

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WELFARE

Division of Town Planning

Annual Report for the Year Ending

November 30, 1935

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DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WELFARE DIVISION OF TOWN PLANNING

ANNUAL REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDING
November 30, 1935

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EDWARD T. HARTMAN, *Consultant on Planning*

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Two (2) new planning boards, in Carver and Southborough, may be added to the list, making a total of 123.

But one new zoning law, in Dover, may be listed. This was adopted in 1933. In the meantime in many local zoning laws constructive changes and additions have been made or are under consideration. There continues to be many changes, in the form of spot zoning and undue expansion of existing business areas, which may not be called constructive.

It should be noted that during the last few years there has been a notable curtailment of activity in local planning and zoning, due to cutting down of current appropriations, and refusal of appropriations for new work, while in state and national fields the greatest expansion in our history has taken place.

That the people are becoming planning minded is manifested by the numerous inquiries received through office visits and by mail, through much constructive newspaper activity, and through "State Planning, A Review of Activities and Progress," prepared by the National Resources Committee. This report should be studied by all local board members. It gives a much-needed picture of the national field and indicates many possibilities for community planning.

It is being argued that when building a home, a business building, or an industry, a wise man will prepare and follow a plan, that the building may be safe and sound, and that functional efficiency may be as nearly perfect as possible. It is then asked why such a plan, and the following of such a plan, is not as important, even more important, with a thing so dynamic, so vital in the lives of all the people, as a city or town? A city or town, moreover, is not static, not nearly so much so as a building. It is expanding, or contracting, or changing. Whatever is happening, a purposeful, directed change is safer than what is haphazard.

PLANNING BOARDS

A planning board has only advisory powers. Many boards have developed skill, they propose certain things which should be done, or advise as to how

*Walter V. McCarthy December 1, 1935.

to do what is to be done, with sound reasons as to when, where and how each thing should be done. The board provides for the town the same form of careful thinking which every capable board of directors gives to an industry.

Failure to use this care is one of the main causes of heavy town expenses. Action which is not sound increases the tax rate, depreciates property values, and undermines the economic base of the individual citizen and the town.

The careful man, the kind who makes the best citizen, refuses to buy or build a home or an industry in a poorly planned, ugly, unprotected, expensive town. The greatest element of competition between towns is the protection they offer to homeseekers and businesses alike. Investing interests refuse to loan money in unprotected towns, or loan less and at higher rates of interest; insurance companies insure for less and at higher rates.

Whatever a planning board advises, action remains with the town meeting. A careful board makes for action along the best lines. A town is safer acting on advice than without advice. The advantage of a board is that it may gain an accumulating experience and become more and more valuable as time passes.

The complaint frequently is made that boards have no power. This complaint comes as frequently from boards which have made no studies and no proposals for improvement as from those which have done much work and whose proposals have been turned down. Why should a board which has done no work complain that it is ignored? On the other hand, why should a town ignore the recommendations of a board which has done careful work? It should be remembered that the powers of a board are inherent in the members of the board. When they have imagination and initiative, when they work, when their work is sound, and when it is carefully presented to the people, results will come, sooner or later.

Great power, with no ability or willingness to work, would do far more damage than good. When a board is able and does sound work, its proposals should be given careful consideration, and followed except where better proposals may clearly be proven. When a board sees its town as a whole, and makes a conscientious endeavor to develop all parts of the town, each in proportion to its needs, and each feature in proper correlation with all other features, and when it pursues its work with steadfastness, it will gradually achieve its proper position in town affairs. When a board does nothing it should not complain, and the people should replace it.

ZONING

Protected Residential Districts.

All planners and citizens interested in protected home areas have long recognized that every element of protection must be provided if an investment in a home is to be safe. Now comes the Federal Housing Administration backing up every element that has been proposed by planners and thinking citizens.

Under the system by which the government insures a mortgage, the money being loaned by some loaning institution, the government refuses to insure unless the following conditions are complied with:

1. The house must be properly designed and constructed.
2. The local street system must be proper.
3. The local street system must have a proper relationship to the street system of the town so that there is easy access.
4. The necessary utilities must be installed or reasonably available.
5. The area must be zoned, and the zoning must be enforced.
6. As far as may be needed, private restrictions must be imposed to protect the property. This means, for example, that if the town is not zoned the area involved must have private restrictions which will keep out business intrusions and provide other conditions which make for safety of the investment.

