection to systematically inspect housing conditions throughout the City. Specific priority areas were to be designated and approved by the Committee on Buildings and Development and City Council. The following year, Council approval was given to the designation of three areas based on priorities established by the Urban Renewal Study of the City of Toronto.

After considering a report on progress in the first area, Council declined to authorize the continuation of the inspection programme into the second priority area bounded by Danforth, Pape, Gerrard and Broadview. This action apparently resulted from a belief on the part of some Council members that the provisions of the Housing Standards By-law should be applied only to the most obvious areas of deterioration, notwithstanding the adverse effect of occasional blighted property in areas in which otherwise sound housing predominated. To counter this frustration of its inspection policy, the Committee authorized the Commissioner of Buildings and Development to designate priority areas, thus eliminating the necessity of going through Council.

A systematic approach to the maintenance of minimum housing standards thereby was established. In a report submitted to the Committee in March 1961, the Commissioner outlined the results of inspections in the first priority area. Out of a total of 2,575 initial inspections, 1,324 dwellings needed rehabilitation work. Of this number, 595 had not been repaired within seven months of the initial order. In addition to inspections in the first priority area, follow-up inspections in the

original Jarvis and Riverdale areas were made. During the three year period of 1957 to 1960, there were nearly 100,000 first and follow-up inspections, 4,086 buildings repaired, 184 demolished and 135 convictions for non-compliance obtained. Though this is impressive evidence of the By-law's enforcement, it is interesting that in 1960, 2,768 notices were sent to owners whose dwellings required repairs yet only 1,591 dwellings were brought up to the standard. In the same year, 22,427 second, third or subsequent inspections were made suggesting that few orders issued by the Department were observed following the initial inspection.

#### *Additional rehabilitation measures*

Two other rehabilitation measures have been developed by the City of Toronto. In 1958, a plan of spot rehabilitation was adopted whereby a number of deteriorated dwellings in the Riverdale area were to be acquired by the City and repaired, to illustrate the value of restoration and encourage similar measures throughout the neighbourhood. Only one house was rehabilitated and the plan dropped when it was found that restoration costs were excessive—due in part to extensive interior alterations that were made to permit use of the dwelling as a lodge for elderly people. This distortion of the original purpose of the project stalled a measure that has achieved considerable success in other cities.

To stimulate rehabilitation in the absence of approved redevelopment plans and provide housing accommodation, the City of Toronto, in 1961, applied to the Ontario Legislature for powers to purchase, repair, and lease, land or buildings. This legislation was designed to permit the acquisition and restoration of deteriorated properties that could not be maintained by their owners and their subsequent utilization for low rental housing. The City's proposal was amended to limit the use of such property to families or persons in need of public assistance. Though this limitation restricted a measure that could have permitted extensive initiatives on the part of the City in encouraging the restoration of deteriorated neighbourhoods and the elimination of blighted pockets of housing, the enactment did allow increased flexibility in the provision of low rental housing accommodation.

#### *Financing rehabilitation*

Though minimum standards of maintenance can be enforced by the City, rehabilitation orders can only be acted on if property owners are able to finance the required repairs. Part IV of the National Housing Act provides for insured Home Improvement Loans and the Toronto Housing Standards By-law permits the City to grant loans in respect of properties requiring rehabilitation. These sources of funds, however, do not provide a sufficiently wide range of credit. The dwellings of many property owners, though in need of repair, are superior to the standards prescribed by the Housing Standards By-law. Their owners are therefore ineligible for loans under the By-law and very frequently unable

to secure Home Improvement Loans through banks or other approved instalment credit agencies. Consequently, the owners of aging properties, which make up the vast majority of the City's property owners, are handicapped in whatever maintenance projects they may undertake or are encouraged to consider. Some relief in this respect may be imminent. The Provincial Government is now studying a system of guaranteeing loans to individuals for the rehabilitation of salvable properties.

If property owners are required to maintain and restore their holdings, then the municipality must see to it that the condition of its own physical plant and services stimulates, rather than discourages, private renewal. The cost of many public improvements undertaken in restorative work normally would be shared as local improvements by the municipality and benefiting property owners. Yet the practicability of this procedure in areas populated by low income groups is questionable. The justification of charging property owners of limited means, who presumably would be faced with rehabilitation of their own property, with special assessments for public improvements, necessitated in part by the negligence of the community, might be open to question.

Though the provisions of relevant legislation have not yet been tested, it is debatable whether senior government assistance for rehabilitation includes improvements to public facilities. However, it is clear that at the present time, the cost of improving public facilities sufficiently to create an environment in which private initiative might check the gradual deterioration of developed areas is beyond the financial capacity of municipalities. Again, the Province has promised some relief by announcing its intention to study means of assisting municipalities in the improvement of the public plant.

A number of potential sources of senior government assistance is available to private enterprise and public authorities for the rehabilitation of buildings. As previously noted, the Planning Act appears to provide for assistance to municipalities for such work. The National Housing Act permits Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation to extend loans to limited dividend companies for the conversion of existing buildings for low-rental housing. Under Section 36 of the Act, the Corporation may contribute 75% of the cost of rehabilitating existing dwellings and their subsequent lease or resale for housing purposes.

