



Planning for Permanence: the Speeches of J.C. Nichols
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City Planning:
National Association of Real Estate Board Study Course
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Have you ever reflected upon the power of the strategic geographical location of a city? As archaeologists excavate among the ruins of past civilizations, they frequently find city after city has risen, flourished and decayed upon the same site, showing the advantages of that site have recurred again and again through the centuries.

A town, starting from a favorable position at the headwaters of navigation; an easy pass through the mountains; at the center of rich agricultural lands, or among oil or other natural resources; or, even at the crossing of important highways; may live forever. Perhaps an energetic roadside blacksmith; a ferry landing; or even a small factory in a mere farmhouse, may have been the feeble beginning of an enduring and powerful city.

The Apian Way, laid out more than 2,000 years ago, is still a traveled highway. This is true of many of the roads in Egypt, China, and other ancient civilizations. So, in planning our streets we should take the greatest care to provide properly not only for our own subdivisions, but to consider their relation and their service to our communities as a whole for all time to come. Let us not repeat the mistakes of some of our early colonists who laid out their streets in accordance with cow paths. If you fail to make your streets properly connect with those of adjoining subdivisions, and create unnecessary jogs, you may through the years entail millions of dollars of traffic and policing costs to your community. We are dealing with permanent things.

A realtor should study the fundamental structure of his city. It is surprising to me how many men engaged in our profession have such little knowledge of the street and block plan of their cities. Every realtor should start with the knowledge that there is 640 acres in a section; a section is one mile square; and he should quickly know that one fourth of a mile is 1,320 feet; or that it will make two blocks 660 feet long figured to the center of the street; and that a mile will create eight such blocks figuring the long way of the block, and sixteen 330 feet blocks measured from the center of the street figured the short way of the block.

I am simply mentioning this as a certain standard of measurement. Of course, lot measurements and block lengths vary throughout our different cities. But, you should know just how many blocks, measured according to the standard in your city, you can get out of a mile. You should know the varying percent of a subdivision given up for streets.

You should know the relation of the cost of improving these streets to the cost of raw land and the sale price. You certainly should know that an acre is approximately 209 feet square, and that there are 43,560 square feet in an acre.

If according to the modern trend in residential subdivisions, you can increase these blocks to 1,000 feet in length, or a quarter of a mile, you should have certain formulas set up by which you would know how much land you save to sell in each acre, and what reduction you make thereby in total street improvements costs. You should learn to quickly calculate the number of square feet in lots with curving frontage, or diagonal sidelines. You should know the additional cost of paving, for instance, if a foot or more is added in width to your paved area, or even six inches is added to the width of your sidewalk. You should know what you save by eliminating the alley with its paving. You should know the proper width of parking areas between the curb and sidewalk that is necessary for the successful growing of trees in the parking. You should know how much parking space is necessary when a tree gets to be two feet or more in diameter and begins to bulge and raise your sidewalk and curb if your parking space is not ample.

You should study the proper radii to be put in the curb for your street intersections; the proper radii of a private driveway leading into the street, in order to avoid cars getting off the driveway and slashing up the grass areas. Thousands of dollars could have been saved in my properties in Kansas City if we had had such knowledge in the beginning.

The subdivider should study and know the strength of curb necessary to withstand the ever-increasing thrust of heavy transportation units on our streets. He should look ahead and lay his paving with increasing thickness to sustain these great loads.

In laying out lot widths and lot depths in residential areas he should visualize the changing conditions as to the use of the garden side of the home. The old front porch of a generation ago has moved around to the side of the house with the increasing traffic, and in many cities has made a complete half circle and now finds itself on the garden side of the house, thus giving more privacy and quiet to the family living in the home.

The abandonment of the stable and the ash pile at the rear of the lot has made the way clear for the garden type of development. Gradually the barn became a garage, and then as people realized the possibilities of it, the garage became a part of the house. This again freed the rear space for garden purposes.

As the garage was attached to the house, or a porch was added on the side, it created a need for greater lot widths. Many of us who moved up from twenty-five to forty foot lot widths, and then to fifty a few years ago, now find our lot widths inadequate. The home with its broad side facing the street is common today.

In our own development a few years ago we increased our average lot widths in our \$10,000 to \$12,000 homes to 75 feet, but with the recent changes that are taking place in house design, we find these houses appear crowded even on lots of this width, and we are now endeavoring to step up these widths to 80 or 85 feet. In many of our areas our minimum width is as great as 200 feet.