If the government is not justified in insuring a mortgage except under these conditions, what can we say as to the advisability of building or buying a home in a town which lacks these elements of protection, or as to the wisdom of a bank in loaning money on a mortgage for the construction of such a home. If it is unsafe for the Federal Government to have anything to do with such homes it is unsafe for any individual to have anything to do with them. Literally millions of individuals have learned this from practical experience and yet, in spite of this, most of our towns refuse to give themselves the necessary protection, and many of our towns which have seemed to offer this protection have allowed the breaking down of the protection through some process. It would seem to be time for all citizens to weigh these matters soundly and to see to it that they get the benefit of what the laws now make available.

Existing Zoning Laws

From many sources comes the assertion that local zoning laws need revision. This seems obvious if we consider the full purpose of zoning. What the enabling law permits, what the people desire, is not enforceable if it is not covered in the local law. If homes and businesses are to be protected, if property values are to be stabilized, the local law must have a full equipment of all features so far developed. Does your law contain these features? If it is proposed to use a large house in your best residential area as a custodial home for the feeble-minded, if a teacher of the cornet, the saxophone and the drums wants to operate to a late hour at night, if a perfectly proper community club building wants to have, or to let space for, all-night dancing, if a man wants to remove sod, loam, clay, sand, gravel or quarried stone for sale, have you a proper method of regulating these uses, or of preventing them entirely if conditions are such as to make them dangerous?

Too many local laws regulate only the uses which may be permitted, and these in an elementary way. A home area permitting single and two-family homes and multiple dwellings has no satisfactory protection, as has been pointed out by many courts, including the U. S. Supreme Court. There is likewise poor protection where from two to ten times as much land as is needed is zoned for business.

Bulk zoning, arrived at through height and coverage limitations, is an imperative part of the city plan. Planning is a problem in three dimensions. Either the street, water, sewer and utility systems must be designed for an assumed bulk of buildings, or the bulk of buildings must be adjusted to the street and other systems. If the bulk of buildings, which decides the service demands on the street and other systems, is greater than can be served stagnation follows. This stagnation is now one of our greatest social problems, involving heavy expense, accidents, which are also expensive, retardation, again expensive, and ultimately heavy loss of property values.

Our mistake lies in that, contrary to the English and European method, we have treated what we lay down on the land, what we call the plan, in one compartment of the mind, and what we build on the land, what we call bulk zoning, in another compartment of the mind. We do not relate them, as they must be related if we are to solve our problems of congestion, traffic hazards, light, ventilation and fire protection. Into a system of streets laid down in the horse and buggy days we have injected the skyscraper and the automobile.

The existing street and block systems of our cities will have to be recognized as fixing the city pattern, or we will have to undertake large-scale demolition and lay down a new pattern. To attempt to solve the problem by large-scale widening of streets is economically and practically impossible. The remaining block sizes, after widening, do not lend themselves to proper use.

not at all in many instances, in many others only when the whole block is in a single ownership.'

Systems of traffic regulation are very expensive, only palliative, and tend to delay the day when effective solutions will be applied.

The best planning, economic and social analysts of the country now agree in their interpretation of the known facts in regard to these matters. It is not an answer to accuse them of being alarmists. The whole people are vitally concerned. The people should be led in their thinking towards sound solutions by planning boards. Such boards should be ably supported, in the solution of this and all other problems of town building, by the people and by all official agencies of government.

FREEWAYS

A bill to permit the department of public works to build freeways has been filed for consideration this year. A freeway is defined as a way to which no one has any right of access except over an intersecting way. It is variously called a freeway, a limited way, and a steadyflow way.

The petitioner is the Massachusetts Federation of Planning Boards. The Federation argues that freeways are now imperative for economy, safety and the protection of natural beauty. This is a problem of major economic and social importance. A solution is big with possibility for the general welfare.

With access to such a way only at properly designed intersections, as widely separated as possible, traffic would be expedited, safety would be increased, and the natural beauty of the countryside would be protected. Such intersections, where both ways carry heavy traffic, would be of the cloverleaf design. Where one way has lighter traffic a traffic circle or some other design to permit a weaving, steadyflow, motion would be planned.

