"IT CAN HAPPEN HERE"

A Paper on Metropolitan Growth

By James W. Rouse

at Conference on The Metropolitan Future

University of California at Berkeley

September 26, 1963
One-half of the houses in California in 1980 will have been built between now and then, says the conference background paper. The population gained by 1980 "will be sufficient to duplicate the entire existing metropolitan system - core cities - suburbs and all - with some left over."

Thus, in California we see, in exaggerated form, the problem and the opportunity which our nation faces over the next 20 years. The country's population growth is projected at roughly 70,000,000, with all of this increase expected to occur in our metropolitan areas. My sleepy old home town of Baltimore has added almost 700,000 people to its population (a city larger than San Diego) since 1940 and is scheduled to add another 800,000 people (a city larger than Denver) by 1980. At the same time Washington, only 35 miles away, will be adding another 1,200,000 population (a city larger than Houston).

How will we as a country handle this growth? In what kinds of communities will our people live in 1980? How timely that the University of California should focus our sights on this task.

What are the current prospects for "The Good Environment" in 1980? Not very good. There is evidence at every hand that our cities are already oppressively out of scale with people. It would be very difficult indeed to claim that our urban society, as we know it today in America, is a healthy soil for the growth of our civilization. Slums, blight, disorder, congestion, ugliness, grimness, juvenile gangs, declining self-reliance, slipping morality, increasing neurosis, loneliness, bewilderment, lack of high purpose and principle -- with increasing force and frequency, these are becoming the hallmarks of the American city.

And a careful look around at the attitudes of the architects and planners; the proposals of the developers; the expectancy of the people does not give hope that substantial improvement in our planning and development process is "around the corner."

In our American cities today we do not have prepared or in process plans that will account for the orderly growth of our population over the next 20 years. If we did have the plans, we would lack the powers to enforce them. If we had the plans and the powers, we would lack architects and urban designers with the sensitive concern - the people-centered attitude - required to fulfill their hope.

I am not overstating the problem. The simple fact is that on the threshold of the greatest growth our country has ever known - growth so enormous that it will transform the face and form of our cities and our country over the next 20 years - we
are wretchedly unprepared in attitude and in capacity to face the task. It is an incredibly serious matter. A strong case can be made for the assertion that the future of American civilization depends upon the kinds of cities we develop over the next 20 years: California will double the size of its metropolitan areas in this period, the background paper says. Will Los Angeles and the Bay area thus be just twice as big, as sprawling - twice as much smog and slums, congestion - and what about Baltimore, Washington, Chicago, and New York? Is this unmanaged, sprawling, oppressive growth really to be the future face of our country? Or will we provide new communities sensitively designed to meet the real needs of people; shaped to be in scale with people - communities in which people feel important and uplifted - where there is some hope of matching growth in numbers with growth in human personality, character, and creativity.

The biggest hole in the planning process in America today is right at the beginning of it. We aren't coming up with right answers because we aren't asking the right questions at the outset. Planning deals with highways, land uses, public buildings, densities, open spaces, but it almost never deals with people. So seldom as to be never, in my experience, do you find in a planning study or report any serious discussion of the problems that people face in an urban society or how plans are directed at relieving those problems.

Isn't it time we began to ask what we are planning for? What is the purpose of the community? What kind of community would constitute a successful community? What would be an unsuccessful community? What are the tests or guide posts or comparisons by which we would measure the success of one community against another?

Newspapers and popular periodicals are filled with examinations of American society and with reports on the problems we face. Last week's Look magazine had a cover story on immorality. The problems of juvenile gangs, teen-age dropouts, divorce, suicide, loneliness; the importance of personal security. Isn't it time we asked how these matters might influence or be influenced by the communities in which people live? Don't the social scientists have a lot to tell the designer-developer people, and don't the urban designers have a lot of questions to ask the social scientists that would generate fresh and important studies?

A few years ago the highway planner and the city planner didn't speak to one another. They hadn't even met. You remember how the Director of the Bureau of Public Roads and the Administrator of the Housing and Home Finance Agency, after working in Washington for years, finally met one another at a conference in Connecticut. Happily they do work together today, and we are coming to recognize that there
is a significant relationship between planning for automobiles and for the people who use them.

But what about cities - central cores, business districts, industrial parks, residential areas, public buildings, schools, churches, health centers, gray areas, recreation areas, open spaces? People use them, too. What are their needs - their real needs? Who's asking whom - and who's studying the answers? No one! No one, that is, who is doing anything about planning, designing, developing the community in which these places and buildings and people are going to fight it out together.

The gap between the problems, the needs, the yearning of people - and the urban design team is every bit as wide as, and much more important than, the gap a few years ago between the highway engineer and the city planner.