Of course in determining the best practical width of a lot you must consider the cost of your raw land, and the cost of your street improvements per running foot and your market. If this cost is too great you are precluded from building broad houses, and must shapen your house to fit the narrower lot. In any event, a good planner of residential

property has an eye constantly on the greatest amount of free space on all sides of his house.

With the constantly increasing traffic on even our quieter residential streets, there is a growing need for a greater setback so as to give more privacy and quiet to the people living in the home, and greater space for the growing of trees and shrubbery as a shield from street noises and traffic. The great geometrical increase of traffic in our cities has created a need for broad traffic ways, and boulevards upon which to concentrate heavy traffic, and particularly through traffic. This has brought about a need for greater study of street layouts in order to protect the more quiet residential type of streets; to attract and concentrate this heavy traffic at the point least injurious to your property; to by-pass a certain amount of traffic.

The advent of the automobile with its high speed endangering the lives of our children, and the public in general, has made it essential that we build certain streets with sharp curves, and steep grades, so as to discourage traffic and make the streets safer for the families living thereon. This has developed a popularity for dead end streets, and has even made it advisable in some instances to create arbitrary jogs at street intersections, or to install circles at street intersections to slow down or discourage traffic. Please understand, I am referring to strictly residential streets. Nothing is more costly to the handling of traffic in the city than jogs in important public traffic ways and business streets.

Lengthening of blocks also lessens the number of corner lots in our residential areas. A few years ago our corner lots sold at a premium, but with the great increase in traffic, making our streets busy thorough-fares, we find our corner lots more or less a drug and difficult to sell. Therefore, we desire to create as few of them as possible.

I have simply hastily mentioned a few of the changing conditions in the mode of life brought about principally by the rapid increase of traffic in our cities today, and which if we are a profession we should study and adapt our planning to fit. This is the sort of thing in which the city planners of our country have taken the lead and are doing such splendid planning and re-planning of our urban sections.

After all, cities are handmade, and whether they are physically good, or physically bad, is largely the responsibility of the realtor. Our realtors and our city planners should devote themselves to improving the living conditions in our cities; to the stabilizing of urban values, thereby increasing the industrial and commercial value of our cities. Fortunately many of us are living in smaller communities of two or three hundred thousand population, or less, where the skeleton, or frame of our cities is still plastic, and has not been hardened beyond all repair, and still offers the opportunity for redirecting the growth along more efficient lines.

Most American cities have immense areas of vacant land not increasing in value as rapidly as the carrying charges; blighted and abandoned residential sections representing but a mere fraction of their former value; shifting retail business centers, creating immense loss in value in the abandoned sections and rendering unstable the highest valued real estate in the city; good residential sections being ruined by the encroachment of other property uses, highly injurious to residential neighborhoods; industrial property hampered in expansion because of encroachment of residential

property, thereby making it extremely costly to later acquire lands for industrial expansion; growing and costly traffic congestion in the centralized business retail sections, wholesale districts, light and heavy manufacturing sections.

We are told by traffic engineers that the traffic increases by the square of the population and when your city becomes four times as large as it is today, your traffic problem will be at least sixteen times as great. This ratio is perhaps being even further accelerated by the increased size and width of the transportation units on the streets and the marvelous increase in the number of automobiles and trucks. Even business property values can be injured by too much vehicular.

In nearly all American cities we find improperly placed school houses, public markets, fire stations, police stations and other utility stations, because of the failure to be guided by proper studies and surveys, and growth forecast, in order to so place these utilities today to serve the needs of tomorrow; water mains, sewers, gas lines and other utilities are frequently of improper size on account of the failure to properly look ahead as to future needs; we find certain blocks in the general street layout are either too long or too short and certain streets too wide or too narrow, to meet the conditions that have arisen as the city has grown in size; main traffic arteries extending not in the main lanes of travel, but in the direction of the lesser amount of trade movement.

We find without a farseeing City Plan great difficulties and expense in providing later on for the proper amount of playground and park areas so important to the moral, social, and physical life of any community. Belated acquirement of such land levies a great tax on future generations.