Economy is obvious. According to the latest accepted figures a four-lane freeway will clear from three to four times as much traffic as a four-lane unprotected way.

The advocates of freeways, from the U. S. Bureau of Public Roads down to local advocates, the country over, hold that the mere existence of additional unprotected ways causes heavy loss.—Such ways depreciate values, while a proper freeway will increase values where there is any reasonable need of land development. A freeway is, for example, a speedy, safe and beautiful way of approach to a fine home development, reached via an intersecting way.

The demand of all abutters to be allowed to build what they like along our state highways is admitted to be wrong because this kills the traffic-clearing capacity, for which the road was built, through parked cars, people crossing from one side to the other, and many other forms of interference. There is no demand for such space for general business. Were all existing Massachusetts state highways solidly developed for business they would meet the needs of 50,000,000 people—and the ways would be killed for traffic. General business belongs in the trade centers of cities and towns, through which no main highway should pass. At main intersections the needs of the users of freeways may be supplied without traffic interference, or undue hazard, or destruction of natural beauty.

The hazards of unprotected ways are as obvious as their expense. At last the people are aroused over the deaths and injuries on our highways. The economic cost of accidents, put at \$1,500,000,000 per year by the National Safety Council, 66 per cent higher by other authorities, at \$17,870,000 for Massachusetts, is causing widespread alarm. Hitherto the annoyance of retardation has been more considered—it is a major item of cost—and efforts

have been devoted to traffic regulation rather than to planning for safety, which is best done through freeways and insulated neighborhood units.

And natural beauty is worth considering. Virgil Jordan of the National Industrial Conference Board has emphasized this by saying that we live as in a series of ramshackle mining camps, as though expecting to move on tomorrow, while these camps are connected by recently constructed good roads running through an abomination of desolation. To be able to leave a city center over a protected, safe, beautiful way, and arrive at a home in a safe and beautiful development, is the hope of every thoughtful citizen. To date such opportunities are notable for their scarcity.

The advocates of the measure urge the high economic importance of safety and beauty, and say that these must be added to that coming from so designing a way that it will do the work of three or four unprotected ways. They say that the cost of \$90,000 per mile for the Providence road, \$145,000 for the Concord road, and \$175,000 for the Worcester road, the figures of the chief engineer of the department, is but one element of the cost of unprotected ways, and that if we are brutal enough to ignore injuries, deaths and the destruction of beauty, the economic results alone will force action. They urge that this action has been too long delayed, and that the unfortunate financial conditions of the state and most of the municipalities would have been greatly relieved by earlier action.

There seems no reasonable ground for argument against any of the points advanced. There are many other points in the comprehensive arguments now made the country over, and none of them seems weak or foolish. The reasons cited, and many others, are putting a rapidly increasing body of opinion back of freeways. The people see that freeways are economical, safe, and may be beautiful, all in a high degree, and they consider any one of these points as enough to justify the development and protection of such ways.

PLANNING BOARD ACTIVITIES

BOARDS ESTABLISHED

Amesbury	Concord*	Leominster	Northbridge*	Taunton
Amherst*	Danvers	Lexington*	Norwood	Tisbury*
Andover*	Dartmouth*	Longmeadow*	Oak Bluffs*	Wakefield
Arlington	Dedham	Lowell	Paxton*	Walpole*
Ashland*	Duxbury*	Lynn	Peabody	Waltham
Attleboro	Easthampton	Lynnfield*	Pittsfield	Watertown
Athol	East Longmeadow*	Malden	Plymouth	Wayland*
Auburn*	Everett	Manchester*	Quincy	Webster
Barnstable*	Fairhaven	Mansfield*	Randolph*	Wellesley
Bedford*	Fall River	Marblehead*	Reading*	Westborough*
Belmont	Falmouth*	Medfield*	Revere	West Boylston*
Beverly	Fitchburg	Medford	Salem	Westfield
Billerica*	Framingham	Melrose	Saugus	Weston*
Boston	Franklin*	Methuen	Scituate*	West Springfield
Bourne*	Gardner	Middleborough*	Sharon*	Westwood*
Braintree	Gloucester	Milford	Shrewsbury*	Weymouth
Bridgewater*	Great Barrington*	Millis*	Somerville	Wilbraham*
Brockton	Greenfield	Milton	Southborough*	Wilmington*
Brookline	Hanover*	Natick	Southbridge	Winchester
Cambridge	Haverhill	Needham	Springfield	Winthrop
Canton*	Hingham*	New Bedford	Stockbridge*	Woburn
Carlisle*	Holyoke	Newton	Stoneham	Worcester
Carver*	Hudson*	North Adams	Stoughton*	Yarmouth*
Chicopee	Hull*	Northampton	Sudbury*	
Clinton	Lawrence	North Attleborough	Swampscott	