#### *The promotion of rehabilitation*

A rehabilitation project must be promoted by an outspoken campaign of public information. Property owners should be apprised of the threat posed by blight, its costs, the means available to arrest its spread, and measures proposed to be undertaken by public authorities. Periodic inspections by competent personnel of all dwellings, if integrated into a general policy of public information, would serve the dual purpose of maintaining standards and establishing a familiarity with housing maintenance that could breed better conservation measures.

In this regard, the Toronto City Council, in 1960, recommended that the Metropolitan Assessment Commissioner, in conjunction with the City of Toronto Planning Board, be requested to investigate the preparation of a pamphlet, listing the repairs and improvements to dwellings which would not increase their assessments. In January of this year, the pamphlet was sent to all property owners with their Interim Tax Bill, notifying them that, for instance:

- exterior painting
- replacement or removal of obsolete trim
- replacement of the roof
- replacement of doors and windows
- interior decorating
- complete rewiring
- removal of partitions to enlarge rooms

can be undertaken without increased assessment. Such information will assist in encouraging home maintenance.

#### *Organizing for rehabilitation*

Since rehabilitation involves marshalling all municipal resources for the systematic restoration and maintenance of the city, adequate machinery for administrative co-ordination is essential. An effective rehabilitation programme must be based upon meticulous research to determine priorities, the disposition of individual areas and structures, alterations and additions to the public plant and the character and future of specific areas. At the same time, building, health, and housing by-laws must be enforced and the participation of operating departments efficiently integrated into the plan. Without careful research and co-ordination, there is the distinct danger that restoration work may be ordered or encouraged either when it is uneconomic or when long range plans call for redevelopment and changes in land-use.

Weaknesses in planning or scheduling can seriously affect the readiness of private enterprise to participate in renewal. The Toronto Urban Renewal Study cites two such instances. In both the Don and Spadina Planning Areas, private capital expressed interest in redevelopment but were "discouraged by present conditions and lack of clear policy for future development".<sup>1</sup> If substantial investment is discouraged in this way, the absence of firm plans must be no less frustrating for individual property owners whose only source of information is fragmentary newspaper reports. If the sums of private risk capital required for renewal are to be attracted, private enterprise must be assured of firm policy and clear cut procedures, and then be brought into the planning process at an early stage. Renewal of any sort is new enough and uncertain enough to justify

<sup>1</sup> Advisory Committee on the Urban Renewal Study, *Urban Renewal: A Study of the City of Toronto 1956*, City of Toronto Planning Board, Toronto 1956.

<sup>2</sup> Ontario Department of Municipal Affairs, *A Better Place to Live*, Toronto, 1960, p. 24.

<sup>3</sup> Metropolitan Toronto Planning Board, *The Official Plan*, Toronto, p. 77.

extraordinary measures for co-operation between public authorities and private enterprise.

In Toronto, responsibility for urban renewal has not been lodged with a definite group or department. Co-ordination of redevelopment schemes has been performed by the Board of Control. In the absence of rehabilitation and conservation programmes, such a procedure probably has been feasible, though an imposition on the Board. As pressure for renewal increases, a single purpose body must be charged with responsibility for the co-ordination of all renewal measures.

The Woods-Gordon management survey of Toronto's civic administration proposed such an arrangement. It was recommended that all aspects of property control, redevelopment, property maintenance and improvement, be made the responsibility of the Buildings Department which was to be renamed the Department of Buildings and Development. A building control division was to enforce regulations relating to building construction; a redevelopment division, to co-ordinate, schedule and control the work of all departments in redevelopment and rehabilitation projects as determined in consultation with the Planning Board, and, an improvement division to stimulate the conservation of private property.

In its consideration of these proposals, a Council Committee of Implementation recognized the relationship of housing to renewal by establishing a new Buildings and Development Department and incorporating therein divisions of building regulation and redevelopment. They deferred formation of an improvement division for the dubious reason that the need for such had not yet been demonstrated.

If the responsibilities of this Department are examined, it is evident that since the presentation of the Woods-Gordon Report in 1957, few changes have been made. In spite of the Implementation Committee's recommendation, the Department does not now have a redevelopment division. Nor, apparently, has the need for a conservation programme manifested itself in the establishment of an improvement division. As matters now stand, the job of renewal is adrift without provision for a nucleus around which positive action can coalesce.

#### CONSERVATION

In the future, the need for conservation measures will increase. It has been estimated that by 1985, 40% of Toronto's present housing stock of 417,000 units will require intensive rehabilitation.<sup>2</sup> By the same year, it is expected that 20,000-30,000 additional dwelling units for low income families will be required.<sup>3</sup> If this supply of housing is not provided by new construction or

adequate conversions, the pressure of overcrowding upon existing housing stock will be intensified and with it, the attendant threat of blight. At the same time, the costs of renewal will increase the incentives for preventive action, while appreciation of the social costs of blight will have a similar effect.

