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## Practical and Economical Elements of Planning In Westchester

The following address by Robert E. Farley was made before the Westchester County Planning Federation.

"You are undoubtedly cherishing some hope that I may bring to you some practical suggestions, and this, I will endeavor to do, and I wish to take up at once what I regard as the chief facts of menace that confront Westchester County today. The developments that are springing up in increasing numbers disfigure and ruin some of our naturally beautiful tracts, and the developments that are dangerous to adjoining property and in sections in which they are located for they inevitably prevent developments of surrounding properties in an artistic manner, thus resulting in serious decrease in realty values. The fact of which is felt by the county as a whole. I am referring to the development, founded on the proposition that you should never give your own development a precedent, whose promoter has only one objective, quick sales and large profits. These have been for years the curse of certain sections of Long Island, Westchester, fortunately has been wiser than them from a comparative standpoint, but I would like to sound the siren of warning and urge the most prompt and serious consideration of this problem.

"Here, planning boards exist, they are often exacting, sometimes perhaps too exacting as to the layout of the streets and the subdivision into lots or plots. You will agree with me that it is possible to do this very fine layout on a map and at the same time get a wretched development. In other words, we have no assurance however good a map layout may be, that the development will not be a disgrace to the county.

"Now, what can be done? I desire to offer a solution that may surprise you; it is that we should speedily start here in Westchester a movement, the purpose of which shall be to require the approval by the municipality or their various members, of at least the exterior of all buildings to be erected in the county. We have our building codes, our sanitary codes, our fire regulations, our zoning ordinances, and our planning restrictions, but we have nothing new to prevent the blight that comes from ugly and offensive buildings. Under our building codes, we have absolute control of construction, but no check so far as artistic merit is concerned. The ugly house or building is far worse from a community standpoint than the poorly constructed one that is barred by any building code.

"Wants County to Lead  
"If it should appear that the construction here the necessary legislation, then I believe that the people generally would favor any necessary amendment to the constitution. Such a recommendation as I propose would also give us absolute control over the frightful menace of the hot dog stands that line so many of our beautiful highways, and rob us of an unlimited amount of pleasure that we should be permitted to enjoy. I believe that the time must and will come when municipalities generally will have such a regulation, and I would like to see Westchester lead the way, as Westchester has in many other respects.

"For have I asked me to speak to you, knowing that I am a developer, and I know, therefore, that you will not resent it if I talk to you plainly from the developer's standpoint. The subject of which I am speaking is a two sided one; that is it should be considered from the standpoint of 'what is practical and economical from the standpoint of the developer' as well as from the standpoint of the community, always considering, however, that the interests of the community are paramount and of first importance.

"The personnel of our planning boards should contain men of experience and training. They should be disinterested men, who have had some development experience, whose experience, fits him better for the position that the merchant, lawyer or doctor, who is deriving point is that if planning boards are to do their work with the greatest efficiency the personnel should be of the highest importance, and so far as possible, men of training and experience should be selected.

"Rules Too Rigid  
"All planning boards have certain definite rules, policies and ideas, and sometimes planning boards will undertake no circumstances arise from such rules, policies and ideas even when the conditions and circumstances justify some deviation. Some boards feel that dead-end streets are unthinkable; that a strip reserved for protection along the boundary line is impossible, and that a curved line is something to be viewed with suspicion. Let me say here that curved or winding roads are fast disappearing by the command of the speed god.

"So far as automobiles are concerned, we have reached a point now where the slow driver is regarded as the offender and he is more liable to be arrested on some of our highways than the man who is driving seventy-five miles an hour. Now, why do I talk about speed? I do so because I can see the inclination in planning to sacrifice the beautiful and artistic face of the automobile speed. In my twenty-five years of development work, I have always advocated the curve line instead of the straight line where conditions promoted or justified it. I do not mean the artifice of the automobile speed. In my twenty-five years of development work, I have always advocated the curve line instead of the straight line where conditions promoted or justified it. I do not mean the artifice of the automobile speed. In my twenty-five years of development work, I have always advocated the curve line instead of the straight line where conditions promoted or justified it. I do not mean the artifice of the automobile speed.

much; that is, don't let us bow down humbly at the altar of the great speed god.

