For the Benefit of the Few

By FRANK Q. CROWDER

The table reproduced herewith is from one of a series of studies in zoning published by Harvard University. This particular study, by Harland Bartholomew, entitled "Urban Land Uses," was issued in 1932. Its purpose was to establish and support a basis for city zoning; but the data reveals facts pointing to more important economic and social interpretation.

The study covers sixteen American cities, ranging in area from 1,374 acres to 28,736 acres, in population from 8,697 to 307,808—a rather representative selection. While the figures are nearly ten years old, the changes in population or in the other data are not likely to be so great as to affect the validity of the conclusion derived from them.

The most developed city—that is, the city with the greatest land area bearing improvements—is Louisville, Ky., with a percentage of 77.9. The least developed city, Cedar Rapids, Ia., shows a percentage of 33.2. The average is 60.2 per cent. That means that forty percent of the areas of all these cities is held out of use.

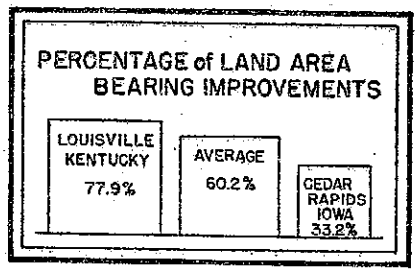
Just what constitutes "developments" is not quite clear. On city assessment rolls land which bears any taxable improvements is considered improved. Thus, a parking lot with a repair station would be improved land; a one-story "taxpayer" on the most valuable land in the city would be a "development." Such

land is not being used to its full economic value, and to that extent must be considered economically vacant.

Even so, forty percent of the land in these cities is entirely unused. The services which the authorities render to the communities are borne by the sixty percent of the land which has been put to productive use, as well as by the buildings on them. The burden of taxation is on the industrious, while a premium is put on the holding of land out of use.

Notice that within the limits of these municipalities there are on the average 11.7 acres for every 100 inhabitants, but that they work and live on only 7.4 acres—that is, the area developed. For students who fret about the overcrowding in our cities these figures should be revealing. In smaller cities overcrowding is not obvious. But this disproportion between used and unused land nevertheless indicates a premature expansion of the city limits, with a consequent increase of the tax burden, for the benefit of speculators.

More than half of the developed land is occupied by public and semi-public improvements. Our investigator has included streets and parks, as well as public and semi-public buildings, also railroads, in the category of developed land. This is a rather unusual use of the term "developed area." But, it further indicates the extent to which land is held out of use in our cities. Of the 60.2 percent of the land "developed" more than half is used for streets, parks, play-grounds and public and semi-public buildings. Without these "developments"—which are really social services—the 28.89% of the land privately developed and the 39.8% of the land held vacant would be practically valueless. To a large extent the 68% of the privately-owned land (of which two thirds is entirely vacant) is made valuable by these municipal services paid for out of general taxation, most of which falls on labor products, very little on the land values.



Interesting, too, is that of the 28.89% of the area developed over four-fifths is devoted to homes or living quarters. Since buildings for dwelling purposes are on the whole located on the outskirts of a city, where land values are low, the ratio of their value to the value of the land they rest on is high: homes are assessed for taxation purposes at from five to ten times the land assessments. It will readily be seen, therefore, that the real burden for taxation in municipalities rests on the non-productive home. The beneficiaries are the owners of land in the centers of population, where building values are low as compared to land values, to say nothing of the owners of vacant land. The many are taxed for the benefit of the few.

From "Urban Land Uses" by Harland Bartholomew
(Harvard University Studies in Zoning)

RATIO OF TOTAL POPULATION AND TOTAL CITY AREA

City	Pop. at Date of Survey	Total City Area in Acres	Total Developed Area in Acres	Total City Area: Acres per 100 Persons	Developed Area: Acres per 100 Persons	% Total City Area Develop.
KNOXVILLE, TENN.	100,201	15,774	8,275.0	15.7	8.3	52.6
VANCOUVER, B. C.	143,560	10,560	7,450.0	7.4	5.2	70.5
SAN ANGELO, TEX.	22,711	3,776	2,686.4	16.6	11.8	71.1
FORT WORTH, TEX.	152,730	28,736	15,898.6	18.8	10.4	55.3
CAPE GIRARDEAU, MO.	15,323	4,992	1,913.1	32.6	12.5	38.3
SACRAMENTO, CALIF.	90,352	8,896	5,201.0	9.8	5.8	58.5
SAN JOSE, CALIF.	55,667	6,080	3,720.0	10.9	6.7	61.2
SPRINGFIELD, MO.	57,248	8,768	5,587.3	15.3	9.8	63.7
CEDAR RAPIDS, IA.	55,731	17,984	5,966.1	32.3	10.7	33.2
TULSA, OKLA.	141,281	13,760	8,342.5	9.7	5.9	60.6
LOUISVILLE, KY.	307,808	24,192	18,843.8	7.9	6.1	77.9
PEORIA, ILL.	105,155	7,803	5,851.9	7.4	5.6	74.9
JEFFERSON CITY, MO.	17,572	3,718	1,600.6	21.2	9.1	43.1
SAN ANTONIO, TEX.	231,542	23,040	15,535.9	10.0	6.8	68.7
TROY, OHIO	8,697	1,374	958.2	15.8	11.0	69.7
BINGHAMTON, N. Y.	77,609	6,445	4,099.1	8.3	5.3	63.6
TOTALS:	1,583,187	185,903	112,229.5			
AVERAGES:				11.7	7.4	60.2