Few, if any measures have been directed at the conservation of older dwellings. A number of general acts, referred to above, permit remedial action against buildings that are a hazard to the public. The Housing Standards By-law of the City of Toronto, and powers conferred by private legislation give the City unique regulative authority. Such powers, however, are not in the nature of conservation measures: they are not positive instruments for the prevention of blight. Building by-laws have little effect on older housing while the provisions of the Public Health Act simply permit the repair or condemnation of premises which endanger health. Although the Toronto Housing Standards By-law specifies certain standards of occupancy and maintenance, its provisions are so minimal in nature that they can be enforced only when conditions endanger health and safety. Reliance upon the By-law for the prevention of blight is a negative approach. Its application is in fact an admission that properties have been allowed to deteriorate to the danger point. If for no other reason than the economic and social cost of decay, it only seems reasonable that means should be available to arrest deterioration before residents and surrounding properties are seriously threatened.

There are indications which suggest the application of the Housing Standards By-law may be broadened. This is shown by a recent recommendation to the Toronto City Council seeking authority to demolish several substandard dwellings due to their dangerous condition — and because they constitute an "eyesore and a blight on the area" which might adversely affect the condition of surrounding development.

If appearance and effect upon abutting properties are to become factors in the enforcement of the Housing Standards By-law, then this regulation could become a powerful instrument of conservation by providing that the standard of occupancy, structural maintenance, and appearance of any one dwelling would be prevented from falling below the general standard of the neighbourhood. However, such procedure is neither practical nor particularly desirable since unrestrained regulation of this kind would be an unnecessary intrusion upon personal property rights. In addition, standards of maintenance are legislatively feasible only within broad limits and desirable to the extent that they protect the value of the community's investment in housing. Yet the provision of some measures to prevent premature deterioration is necessary if only as a safeguard against the expenditure of public funds for slum clearance and rehabilitation.

Rather than relying solely on regulations that seek to translate variable standards into law, additional means are available. Together with the enforcement of occu-

pancy regulations and broad standards of maintenance, the community, by showing positive leadership in the renewal of public facilities can provide the environment necessary to ensure that neighbourhoods retain their attractiveness as places in which to live as well as provide the incentives to encourage private conservation. In this regard, the Provincial Government recently announced a study to culminate in proposals to encourage the preventive maintenance of housing in areas susceptible to premature deterioration.

### CONCLUSION

At the present time, the municipalities of Metropolitan Toronto can do little to prevent premature deterioration. The measures immediately available to them are, in effect, negative renewal instruments since they are effective only when blight is well advanced.

A positive approach to urban renewal is urgently needed. Age has caught up with our housing stock and in the future it will not be possible to ignore the need for preventive action. The costs of withholding renewal until massive redevelopment measures are necessary are already exorbitant and will become greater as middle aged and post-war housing reach maturity.

Total dependence on private initiative for renewal has been found wanting and reliance on the enforcement of existing housing regulations is impractical. Therefore, public authorities must take the lead in inducing maintenance. They can do this in two ways.

First, the need for conservation can be promoted by publicity and regular inspections of all property. According to conditions encountered, property owners can be advised of conservation techniques, minimum standards of occupancy and maintenance, assistance available for rehabilitation, and renewal measures planned by the municipality.

Second, public action can be the catalyst to spark renewal. If areas are not attractive as places in which to live and work, no amount of renewal will prevent their gradual deterioration. For this reason, public authorities must show leadership in providing the basis for an environment which encourages the preservation of private housing stocks. It is only when open spaces and schools are adequate, traffic and land uses segregated and neighbourhoods visually attractive that residents can be expected to see advantage in maintaining their property. With such incentives, not only will individual initiative be encouraged but also, public authorities will be justified in insisting upon proper maintenance. In addition, if private enterprise is assured of positive public action in rehabilitation and conservation, investment of private capital will be encouraged.

Effective renewal requires vigorous, positive measures to combat the causes of blight and encourage the conservation of sound building stock. It is the responsibility of public authorities to provide the leadership that is necessary for this purpose.

### BUREAU OF MUNICIPAL RESEARCH

Founded in 1914 by a group of public-spirited citizens — operating since then under provincial charter as a non-partisan, non-profit research agency — staffed full time by well qualified personnel — the Bureau of Municipal Research keeps local government operations in Greater Toronto under constant scrutiny.

The Bureau has gained wide recognition as an effective proponent of good government through its bulletin *Civic Affairs*, through the publicity given its statements, through its information and advisory services, and through the participation of the staff in the public discussion of municipal issues.

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*Your inquiries are invited*

Michael D. Goldrick  
DIRECTOR

32 ISABELLA STREET, TORONTO 5  
Phone 924-9717

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The Bureau is headed by Michael D. Goldfarb, Director.

Michael D. Goldfarb  
DIRECTOR

12 ISABELLA STREET, TORONTO 2  
Phone 92-5717

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