We can't plan effectively for the future growth of American communities unless we start at the beginning - and that beginning is people.

I am serving on an Advisory Committee to a New England city which is developing a community renewal plan. At the first session, the job of the advisory group was to review a number of proposed studies, the results of which would guide the ultimate plan. These studies concerned population growth, central business district, housing demand, industrial growth, etc. There was no study that was directed at discovering the kind of community this city really wanted to be. Did it want to become the fastest growing industrial city in New England or did it want to be a fine, quiet, stable university town? (It is the seat of a great university.) Dredging the harbor and strengthening the port facilities could be useful to industrial growth. Cleaning up the harbor and converting it to boat and beach facilities would add to its value as a place in which to live and raise a family. Which to do? No one sought these answers or really wanted to ask the questions. The studies and the plans for this city will proceed with this big hole left at the beginning. And so it goes all over America.

How can we really talk about what size a community should be, the structure of the community and its neighborhoods, whether or not it should be separated from another by greenbelts and open spaces, about big concentrated cities versus a collection of small towns around a center, until we have first asked and answered a lot of questions about what we are really trying to achieve in the community - what will contribute to the growth of people.

I believe that the ultimate test of civilization is whether or not it contributes to the growth - improvement of mankind. Does it uplift, inspire, stimulate, and develop the best in man? There really can be no other right purpose of community except to
provide an environment and an opportunity to develop better people. The most successful community would be that which contributed the most by its physical form, its institutions, and its operation to the growth of people.

And then we have to ask: What constitutes "growth" in people? Is it increase in physical capacity? - improvement of the intellect? - strengthening emotional balance, security, personal effectiveness? Perhaps it's all of these things, but in searching for ultimate purpose in the development of a community, I find no test so embracing and so satisfactory as the Biblical injunction, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind. Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." If that were the target and the test of community planning; if we were really trying to create inspired, concerned, and loving people, might not this begin to influence the kind of plans we would unfold; and might it not point the way to answers we are not now perceiving?

An inspired and concerned society will dignify man; will find ways to develop his talents; will put the fruits of his labor and intellect to effective use; will struggle for brotherhood and for the elimination of bigotry and intolerance; will care for the indigent, the delinquent, the sick, the aged; will seek the truth and communicate it; will respect differences among men. The raising of such a target would provide direction and purpose and basic testing for the pieces of planning which ultimately make the whole community. To shoot at it all would require questions and answers that aren't flowing today among the people planning and developing our communities.

Is the "advanced" civilization of New York truly superior to the "undeveloped" society represented by the swamp slums of San Juan, when New York seems to develop hostility, violence, and delinquency in Puerto Rican immigrants, who, although illiterate and underfed, were friendly people in their native land?

Is Baltimore a superior civilization to the backward, rural South, when, statistically, illegitimacy and other indices of family instability run higher among second generation Baltimore Negroes than among their counterparts in the backward South? Are these superficial tests? If so, what better test might there be if we searched to find measurements of community that didn't relate to "space" or "urbanity", but related instead to the growth of people, as people - growth in their concern for one another and their inspired views of the society of which they are a part. If the legitimate target of society is not to develop more inspired and more concerned people, then what is it? Some answer, some target, is the necessary beginning point for planning.
if it is to have real roots and be valid for the people for whom it is intended.

It is presumptuous for me as a businessman-developer with no professional training or capacity in planning or the social sciences to suggest such questions but, for purposes of illustration, let me put some of the questions that would come to me were I faced with the planning of a community. If the purpose of a community were determined, what might be the specific questions we would ask if we were planning out from the real needs of people instead of inward from the preconceived notions of the designer?

1. Is the mixing of people - economically, culturally, racially - within a community important to individual growth? If not, what then? If so, then in what manner and in communities of what size, and how might this target influence the plan?

2. Is individual participation in and responsibility for a community an important objective? Why or why not? What is the minimum size group which really draws a person into a sense of community? What is the maximum size group beyond which the individual sense of responsibility becomes so diluted that he no longer feels true responsibility or participation?

3. What kind of neighborhood or community makes an individual feel secure, comfortable, and important? What does such a neighborhood or community include in facilities, institutions, etc.? Do individuals belong to a number of overlapping communities at the same time? What are they? How do they affect his growth? How should they be planned for - or against?

4. Could community health and activity centers help to discover disorder (physical or emotional) at an early and more readily correctable stage, and, if so, how should they be planned for? If not, what alternatives are there to discovering and relieving physical and emotional disorders and improving individual and community health? How should these alternatives be fit into physical planning?

