

## “Edifice Complex”

THE (Tucson, Arizona) News-Gazette featured as a guest editorial by Joseph Zashin in December, “an alternate to urban renewal.”

Regarding a meeting in Tucson intended for re-evaluation of urban renewal he said “there was no chance for rebuttal, instead the city manager made a long summing-up on the “for” side. This program provides for purchase of an 80-acre area to be used mainly for government buildings and parking (on land averaging \$250 thousand an acre). Is the administration encouraging an “edifice complex,” asks Mr. Zashin.

Such a program will never eliminate blight, he notes, as there will still be “a whole sea of blight” surrounding this tract, and “not even combined local, state and federal monies will do the job.” New York was mentioned as a prime example, with more urban renewal funds than any other part of the country, but with more slums now than when it started, since landowners are encouraged to allow their properties to deteriorate. And the faster they deteriorate, the more the clamor is heard for buying up and clearing the area. It has become more profitable to abandon maintenance of dwellings than to attempt to keep them in decent condition. The present cost per apartment unit for dislocated slum dwellers has risen to over \$20,000 for minimum accommodations, while there is talk of new programs to cost 100 billion dollars.

The answer, Mr. Zashin relates, is to tax blighted land at its true full value instead of at the ridiculous levels at which it is assessed today. This will encourage a spurt in property improvement and new building which will be astounding. The fact is, he says, that “private effort can handle the prob-

lem,” as indeed the Lefrak organization in New York has proved, by creating more housing with more tenants than the entire New York City Housing Authority with its “huge, ponderous bureaucracy.”

Public buildings and civic centers, he believes, should stand on their own merits. Sites should be prudently acquired, and certainly it is inconsistent to spend \$250,000 an acre for sites when land in a downtown area within a one-mile radius of City Hall is assessed for tax purposes at a few hundred or a few thousand dollars an acre.

It was claimed that a “sparkling governmental center” would be a great tourist attraction in Tucson, but Washington, D.C. has “huge, elegant, preposterous governmental structures,” and also shocking slum conditions. “An edifice complex,” Mr. Zashin repeats, “is not the answer.”

An intelligent land policy would demand to know why so much desirable land remained undertaxed and under-utilized, and why a railway company finds it profitable to keep a freight station in the heart of Tucson, like a “Chinese wall at the east boundary of downtown.” This huge unused railroad reserve is being assessed at how much? Does anyone know — or care?

Tucson, he urges, should embark on an intelligent land policy, if only to show that it wants to learn from the experience of other cities which are mired down in their ineffective programs.

Few issues of HGN have drawn an enthusiastic comment as the November issue, and the article most applauded was one by Joseph Zashin, “Perfect Proof—Tax Maps!” Nils C. Oesleby of Eau Claire, Michigan referred to

this as "tops" — he is amazed at the number of people who write for HGN. Zashin's technique and use of land maps he wrote, "is closely allied to George's recommendation that a sign be posted on each piece of property, describing its size, ownership,

assessment and taxation. Incidentally, just think of all the work for unemployed sign makers if they took hold of George's suggestion," says Mr. Oesleby. Judge Fuchs, recuperating in Texas, sent for extra copies of this issue as did several other readers.

## The County

In a booklet, "County Government Lives Up to American Principle," written by Dorothy Worrell for the County of Barnstable, Massachusetts, she states:

"The county is the oldest form of government, having come down from the ancient times of antiquity. . . . It has survived for 1500 years and has been found to be a very efficient governmental unit. The county acts as a buffer, being a unit intermediate between the town and the state. There are functions that are above the town level that should still be handled directly by the people, and through the county this can be done. There are other functions properly belonging to the state.

"County government well exemplifies an American principle, of which we must never lose sight, enunciated by Abraham Lincoln; namely that our government, is one 'of the people, by the people, and for the people.'"

One of our Long Island readers who takes his county government seriously is Dr. Samuel Scheck. He visited the Nassau County Tax Assessor's office for the purpose of getting general information as to how the property tax and assessing system works, with the thought of making up land value maps as Joseph Zashin has done in Tucson. The County Assessor was pleasantly surprised and informed

Dr. Scheck that he was the first person to come to his office for such information — most visits being from property owners who complain that their assessments are too high or their neighbors' too low.

Dr. Irene Hickman, a leader in the Sacramento Henry George School and a director of the Statewide Homeowners Association, has filed two taxpayers' suits charging illegal assessments in Sacramento County. She, too, is interested in tax reform and has found innumerable cases of unequal taxation of lots adjoining practically identical parcels.

The first suit is an action to obtain an injunction to prevent illegal assessments in the future, and the second is an action to recover for the county taxes she says should have been imposed and collected for this year for parcels she has found to be assessed at too low a figure.

One two-acre plot was sold for \$100,000 but assessed for \$100—one-tenth of one per cent of assessed ratio. The taxes on this parcel were \$7.42, said Dr. Hickman, "most of us would be delighted to pay \$7.42 for every \$100,000 of property we own."

Georgists might do well to take another look at their county unit and exercise some of their rights as citizens—especially as these are often welcomed by the county officials.