
REGIONAL PLANNING'S STRATEGIC VALUE

For once, in Philip H. Cornick's study of "Problems Created by Premature Subdivision of Urban Lands in Selected Metropolitan Districts," we have a work in regional planning that can be endorsed without qualification. Mr. Cornick fits these problems into the setting of the larger problem, that of general land speculation, the problem from which they are derived and to which they are subsidiary, noting clearly:

"The study itself presented evidence which indicates that the terrain explored represents only one relatively minor sector along the extended front on which the campaign against disruptive speculation in lands must be waged."

In presenting proposals for a measure of control over the more obvious types of land speculation in the metropolitan fringes, proposals which, he suggests, may have wider uses, he warns:

"There is little basis in past experience on the other hand, for the belief that the police power alone can prevent the occurrence of blight at the numerous overlapping margins of economic land use which exist in urban areas. The problems presented are too varied and too intricate to permit the wise, and at the same time comprehensive, exercise of that power. It is in those areas, furthermore, where blight assumes its most stubborn forms.

"The sum of all the speculative increases in land prices which take place in the extensive areas of the state which lie below the level of urban use, is as a drop in the bucket

when compared to those which occur within the relatively small urban areas themselves. The latter assume such proportions as to warrant the assertion that they are among the major causes of the credit inflations which engender booms. While, therefore, the strategy outlined in this volume may be adequate for carrying certain positions in the campaign against the minor aspect of land speculation, it can hardly be expected to win the war."

These paragraphs ought to be printed in great primer letters and tacked above the desks of all students of land use planning, who have, to use the homely phrase, too often failed to see the forest for the trees. But Mr. Cornick also has a few sentences for those of us who have been insisting for decades on the basic importance of the social appropriation of rent in a program of social reconstruction, and have failed to see the trees for the forest:

"The land of our fathers is also the land of our children. Upon us, as temporary trustees, devolves the duty of managing wisely and conserving well this basic heritage of the race."

In the accompanying review, J. Charles Laue discusses this aspect of Mr. Cornick's work, on which the New York Division of State Planning, the New York State Planning Council and the Institute of Public Administration, and all the officials and agencies who cooperated with them, deserve the warmest congratulations.

—W. L.