5. What is the effect on children of increasingly high educational standards? How do you focus on the development of individual talents and capacities and develop, at the same time, emotionally secure, tolerant, loving people? How do these tasks influence the education and recreation programs and the facilities which support them? Do the rigid demands of increasing educational standards indicate the need for more relaxed recreational opportunities - more time for loafing, daydreaming, for solitude, for choice, for development of self-reliance and a free spirit?
6. What about the elderly? Should they be segregated in projects or communities, or are they and their communities strengthened by encouraging their distribution through the community?

7. What will be the role of recreation in the coming world of more and more leisure time? How will we put to effective use the additional time that becomes available with shortening work weeks?

8. What about adult education?

One of the conspicuous phenomena of our age is the speed with which man is made obsolete in his training by the pace of technological advance. How can a community have a continuing program of adult education to correct individual obsolescence as it occurs; to equip men to move forward with technological growth?

What about the college educated housewife-grandmother of 45? Her children have grown and left home for college or marriage. Her mechanically equipped home exerts a minimum demand. She is bright, educated, equipped to be effective; yearns to be important. How can this tremendous resource be put to effective use in the community?

How might these considerations affect a community plan?

9. How can the community communicate to itself about itself effectively? Should we rely entirely on the chance that radio, TV, newspapers will be operated by good, wise, and responsible people? Can the community afford this risk? If not, by what mechanisms might a new community influence these media to be vital, responsible, and effective?

10. Might there be a new and different solution to the relationship between the people, the public services, and the role of local government in a new community?

Is it possible that the housekeeping role of government might be performed under a non-political administrative system? For example, is it possible that assessments might be levied (perhaps by deed and agreement instead of by taxes) and paid to a management corporation to care for the conventional community housekeeping needs such as streets, utilities, trash collections, etc. Might not such a separation of functions serve to improve the opportunities for efficient administration of the housekeeping services and concentrate public attention and public responsibility in the public service area where public, political choices could then be more sharply focused?
Suppose the community accepted a new and higher sense of responsibility in the fields of education, recreation, health, etc.; set budgets high enough to attract the finest teachers and professionals and maintain the best facilities and accepted relatively high real estate taxes in exchange for outstanding community performance - what might the over-all economics of such a program be? Could it not be more attractive to both industry and people than communities with a lower level of taxes, but a much lower level of public services?

11. What new forms of financial support or tenure might be developed in a new community to make possible adequate housing for people of all incomes in the community?

Personally, I hold some very unscientific conclusions to the effect that people grow best in small communities where the institutions which are the dominant forces in their lives are within the scale of their comprehension and within reach of their sense of responsibility and capacity to manage. I believe that a broader range of friendships and relationships occurs in a village or small town than in a city; that there is a greater sense of responsibility for one's neighbor and also a greater sense of support by one's fellow man in a small town than in a city; that self-reliance is promoted; that relationship to nature - to the out of doors - to the freer forms of recreation and human activity is encouraged in a smaller community.

I believe there should be a strong infusion of nature - natural nature - not sterilized and contrived nature - throughout a network of towns; that people should be able to fish and watch birds; find solitude; study nature in a natural environment; feel the spaces of nature - all as a part of his everyday life.

I believe that many of the most serious problems of our society flow from the fact that the city is out of scale with people; that it is too big for people to comprehend; to feel a part of; to feel responsible for; to feel important in. I believe this out-of-scaleness promotes loneliness, irresponsibility, superficial values.

My ideas, if correct, would lead to a different kind of plan than Ed Bacon's big concentrated city plan. I would visualize a series of small communities separated by topography, highways, public institutions, or greenbelts and united by a center that provided cultural, educational, recreational facilities for many (say, 10 to 20) small towns around it.

But am I right? What experiences are there in the United States to indicate that one environment or another contributes to healthy growth or to the erosion of human personality? What has happened to the personality, character, creativity of people
in Ed Bacon's Philadelphia when studied in comparison with the small towns and cities of Pennsylvania? What could we learn from experience about "The Good Environment" if we looked for answers and guide lines?

How can we plan for "The Good Environment" until we have first determined what we believe a good environment to be. By this I do not mean that we can find one right answer - that there would be one conclusion as to the good environment. But, rather, if we thoughtfully asked and answered the right questions, we would produce a variety of conclusions and a variety of plans directed at fulfilling those conclusions, and each plan would be purposeful and vital in shooting at its target.

To get the Urban Design Bus on the road toward "The Good Environment" three important changes in attitude must occur:

1. The architect, the planner, and the schools in which they are educated must change their attitudes toward urban design. They must become people-centered. Whatever freedom and personal delight self-expression may afford in the design of an individual building, it must take a back seat in the design of a community. The urban design process must be rooted first in a sense of community service. The architect and planner developing a community plan must find their excitement in discovering what works for people. Lacking training or experience themselves in the social sciences, they must seek help from others who are trained to give it. This "seeking" in itself could stimulate a revolution in Architecture and Planning.