* Under 10,000 population.

NO BOARDS: Adams, Chelsea, Marlborough, Newburyport.

CITIES AND TOWNS WHICH HAVE BEEN ZONED

COMPREHENSIVE		COMPREHENSIVE—Continued		PARTIAL	
Brockton	Nov., 1920	Winthrop	Oct., 1929	Marshfield	June, 1926
Brookline	May, 1922	Lynnfield	Nov., 1929	Fall River	Sept., 1927
Longmeadow	July, 1922	Franklin	Mar., 1930		
Springfield	Dec., 1922	Wilbraham	Feb., 1931		
Newton	Dec., 1922	Natick	Mar., 1931	PREPARED BUT NOT ADOPTED	
West Springfield	May, 1923	Hull	Mar., 1931		
Cambridge	Jan., 1924	Westfield	Aug., 1931	Amesbury	
Lexington	Mar., 1924	Great Barrington	Mar., 1932	Amherst	
Melrose	Mar., 1924	Carlisle	Feb., 1933	Andover	
Winchester	Mar., 1924	Sharon	Mar., 1933	Attleboro	
Arlington	May, 1924	Dover	Mar., 1933	Beverly	
Boston	June, 1924	Wilmington	July, 1934	Billerica	
Woburn	Jan., 1925	Wayland	Sept., 1934	Bourne	
Belmont	Jan., 1925			Braintree	
Needham	Mar., 1925			Canton	
Walpole	Mar., 1925			Chatham	
Stoneham	Mar., 1925			Chelsea	
Waltham	July, 1925			Chicopee	
Haverhill	Oct., 1925	Milton	July, 1925	Clinton	
Medford	Oct., 1925	Holyoke	Sept., 1923	Duxbury	
Wakefield	Nov., 1925	Swampscott	Apr., 1924	Easthampton	
North Adams	Dec., 1925	Dedham	May, 1924	Fitchburg	
Somerville	Dec., 1925	Chelsea	June, 1924	Framingham	
New Bedford	Dec., 1925	Paxton	Dec., 1924	Gardner	
Watertown	Jan., 1926	Worcester	Dec., 1924	Hingham	
Fairhaven	Feb., 1926	Wellesley	Mar., 1925	Leominster	
Falmouth	Apr., 1926	Salem	Nov., 1925	Littleton	
Reading	May, 1926	Hudson	Mar., 1927	Manchester	
Lynn	June, 1926	Bedford	Mar., 1928	Marion	
Lowell	July, 1926	Middleton	Apr., 1933	Medfield	
Malden	July, 1926	Stockbridge	Feb., 1934	Middleborough	
Everett	July, 1926			Nahant	
Norwood	May, 1927			Northampton	
Gloucester	Nov., 1927			North Attleborough	
Pittsfield	Dec., 1927			Plymouth	
Marblehead	Apr., 1928	Taunton	Sept., 1925	Quincy	
Weston	Apr., 1928	Marlborough	Jan., 1927	Scituate	
Concord	Apr., 1928	Andover	Mar., 1927	Shrewsbury	
Agawam	Apr., 1928	Petersham	Mar., 1927	Southbridge	
East Longmeadow	Apr., 1928	Oak Bluffs	Apr., 1927	Sudbury	
Saugus	June, 1928	Northampton	Sept., 1927	Wenham	
Lincoln	Mar., 1929	Barnstable	June, 1929	Westborough	
Westwood	Mar., 1929	Attleboro	May, 1930	Yarmouth	
Revere	July, 1929	Peabody	June, 1930		
		Sudbury	Mar., 1931		