Generally suburban belts of property immediately beyond the municipal limits are developed with practically no control. Just beyond the city we frequently find little business centers in the making; perhaps only a filling station in the beginning; a hot dog stand is added; a night club; a drive-in vegetable market; a garage, making altogether a disorderly group of buildings, and quickly becoming an ugly blot on the whole countryside. These little centers are generally laid out with no regard to ample street widths for future growth, and no relation to the street plan of the nearby community. Yet some day some of these little business centers will become very large ones with no reasonable adaptation to the modern needs of business centers. Certainly the city planner or realtor should look ahead in the beginning of such new business centers.

Research laboratories are needed in our profession. Realology should become an established science.

The city-to-farm movement so popular a few years ago is lessening. There will surely be a farm-to-city movement take its place. The rapidly decreasing percent of our population now living on farms, the increasing growth of our urban communities all foretell this, and it deserves our study and thought.

All of these conditions and many others, not only lay a heavy toll on every movement of trade within our growing cities, and not only create conditions menacing to the health of its people, but render real estate values unstable (the foundation of all wealth); make industry and commerce uncertain, and create a lack of confidence in the

permanency of the location of your business location or home and cause you to have a lack of patriotic and civic pride for the city itself.

Cities have changed more in the last fifty years than they did in the previous two thousand years. Revolutionary changes in communication between community centers in the last twenty years have been almost miraculous and the city that fails to take inventory of the conditions under which it lives and transacts its business, and fails to take account of its growing needs and fore-plans for the future, will not only suffer in its competition for supremacy in trade and fail to appeal to families from throughout its trade territory to come and live in the city, but it will also fail to hold its own citizens seeking the most desirable place to transact their business and rear their families.

Fortunately, most of our American cities have awakened from their self-complacency and the lethargy of previous decades, and from one end of the country to the other, “City Planning” has taken on a wonderful meaning. We have ceased to regard city planning as a visionary dream of a reformer or the extravagant embellishment or ornamentation of our cities. We have come to realize that city planning means “The City Practical,” and the planning or re-planning of cities is now a definite and precise science.

Efficient city planning involves vitally every industry and every individual of our cities. It is the insistent demand of business and human instinct for the use of reason, fairness and foresight in the planning of the organic structure of a city – according to a carefully prepared plan – on exactly the same principles as govern any commercial undertaking, the building of any house, the laying out of any farm or the intelligent execution of any human activity.

A city – a civic machine – is dependent upon the efficient performance of its every part, as is the body, the human machine, dependent upon the workings and relations of its parts.

An intelligent city plan thinks impartially for all parts of a city at the same time, and does not forget the greater needs of tomorrow in the press of today. It recognizes the economy of preventive measures over corrective costs. It is simply good, practical hard sense.

Today almost every city of any considerable size is spending immense sums in correcting the evils of its past city building. Fire risks, health standards, traffic needs, economic business hazards, protection of home surroundings, decent living conditions, stability of property values and many other phases of city life are crying out for the better planning of our cities, to meet both their present and their future needs.

A good city plan will stir the imagination of its people and record a diagram for future growth so logical and so sound and so meritorious that its force will recur again and again at every step of the city’s structure.

First in importance in the various phases of city planning comes the zoning of the city. Zoning is merely the application of common sense and fairness in governing the use of private property; it is the natural advancement of civilization in placing the public welfare above individual and selfish rights; it assures to every section of a city the best conditions possible for its particular uses with due regard to surrounding districts; it recognizes the need of differentiation in the use of city property; it recognizes the

different needs pertaining to property of varying uses; it protects an owner in the enjoyment of his property rights, from unreasonable injury by the owner of adjoining property taking unfair advantage of his neighborhood.

Yes, with it all, zoning treats all men alike. It sets up reasonable regulations of heights, use, and area of buildings; it catalogs all the uses of property within a city and with reason and foresight groups uses of harmonious kinds; it protects industry as well as the home; it provides for future expansion of all types of property uses.

It creates a definite, yet elastic plan to guide every phase of city building, the placing of every utility, the establishment of every carline, school, church, fire station, subway, bridge, viaduct, post office, water main, traffic way, boulevard, park, playground, approach to rural highways, public buildings, freight terminal, freight distribution station, railroad and interurban station, art museum, public library and every other feature of the physical side of the city.

Zoning checks the haphazard, topsy-turvy, selfishly directed growth of the city, according to the whim or desire of every individual owner and establishes a higher standard of general benefit and public welfare, from which eventually real estate as a whole and the citizenship in general procure a greater gain; it recognizes the economic hazard attending every property value as a result of conflicting and uncongenial surroundings. It actually stabilizes and increases general values by a 'live and let live' practice, rather than the 'dog eat dog' custom of the past.

