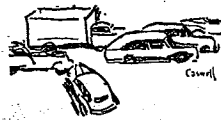


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Parking Problems and Slums

By LANCASTER M. GREENE

SLUMS are spreading faster than we can clear them. Some years ago we thought all the slums (in New York) were on the lower East Side, but now they are sneaking up on our best districts and we can't seem to keep up with them.

Pittsburgh cries out that it cannot afford the high cost of squalor.* The immediate concern is its costly lower hill slum right next to its \$120 million Golden Triangle of office buildings just risen from another costly slum. In the adjacent slum area, Pittsburgh finds that crime is 8.1 per 1,000 people per week; the city-wide average is 1.9. The slum death rate per 1,000 runs 32 per cent above the rate for the whole city. Neglect and dependency cases in 1949 were 122 per cent above the city-wide average. Public welfare cases average 283 per cent above the Pittsburgh assistance rate.

These are some of the reasons why the Urban Redevelopment Authority is marching on the "lower hill" area intent on razing 106 acres of slum buildings almost a century old.

It Can Be Done

All cities are struggling with these two problems—slums and the parking problem. The National Municipal Council gives an award each year to the city that makes the most progress in these two problems.

The city of Newburgh (New York) won an all-American award last year. Newburgh was faced with a large sales tax which was driving business out of town. They had a budget they couldn't possibly meet and the merchants were losing business. What did they do? Well, the merchants got together with other businessmen, and talked it over with the Automobile Club. The Club agreed to make a survey of the parking problem free, saving \$10,000 proposed for an engineering survey.

Then they proposed the appointment of a city manager, who was independent of the elected Mayor. He faced the problem in a business administrative way. As a result they cleared lots for parking in the center of town which formerly had been garbage and bottle catchers.

They put black-top on these lots and collected \$105,000 the first year. Then they took other items that had been expenses, such as disposal of leaves. Leaves make good fertilizer, and farmers were permitted to come and buy them for \$2 a lot. This city manager has balanced the budget and has gotten cars off the streets and that is why Newburgh was nominated an all-American city.

There are vacant lots in every city that are just bottle catchers, but it doesn't pay the owner to make a parking lot because of zoning laws, taxes, etc.

The reason businessmen are opposed to parking meters is that there is great difficulty in getting the money into the city treasury. The collectors go around and collect coins from the

*Business Week, April 11, 1953.

parking meters, but keeping track of those coins is another matter. A lot of the money never gets into the city cashbox.

The city that did most for getting rid of slums was Baltimore. A girl by the name of Frances Morton came from there to study at the New York School of Social Work and she went back to Baltimore with all sorts of ideas. She started doing articles for the papers and got one editor interested. They began to enforce building and tenement violations and made people tear down old buildings—consequently people were encouraged to build new ones. Citizens started foundations to lend money to people to replace buildings. They even started a new housing court in 1947. Well, this housing court pushed things through.

To flash back to New York—in June of 1950 the Herald Tribune had a picture of a big vacant lot with plenty of trash on it. The caption read, "There are many more of these." Now, three years later very few have been built on. A few are parking lots but most of them are still bottle catchers. One of the reasons is that it costs so much to put up buildings, and no buildings are built except in those areas where the owner can get \$1,100 per room per year—so most of the building has been office buildings or apartments on Park Avenue, Fifth Avenue or Madison. Those are the only places where vacant lots have disappeared, so we haven't made much of a dent in our vacant lot problem.

Re-Zoning Takes Time

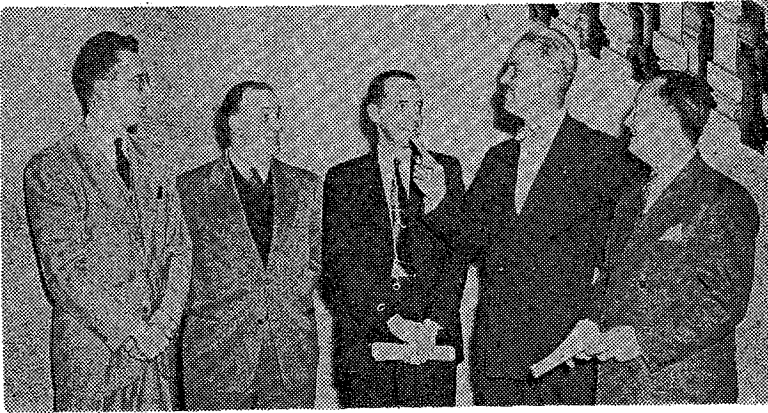


One of the reasons we haven't had garages built is that you can't get garages financed. You have to own the lot and then appeal to the zoning board to have it zoned or re-zoned for a garage. It takes 120 square feet to house a car in a garage and that costs plenty of money. It costs \$1,000 per car to build a garage, and you need about \$200 a year for taxes and labor costs to break even. Then you have to pay for the land. With a big garage you have elevator expense, so you can see why we aren't getting many garages. Banks usually refuse to lend money on them, as special purpose buildings.

