

METROPOLITAN PLANNING.

AT FIRST CITY AND TOWN PLANNING CONFERENCE,
STATE HOUSE, NOVEMBER 18, 1913.

I am particularly glad to welcome this convention to Boston. It marks the beginning of that cooperation among the cities and town of the Commonwealth which is so important for our common good. It testifies to the fact that in many things our union in interest is stronger than the separation maintained by distance and local governments, for we are not here merely to gain wisdom one from the other, but in some sort to make a common plan to secure the finest possible communities for the State of Massachusetts.

As far as the planning of Boston is concerned, I feel that the other cities have a right to give something more than advice. We realize that our hotels and theaters and big stores depend on the communities outside our political limits, growing with their growth and prospering with their prosperity. Furthermore, as a shipping port and as a market we are closely related to all your fortunes, both good and bad. It is therefore with something more than dispassionate interest that the representatives of Boston will listen to your discussions.

But if all the cities of the Commonwealth are bound in some sort to Boston, what shall we say of the forty communities physically united to her? It is a curious fact that for Boston alone of all the cities of the world there should be actually more people, within a radius of ten miles, outside the city limits than inside. It is ridiculous that these forty separate units, making up the million and a half people of greater Boston, cannot get together on all matters of serious importance.

We have a Metropolitan Park Commission and a metropolitan water supply, but we should also have

closer relations with the fire and police service of the Metropolitan district. If we cannot protect Chelsea, we cannot protect East Boston; if we cannot protect Somerville, it is useless to elaborate our schemes for Charlestown. We are an immense industrial and commercial community, visibly one in physical continuity and in many common needs. I do not advocate political union with Boston, but I do advocate some form of loose federation among these cities and towns already so closely bound, if they would only recognize it, by intimate economic ties.

There is a distinguished precedent for this federation. Metropolitan London has a much less tangible organization; only the drainage, police and water departments cover the whole area of 700 square miles, including London city, London county and much more; yet London gets universal credit for 7,530,000 people.

A plan for a federation of this sort was rejected not because of any political opposition but through the hostility of the suburban places, Newton being the leader, which claimed to have all the intelligence and most of the virtue abiding in the neighborhood. Whether they feared that it might lead to closer political union with Boston or not I cannot say, but I submit that their attitude shows very little enlightenment. The plan outlined was too broad and farsighted for a group of men accustomed to deal with problems that are purely local in their character and affecting only small populations. That is the difficulty you will have to meet in endeavoring to bring about a more enlightened form of city planning. You must first get out the blackboard and give a few primary lessons and in this way inculcate the Metropolitan spirit as against the parochial attitude which now prevails; yet some union must come soon. I believe it to be a necessary preliminary to any effective city planning in Boston. We cannot even secure that most rudimentary of city plans—the circumferential thoroughfares—when any such proposed thoroughfare runs in and out of the jagged fringe of political Boston

like a weaver's shuttle in a Jacquard pattern. Much less can we hope to attack with any prospect of success the question of housing reform.

The various indirect ways of attacking the slums through taxes on unimproved land and through legal restriction may some day be within the power of the City of Boston. But would it seem quite fair to lay a burden on the real estate men five miles from the State House in one direction and leave those a mile away in another, under perfectly similar conditions, entirely free? There are sections outside the city limits having all the characteristics of the city slums which any regulation in Boston proper would only tend to aggravate. If we are to reform the slums, Metropolitan Boston must conspire to do it; sectional attack will only aggravate and confuse the issue.

How much more true is this of an attempt to solve the problem through the development of suburban sections. To the north of Boston there are no suburbs within the city limits; Somerville, Everett, Malden, Medford, Arlington, are separate towns, yet I venture to say half of the people of Boston and most of the people outside of the Metropolitan district regard them as a part of the city life. Indeed, if you meet a citizen of any of these towns abroad you will always find that they claim to come from Boston; the same is true even of our aristocratic sister, Brookline, for, charming as Brookline is, it is unknown in Berlin, except perhaps as a suburb of the great city which so nearly surrounds it. These are towns to which the people of Boston return at night. How can we of political Boston attempt to secure "garden suburbs" in districts which in spite of that fact hold themselves alien? We have a very interesting suburb in West Roxbury, in which homes of beauty, even of distinction, are given to the people at the lowest price profitable to the investor. But that district contains most of the undeveloped land within the city limits. It is not enough, not nearly enough, for our people; if we are to develop the new sections of

Metropolitan Boston attractively and economically, we must attack the problem together.

Especially is this true of the "pest of three-deckers" now spreading over all the suburban sections. Dorchester, twenty years ago picturesque and beautiful, with old houses and wide shady streets, is to-day overrun with these shabby, unkept substitutes for homes. This type of building answers the demand for cheap construction and consequent low rent. But it is a danger and a disgrace to the community which tolerates it. Yet how can the three-flatters be eliminated in East Boston and allowed in Chelsea, forbidden in Dorchester and welcomed in Somerville and Medford? If we are to get rid of it — and surely this is the most elementary of reforms — Metropolitan Boston must unite for the effort.

Some solution of the housing problem is vital to real Boston. If we set to work at it forty different groups in forty different ways, the best intentions in the world will not pull us out with anything but confusion and cross purposes. But if this convention is, as I hope, the beginning of a recognition of the common needs and purposes of the cities of the state, and the beginning of some form of federation for the cities and towns already closely united in interest, there is no good hope that I would not be sanguine enough to entertain.