By height and area regulations, and the establishment of "use zones" fire risks are reduced, traffic congestions relieved, the health of the occupants of the buildings safeguarded and the character and use of particular sections made permanent and stable.

It has been said upon reliable authority that a loss exceeding a billion dollars annually has been entailed in our American cities as a result of the evils attending the lack of proper zoning and planning. This loss may be the result of encroachment of a public garage, undertaking establishment, flat, laundry or factory adjoining your home; or may be the deterioration of a prosperous retail section by encroachment of factories and other enterprises undesirable in such districts; or it may be an encroachment into industrial areas of residential subdivisions or perhaps the result of ill-placed public buildings and utilities soon to be left abandoned or outgrown and of little value in a part of the city where the character of that particular section has entirely changed.

This zoning or districting system – this organic development of a city – puts the various inter-related parts to their highest and most specialized use, in the same general way in which any business institution would organize and lay out the physical arrangement of its plant, and the handling of its raw and finished material, so that every part would nourish and stimulate every other part. The past planless and wasteful procedure of our large cities is just about as sensible as building a house and providing for the piano in the kitchen, the cook stove in the drawing room and the entrance of your guests through the coal chute or the basement window.

Closing attending zoning, and in fact necessarily considered simultaneously with the establishment of zones, is the street and block layout of the city – the skeleton of the city. The blind conformance to a checkerboard and rigid standardized plan of street

planning, or a standardized width of street and length of block, is perhaps the most senseless act and greatest curse in the entire making of the cities of the United States. It is wasteful, extravagant, inelastic and an absolute failure to fulfill the real purpose of a street plan. You may as well try to make one suit of clothes fit all men.

Street areas occupy from 20% to 40% of the land within the boundary of an American city. Blind conformance by many cities to the same uniform street plan adopted when the city was small, has gone on through generations failing to meet the changing and growing conditions of the city. Frequently the broader streets of easier grade do not run in the direction of the city's greatest traffic. Frequently, streets are just as wide in the part of the city having a hundred times or more traffic as in that part of the city in which only a few vehicles a day occupy the streets. By your city ordinances, a sidewalk or paving width, or the street width itself may be required to be as great on a minor street as upon a semi-major street. Perhaps one or two broad streets in the original plan of the city has lulled its citizens into a sense of civic smugness and caused the city to utterly fail to provide highways of sufficient width to serve beyond the needs of the present day.

That city which is not providing for the proper handling of traffic increasing in a geometrical ratio particularly in its central areas, will surely suffer much decentralization of its downtown districts.

City planning calls for the study of traffic needs, based upon the changes in traffic counts, analysis of the objective points of traffic, and the changing sources of traffic. It studies the street layout and street functions just as carefully as the sewer or water engineer studies the size and needs of sewer or water mains. Diversion of unessential traffic from certain streets, the creation of circumferential or diagonal highways, frequently miles beyond the city limits, the opening up of short cut roads, the separation of traffic, provision of pedestrian-ways, are all as important as the widening of the streets themselves. But city planning at all times does not think in terms of the needs of today, and should wisely calculate and estimate growth of the city over future periods.

City planning does not necessarily entail great costs on the present generation, but sees to it that the present generation does not do the things that bring colossal costs in the next decade. The mere establishing of a building line on a street destined ultimately to be a broad highway, may be of no cost to the property owner of today, and yet save millions in future widening that street in caring for the traffic needs of the future. All of this, by saying to the property owner of today, "You must not extend your building nearer than a certain number of feet to the street line." So long as this rule is made universal on that street, any loss of lot depth is more than compensated by the confidence in the future of the street and the security with which improvements may be erected.

City planning, guided by a zoning map, designs its streets in relation to the fundamental sources of the traffic. It recognizes the different needs of the highways serving the wholesale or factory district or approaching the railway stations, or connecting with the permanent of important, Federal, State, and rural highways. It recognizes future population centers in and around the city. It recognizes the increasing number of vehicles approaching downtown centers, public parks, and other common

objective points. It recognizes the encouragement of business traffic by easy grades reducing the cost in every trade movement.