Most New Yorkers live in rooms that cost \$500 per year per room—many are moving out to Long Island because land is cheaper there. The Automobile Club says the problem of parking and traffic flow is composed of numerous little things. Some of the jams are being ended by our traffic commissioners, but we are building cars more rapidly all the time and the salesmen are trying to get them out on the road while our problem is to keep them off the road, or in motion on the way. The Automobile Club estimates that there are 500,000 cars owned and

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This group of experts recently discussed municipal finance in Easton, Pa. Left to right: Jerome Cranmer, Drew University; J. Cal Callahan, Easton Planning Consultant; Dr. George G. Saunse, Jr., Lafayette University; Lancaster M. Greene, security analyst of New York; and Dr. James Charlesworth, University of Pennsylvania.



Parking Problems and Slums

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kept in New York but registered outside the city, and 897,000 cars registered in New York.

A Hint from Sweden

Another angle on the problem is that you need a quick write-off. If you have to write-off a garage after a 25-year period you won't have many garages built. I'd like to point out that Sweden has a Socialist Minister of Finance who is quite unsocialistic in one regard. They needed more expansion. He thought that anyone should be allowed as fast a write-off as he wanted on any property, machinery, buildings, etc. Garages *should* be written off in five years before taxes since they are considered expendable. Deferring would encourage quite a lot of garages being built despite the fine, or tax, on people who put them up.

A friend of mine wanted to know what to do with a block he owned which had old buildings on it. He found he would make a better return by renting out the lower floors to stores and the top for a tenement slum than by tearing it down and building a new one. The alternative is to tear down the block and make a parking lot. We have a lot of this going on because of the fine for fixing them up or replacing them.

Tax-Free Structures

Now to get back to parking—I went down to the Triborough Bridge Authority's Battery parking garage. They have six indoor floors and the top floor outdoors. They leave enough space so anyone can drive in and park themselves. If you come in the morning by 8:30 you can park on the lower floors. If you come later you may have to drive around for half-hour and then find a space. What do they charge? They charge \$30 a month for daytime parking, 8 to 6. And \$35 a month for 24-hour parking. The reason they can't charge more is because everyone parks in the streets after dark. They didn't think of building the garage high enough so that trucks could park there. Truck owners would be happy to rent the space. One of the reasons this place is a success is that the Triborough Bridge Authority is tax-exempt. The city put up the building and leased it to an oil company. Why not make all buildings tax-exempt and have more?

In Union Square in San Francisco the city wanted an underground garage so they leased it to an oil corporation who put up equity money so their oil and gasoline would be sold there. The garage of about five stories holds 500 cars and it cost the city nothing. It's wonderful just to drive in and let someone take your car. They are doing the same thing in St. Mary's Square and also at Pershing Square in Los Angeles. I have proposed that our city

should have similar garages under Central Park—maybe ten to fifteen of them and under other parks. I believe oil companies would put up second mortgage money to build many garages at no expense to the city.

Keep Them Moving

There is still another angle to the parking problem and that is the matter of traffic control—getting vehicles moving and keeping things fluid. How to do it with no jam-ups? In Philadelphia they have an area 34 blocks square where no one can get out of a car in rush hours. People are supposed to take buses. The theory is that 85 per cent of the people come by bus anyway so it would be much better if they just banned parking for many square blocks since only 1½ persons are averaged by private cars. Here in New York they could do it possibly from 82nd Street to Greenwich Village and from Third Avenue across to Ninth or Tenth Avenue.

Why don't we build over-street parking garages? No one wants a slum in their backyard, and the EI has made a slum out of Third Avenue. Land speculation went up by leaps and bounds in all areas where the EI came down. Of course over-street parking is cheaper than underground but no one wants it. Robert Moses (park commissioner) says the real estate people are very much against an over-street crosstown expressway. They would agree to an underground expressway but no one will put up the money. It would cost three to four times more than an over-street crosstown highway.

In Houston they have a system that works fairly well. No one goes by motor car through the center of town—it costs 5 cents to go 10 to 20 blocks in a shuttle bus so they keep the traffic fluid.

I went to talk to several real estate men around Irving Place, in New York. I wanted them to take a huge lot and build an apartment house. They say it would be possible but there you can only get \$750 per room per year and the arithmetic is against it, for to break even you have to get \$1,100 per year per room. For a garage it would take too long to get it zoned for the purpose.

What of the Future

Let's take a look at our cities 10 or 20 years hence. As the second or third child arrives in the better income families, the pressure mounts to leave city public schools behind for suburban or country living. Civic control is left to the lower income voters. This tendency has already resulted in vicious machine control in many cities. How much worse will it be in 20 years at our present rate? Will the grass be growing in the streets as the cities rot at the core?

How could this trend change for the better?

How can we permit hundreds of thousands of house and apartment owners to do their own slum clearance or prevention?

We can make locations cheap by taxing the value of each site, and we can encourage individual improvement by having no tax on improvements.

Now only a few big insurance companies can afford the high cost of land acquisition and can secure legislation reducing taxes on a specific housing project. Land for a \$9 million project is apt to cost more than a third of that amount. Site value taxation will reduce this cost. It will make it possible for every site owner to improve his building and for the many small owners to participate in preventing blighted areas.

If there were no exorbitant site prices and no taxes on improvements, the 188,000 vacant lots in New York City, for instance, would have apartments, with garages or other parking facilities, as people needed them.