"Planning Board should approach developers, at least those who have done something worthwhile to the community in their work, with sympathy not with suspicion or hostility and be willing and eager to co-operate; and I ask also that they keep in mind that the developer may be an expert with years of experience in training, a man who has had months in arriving at his plans and conclusions, while the decision of the planning board may be the result of a few minutes of superficial study and may, who knows, be wrong.

"Zoning, is of course, an essential element in any civic plan of realty improvement. It is sound in principle. How it works out in its sometimes haphazard, inconsistent and unintelligent application, is an entirely different matter and proportion. If it were not for the encroaching apartments, the hot dog and refreshment stands that disfigure our highways, the gas stations that have broken out like a rash all over the land, it is possible that zoning would be a better off today if there were no zoning ordinances in view of the great efficiency the personnel should be of the highest importance, and so far as possible, men of training and experience should be selected.

"I believe the most impractical and uneconomical feature of the application of zoning in Westchester is an unwise and excessive extension of business zones. This is true of White Plains my own home town. In White Plains residential districts have been illogically and unnecessarily destroyed. A large percentage of its entire area has been thrown into business zones, and the gridding tendency of these zones are spread wide in every direction. Recently a well posted student on zoning stated that White Plains already has more business property than it can use for the next one hundred years. My reply was that it had more property zones for business than it would ever need and this is my sincere conviction.

"When considering this needs of business in the future, we are not wise if we overlook the reliable change in business consolidation, centralization and efficiency, in what we might call the application of the inexorable law of the survival of the fittest. The day and the opportunity of the small keeper are fast disappearing, and his place is being absorbed by the great resources. The handwriting on the wall can be easily read. It reads, 'Fewer and Better Stores'—that is, fewer in proportion to population. Widespread and judgment will be served if in extending business zones this tendency of which we all must be conscious is given serious consideration.

"The waste and evils that come from an excess in extending business zones are clear and unmistakable.

"In the first place residential sections, after attractive and profitable, are destroyed or seriously injured, however manifest it may be later that there is an excess, land once placed in the business zone can rarely if ever be captured for private residences.

"County Planning Board  
"I have referred to the interest in having on Planning Boards men of experience, training or education. In the field in which they are acting, the proposition that I advance is that we speedily to create whatever legislation may be necessary, a Westchester County Planning Board that will have exclusive jurisdiction, subject to some proper and valid limitations, in all planning matters for the entire county, and its powers should also include all zoning regulations. The qualifications for members of this County Planning Board should be the same as for members of the local planning boards. We already have, however, a county program as to zoning matters of common interest, such as our Westchester County Park Commission, and our County Sewer Commission, and also our County Highway System. Why not extend this 'honny work to one of the greatest common problems' of the greatest common problems? However, to some communities the creation of a County Planning Board would cause some resistance, but every community would after thought and study concede that it is the only logical and efficient way of handling the matter and would give its consent and approval. Most men in Common Council, Village Boards, and other municipal bodies, would, if I feel they give of relief if this troublesome burden were lifted from their shoulders and transferred to the shoulders of experience and trained men representing the County Planning Board.

"Can there be any doubt of advantage that should and must come from it; that is, from a well executed and administered plan that would treat the county as a homogeneous whole, all sections of which every day are becoming more closely welded into one great community.

"This is a great trust that we have, this trust to make the best use possible of all the land in our beautiful and prosperous county, which we justly and proudly regard as the best in the world. The plans we make of our land, will have their influence, their results forever, and we should be willing to secure the best organizations that the mind can conceive, and the best talents that can be obtained to aid us in fulfilling our trust and in performing our duty; our duty not only to the present generation, but to the generations to come until the end of time."

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