On the other hand, it appreciates that residential character may be encouraged and made fairly permanent on certain minor streets. These purely residence streets are, and should, of course, be well related to the main boulevards, business streets and traffic ways. The plan of these residence streets should generally eliminate alleys, follow the contour of the land, be fitted to the varying size of lots and blocks, affording sites of interesting shapes, and permitting individual landscape treatment. They should preserve and reveal vistas, creating street pictures instead of the stiff monotony of the usual rows of houses and garages.

Closed street views, so interesting in a medieval town, should be frequent, and wherever possible, architectural accent should be given the street by building fitting homes on the axis of its best approach.

These residential streets should not extend for a long distance in the direction of the prevailing winds.

Triangular parkways, at appropriate street intersections, add interest to the street scene as well as serve as traffic guards and dust shields.

Building lines should not necessarily be uniform, but should be varied according to site and view; blocks should be treated as a unit and whenever possible harmonious group planning and collective building should be carried out. Local residence streets should have a cozy, domestic character, quiet, self-contained, gardenlike, affording air and sunshine with ample free space to every home – a residential triumph of our modern cities.

Such local residence streets, free of poles and overhead wires, should have economy, picturesque ness and convenience, and create a homelike atmosphere, exclude industrial encroachment, fix permanently the residential character of the place, and establish security of value in our greatest institution, the American home.

Most of these considerations, (and to a still greater degree), apply to the workingmen's home. There is no greater crime in our city planning than the forcing of streets of unnecessary width and improvements of high costs, and lots of unused depths, into the workingmen's districts. It has been estimated that the cost of workingmen's home is increased from 10 to 15% by this blind conformance to standardized lots and blocks and standardized street width and street improvements.

The greatest municipal investment of cities today is in street widths and street improvements. Unnecessary street widths and street improvements in certain sections involve a colossal loss in every large city, while the lack of ample width of street and street improvements in other sections of the city, involve a handicap to trade; of still far greater cost.

City planning coordinates all existing functions in the most efficient way, according to a generally accepted plan, sufficiently elastic to adjust itself to the changing needs of the city. The parks, the boulevards, the playgrounds, become a matter of definite calculation in proportion to the growth and movement of the population, and may be located in relation to various parts of the city devoted to permanently zoned uses. In

this manner, playgrounds and parks should continue to be convenient to the neighborhoods for which they were intended and boulevards designed for permanent service and future expansion.

In a city plan, street railways, freight terminals, passenger stations, interurban stations, fire and police stations are not placed according to the manipulation by political influence; the selfish activity of real estate operators; the influence of vested property interests in certain sections of the city, but are scientifically placed according to the sections evidenced by the scientific city plan, which generally clearly indicates the most logical and most serviceable location for such public or semi-public utilities and institutions to not only best serve the city of today, but to meet the needs as indicated by the city plan, in the future successive periods of the city's growth.

Increasing needs in the water supply, or many other necessities of a city's population, become more evident when forecast upon a plan for your city's future growth. The enclosing of an obnoxious open sewer or undesirable stream may be foreseen before encroaching improvements make the project a costly one. Surveys show the costs of raw food supply and the distribution of food, compared with other cities, may become an important guide in freight distribution and the placing of public markets.

Population density counts made in the study of zoning maps or traffic studies should bring before the people its present housing conditions and point the need of proper future provision.

Industrial surveys employed in city planning studies should point out the industries which should properly succeed in that city and call attention to those which do not logically belong to that community. Industrial studies should bring to light the comparative costs of distribution and the conduct of industry in your city, as compared with competing cities.

City planning looks ahead and provides for the future development of the city – it looks beyond the present city limits and foresees the demands of the still greater city. In fact, the poorly planned outlying new business centers to which I have already referred, and the heterogeneous, inharmonious masses of beautiful country estates and modest suburban homes mixed with factories and outlying stores, truck gardens, quarries, rubbish heaps, slaughter houses and other tag ends making up the usual 'suburban belt just beyond the limits of most of our cities, present one of the most crying needs for fore-planning. And yet, plats and restrictions beyond our city limits are frequently permitted with no regard whatever for the adjoining city as a whole, or the future needs of the areas beyond.

The harmonious grouping of a number of public buildings gives an effect of dignity, beauty, and civic adornment far grater than the effect of the sum of the single units of such buildings scattered throughout the city. European cities have demonstrated so well the value of the proper placing of public buildings, the proper approach, and proper open setting. The civic center well planned becomes a rallying place in public life; crystallizes a devoted love, affection, and patriotism for your city of incomparable value, not only in city building, but in civic spirit and general morale of the community.

