

MUNICIPAL PROBLEMS

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I believe that any discussion of the subject handed to me, "Municipal Problems", should begin with the events that caused them to be problems.

It is to be regretted that "Town Building" was the antecedent of "Town Planning". Many of the problems confronting us today would not be problems of such magnitude if our cities had had the guidance of a comprehensive plan. But, we are stuck with our cities as they are. We can't move away and leave them.

The problems caused by a physical expansion without good zoning and building code laws are common to most of our cities. Most all of us have business areas that utilize every square foot of available space. Our streets are choked with traffic. We have slums, the breeding place of crime and communism. We have substandard housing and residence areas that are no longer desirable places to live, due to the encroachment of business and industry.

The rapid growth of many of our cities during the last war caused great economic and physical disruption. Housing became a major problem almost overnight. The usual municipal services and facilities were taxed to the limit and were often inadequate. The health of our communities was endangered by overcrowding in our homes and schools.

In an attempt to alleviate the acute housing shortage, many new homes were built and subdivisions developed. Much of this new development was outside the corporate limits of the city and was not subject to subdivision or zoning laws.

In the quest for a source of new revenue, some cities annexed these newly developed areas, but instead of increased revenues that were anticipated, the cities were faced with the problem of constructing streets, sewers, water mains and other utility structures, in violation of all sound economic principles. This great physical expansion called for a very large outlay of capital. Very often these extensions had to be financed by long term bond issues, with the annual payments very likely extending well beyond the boom era.

The orderly growth of a city is desirable. A more diversified industry to balance the economic life of the city is desirable. Adequate facilities for health, education and recreation must be provided. To insure this orderly growth the city must adopt a comprehensive plan as a guide for future development, and for salvaging and preserving all the good things in the community. This plan should reserve suitable land for industrial activity and expansion. Business districts should be easily accessible to the potential customer, and adequate parking facilities provided. Residential areas should be attractive and convenient to schools and playgrounds.

I believe the first step in city planning should be a publicity campaign to crystalize public opinion on what it wants its town to be. There must be a sound conception on the part of the public of the objectives, the philosophy, and the necessary restraints of a comprehensive plan as a guide for current and future activities.

Of course, man's changing needs are the source of many of our problems. Our standard of living is on a much higher level. Every citizen expects the city to collect his garbage at regular intervals, and to provide adequate police and fire protection. He expects the streets to be well lighted, cleaned, and maintained to modern standards. He expects traffic lights and signs to regulate the movement of traffic. He also expects sufficient educational and cultural facilities.

To meet the costs entailed in providing these services and facilities, the city must levy and collect taxes. The chief source of revenue is the ad valorem tax. Even with a high tax rate, our cities are finding it more and more difficult to meet this overhead cost of government.

In the quest for additional revenue, I believe our city officials should seriously consider a program of city-wide reappraisal of property. The Kentucky Department of Revenue has a limited amount of money to help in countywide reappraisals if so requested by the county fiscal court. The cities of such counties that are reappraised may accept the county reassessment if they so desire. Since a just and equitable assessment should be the basis of the ad valorem tax, it is to be hoped that the fiscal courts of our counties will have the courage to request a county-wide reappraisal of property and thus eliminate gross inequities in property assessments.

Another municipal problem, and one which vitally concerns the entire community, is the problem of citizen apathy. What is the cause of citizen apathy? The answer most often given by the average citizen

is that he believes that the city is controlled by persons representing vested interests. He feels that he is a little frog in a big pond, and assumes the attitude of "what's the use".

Citizen apathy has no place in representative democracy. Democracy is built on the obligation and responsibility of individual citizen to his community. It is in the community that democracy meets the test. The late Henry Taylor of Henderson, speaking on the subject, "Community, The Testing Ground of Democracy", voiced a warning against citizen apathy, and the possible result thereof. He said: "There is more to the relationship of community and democracy than that of the *testing ground*. The community is also the *proving ground*; it is the *battle ground*; and, aided by the indifference of individuals who accept its blessings and give nothing in return, the community *can* become the *burial ground* of democracy."