The universities, seeing the community development task for what it really is, must feed into their students (and hopefully into their alumni) a new understanding of the task and of the responsibility of the designer in the urban design process. There has been too much emphasis on the role of the architect as an artist, measuring his success by the aesthetic quality of his creation -- and not enough on his role as a social servant.

I have many good friends in the design professions. I know their hearts to be good and their purpose noble, but they have been trained and they have worked in an environment which has placed high premium on sophisticated considerations of beauty, taste, "integrity" and little or no premium on the social purposes and implications of architecture and planning. And if you will forgive me for saying so, this environment has generated attitudes of arrogance and self-righteousness in matters of design among men who are humble, liberal, big-minded in their attitudes toward political or social problems not seemingly related to design. Our talented designers need to be hauled away from their myopic view of build-
ings as man-made works of art and lifted up to the bigger view of communities as gardens in which we are growing people and a civilization.

2. We must have more thoughtful research as to what works well and what works badly for people in American communities. We must comprehensively examine the problems we face in our urban society and study how those problems may be solved or relieved in the planning, development, and operation of our communities. Such research as has been conducted in the past, along these lines, has proceeded in a vacuum with little awareness that it might be relevant to future physical planning. The social scientist and urban designer must be linked together in a way we have not yet seen in America. The designer must be looking to the social scientists for knowledge and experience; but, perhaps more important, the social scientist must be conducting his work in an atmosphere of hard-headed reality, aware of the fact that his efforts will be put to work with direct influence on families who will live in the environment he has helped to create. This new sense of humility on the part of the architect and of imminent responsibility on the part of the social scientist would introduce creative new disciplines for each.

3. We need a new attitude among public officials -- a conviction that we can make our new communities into whatever we really want them to be; that we are not helpless victims before a flood of growth, but part of a living, growing, dynamic society which has the resources, if it only had the will, to control its destiny.

There is a bewildering attitude that prevails among us all -- professionals, citizens, public officials -- that we really can't handle the problem of the city and its growth. It's as if no one really expected to see a well-organized, efficient, livable, beautiful city. We talk about it, but the talk isn't real. We subconsciously discount in advance the do-ability of the plans we agree are essential. Where in the United States is any community saying: "We see our problems -- of the past and the future. We are making plans to deal with them -- full, complete, comprehensive, detailed plans. When they are completed eighteen months from now (and not eighteen years) we will lay out a program and a financial plan to execute our plans, and we will propose such new powers as may be necessary in local
government to see the job through."

And why not? The proof is all around us that people are ready and waiting to do the job that is necessary to make their communities work. In my conservative home town of Baltimore, the people have responded affirmatively to every big decision asked of them, despite the skepticism and foreboding of professionals, public officials, and miscellaneous "leaders."

"You can't declare the heart of the central business district an urban renewal area," they said. We did.

"You can't ask the property owners to put up the money for a plan that will demolish their property." They put up $150,000 for a plan that did just that.

"You will never get the ordinance to condemn the heart of the city through the City Council." It passed unanimously and without serious opposition.

When the Charles Center plan was announced, the overwhelming verdict among people "in the know" was "my grandchildren will never live to see it." It will be 80% completed within eight years from its announcement.

Last fall we drafted a bill to set up a metropolitan planning agency in the Baltimore area. To raise the agency's budget, the bill called for legislative action assessing each political subdivision in the metropolitan area its proportionate share of the agency's budget. "There's no use proposing such a financing plan. There's no precedent for it. It won't pass." We considered it indispensable to a sound planning agency. We proposed it. It passed and the agency is now in operation.

There are 100 stories like these for every local disappointment; and the disappointments, when analyzed, will show that in most cases the proposals were too little, too timid to attract the big-minded, community-wide support necessary to defeat the small-minded opposition.
What are we waiting for? I'll tell you what -- for plans and proposals big enough to solve our problems. People are drawn by logic and reason and by a deep yearning for order, beauty, and a good life to the plans that deal with real problems and offer real solutions. They will rise to the big and dramatically good plans -- they will yawn at the timid, the cautious, the unconvincing.

If we approach the planning and development of our metropolitan community with the conviction that we plan a rocket to the moon, we will see a new, healthy, beautiful America in this generation.

Here then is the challenge of The Good Environment -- not a call to raise huge new funds; nor to marshal new pools of manpower. It is simply to change our attitudes towards our community. To build:

a new sense of humility and social purpose in the urban designer;

a new sense of relevance and responsibility in the social scientist;

a new sense of conviction and courage in the public official.

To harness these new attitudes to the forces already in motion and to the resources that already exist among us will generate a new, creative thrust that will not only produce new communities but will release among the people in them the potential for the noblest civilization the world has ever known.