How would you regard the merchant who offered you his wares in as dirty, unsightly condition as we today offer much of our merchandise – the ordinary vacant business property offered for sale is clean, well kept and presents a desirable appearance – or the vacant residential lot free of rubbish, trash, or tall-grown weeds? What is more disgusting than to look from the office window of a tall business building, across the disorderly, littered roofs of adjoining buildings? What is more uninviting than to look up and down a business street cluttered with a heterogeneous display of projecting signs of all sizes and all lengths and colors, stealing the street area which does not belong to the adjoining properties, and endangering the lives of pedestrians; each owner, in his eagerness to gain advertising value over his neighbors, practically nullifying the value of all the signs?

Is there not a responsibility of the realtor to make our merchandise present an attractive appearance in the city? What would we think of merchants whose show windows were as unsightly as many of our vacant lots?

Do you try to make the furnishings and decorations of your streets, i.e., lamp posts, fire plugs, trash receivers, poles, wires, street signs, etc., as pleasing and attractive as possible? Or, are they of riotous, clashing colors, conflicting designs, and poorly placed, thereby messing up the front scene in every direction?

Has your city a pleasing approach by river, air, highway, or railroad? Or, is this approach often the worst your city has to offer?

Does ugliness confront the residents themselves of your city – conducive to crime, immorality, and a daily uninspired grind of human existence? Or, does good order of things and beauty enlighten and charm your visitor, inspire and push forward your citizen, to greater acts and greater deeds and a greater spirit of city building?

Are there unsanitary conditions in our merchandise? Have we foul smelling sewers, tolerated from long custom rather than from actual need? Do we permit sewer outlets to endanger our water supply, or render unhealthy large areas of otherwise valuable property?

Have we provided the proper amount and distribution of parks, the lungs of our cities, school, and public playgrounds, so essential in city building? A place to play, to relax, to enjoy good fellowship, to make good citizens, and to enjoy this beautiful world in which God has placed us?

Do you, in your city, permit property values to be stolen by unnecessary encroachment of property of injurious uses? Do you permit the absolute necessity of God-given light and air and sunshine to be stolen from the small workman's cottage, or from the scant windows of the great apartment or tenement?

Do you permit alley houses? Do you permit the disregard of building lines and proper free space for each family? Do you provide streets and open spaces, the lungs of your city to give ample air for your people to breathe? May I repeat that an open square around a public building, a handsome structure placed on the axis of a broad approaching street, stately monument, a beautiful fountain, or colonnade gives real distinction and civic magnetism to your own hometown.

Are we building cities and towns monotonously alike throughout America? Or, are we accenting their particular features and preserving their objects of natural beauty and historical interest, giving them that peculiar personal appeal and lure of the orderly and lovely city which is so great a factor in its growth for commercial supremacy?

Have you created in your city impressive architecture, masterful highways, wide residential areas of appeal and charm, which demand the attention and hold the respect of your visitors, imprints an indelible picture in his memory, bringing him to you again and again? Have you created a civic order and beauty that has grappled the hearts and love of your citizenry in a manner that they will never, for long, leave the city they call their own?

Are you properly safeguarding and perpetuating the character of your residential subdivision by proper building restrictions? Are you giving proper assurance to your clients that their property values will be maintained in your subdivisions?

Are you creating a residential atmosphere, (and preserving residential morale, as important as army morale in time of war,) to which they are entitled and for which they place their faith in you when they locate their families in your property? Are you providing maintenance associations in your residential subdivisions to properly care for community needs, provide economical community service that will continue after your property is sold, and your organization has left it? Are you creating in the beginning the community organization that will see that restrictions are enforced, that the property suffers no future neglect from civic or municipal authorities and public utilities and develop and maintain a community spirit, so important in fostering a permanent respect and traditional love for one's home and neighborhood and so fundamental to creating a civic pride for one's city and a real patriotism, for one's nation?

Great responsibilities and opportunities in city building are all of these, and yet, what group of men in civic life should challenge this responsibility more than the American Real Estate Boards?

The good city plan constantly endeavors to establish the individuality of a city; preserve its historic memories; its surrounding points of interest; its traditions and the pride of its citizens; catch as its peculiar spirit, preserve its distinctive flavor and accent its particular situation.

I say again civic ugliness and disorder breed contempt not only for the thing itself, but for the conditions which permit it. Civic beauty has a direct relation to city politics. Every human being is influenced by his surroundings. There is a gigantic ugliness and almost a contempt for the city itself, which comes from a haphazardly developed city, where property uses run riot with no regard to public good; where cities are built without a future plan and strewn from end to end with the wrecks caused by the shifting of the various parts of the city.

Abandoned industrial areas frequently become public dumps and neglected eyesores. The boasting of an occasional unregulated skyscraper, or, for example, one of the seven busiest corners in the world in a downtown business section, is not a sane excuse for unsightly river fronts, ramshackle buildings, abandoned districts, or a loss of 15 to 20 minutes a day in traveling time to every working man or woman in the city.

The spectacular raising of a million dollars by popular subscription for some great civic or charitable purpose is not a mark of city greatness sufficient to justify or excuse a poor health standard or high cost of raw food supply or an unnecessary toll upon the traffic of the city.

Greater than all is the well-ordered, beautiful, efficient city, in which every section has its definite part to perform, with the greatest benefits to itself and the least injury to surrounding districts. Greater than all, is that city so designed that every generation is freed to look beyond and carry forward the great growth of its city and the accomplishments and achievements of its generations, rather than to be overburdened with enormous taxation to correct the evils of city building of the generations just passed.

And greater than all, is the increased development of civic conscience and social solidarity, and intelligent, scientific civic diagnosis that takes stock of your city as you find it today, calculates the growing needs and opportunities of your city through the future and boldly and determinedly sets about to so plan and diagram the future of your city as to inspire from year to year desire for the greatest service in the hearts of the living, loving souls who consecrate the lives of their families to the city they have chosen and devote their careers to the commercial, professional, civic, and public welfare opportunities afforded in the city they call their own.

We are not scientific; we are not professional, unless we constantly endeavor to improve the product of our hands; unless we develop to the highest specialized uses every part of the city.

May I repeat? We should create and stabilize values and not merely transfer and sell values. If our city lacks personality and charm; if our city fails to appeal equally to the man of commerce and the man of culture seeking the most desirable place for his business and for his family – if our city fails to hold its citizens after their fortunes are acquired – if factories pass us by and locate in other communities; then the realtors, the planners of the city should admit failure in rising to their opportunities.

The planned city becomes the City Practical – the City Orderly – the City of Economy – the City of Efficiency – the City of Health – the City of Wise Plan – yes, the City of Culture – the City of Beauty, for which we need offer no apology to any man; and this city will withstand the onslaught of keen competition in its race for commercial supremacy, handing down a heritage to generations to come of unconquerable spirit; imperishable human values; undying influence for better living among its citizens; and record achievements such as placed Athens and Rome in control of the destiny of much of the world.

The position of America throughout the civilized world is becoming more and more dominated; more and more influenced by the success and achievement of our cities and towns. Will our present form of government succeed? Will it perpetuate itself and endure as no other Republic in history has endured? My answer is – look to our success or failure in the planning and building of our cities!

The J.C. Nichols Company Records (KC106) – Speech JCN037

Arguably Jesse Clyde Nichols (1880-1950) was the single most influential individual to the development of metropolitan Kansas City. Moreover his work, ideas, and philosophy of city planning and development had far-reaching impact nationally – so much so that the Urban Land Institute has established the J.C. Nichols Prize for Visionary Urban Development to recognize a person or a person representing an institution whose career demonstrates a commitment to the highest standards of responsible development.

Nichols' objective was to “develop whole residential neighborhoods that would attract an element of people who desired a better way of life, a nicer place to live and would be willing to work in order to keep it better.” The Company under Nichols and his son, Miller Nichols (1911-), undertook such ventures as rental housing, industrial parks, hotels, and shopping centers. Perhaps the most widely recognized Nichols Company developments are the Country Club District and the Country Club Plaza Shopping Center, reportedly the first shopping area in the United States planned to serve those arriving by automobile rather than trolley car.

The J.C. Nichols Company Records (KC106) contains both personal and business files concerning J.C. Nichols' private and business life. Included are personal correspondence, family related material, and speeches and articles written by him. Business and financial files pertain to actions of the Company, including information about different developments and the securing of art objects; and printed materials produced by and about the Company.