

Planning Needed To Control Change

By Ralph E. Tharp Jr.

Urban planning's future success depends greatly on planning commission members' accepting responsibility to manage change. Change often evolves to the detriment of our well-being when change is not planned and prepared for properly. The propensity for voluntary citizen participation in governmental affairs has been a symbol of 20th-century local government.

What is St. Louis' legacy of this quality enhancing community activity? And what is its future?

Pierre Laclede's French village, and the subsequent pioneer terminus, had begun to deal with its movement into the burgeoning industrial era. Union spanning railroads, Mississippi River steamboats, iron works, chemical and drug manufacturers, breweries and dry goods wholesalers serviced the South and Midwest to the Rockies from St. Louis. Immigrants looked to St. Louis as their platform for the great American experiment.

Nearby forest and prairielands were increasingly used for garden developments and as residential enclaves offering escape from the teeming inner city.

This Twainesque rivertown was soon isolated from its heritage by industrialization of its main facade. Abusing the river, by using it primarily as an industrial corridor, barred neighborhood access to its shores.

Early planning was more a cartographic discipline than a vision for a community's future. It

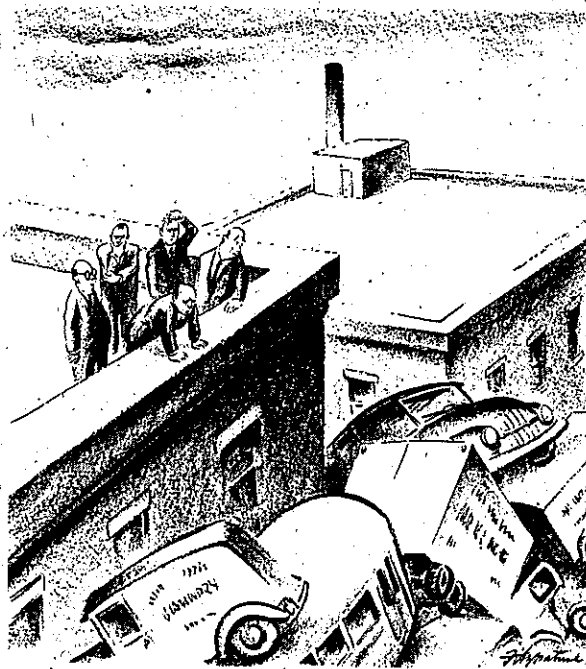
alluded to geometric intersection of streets and alleys, allowed for neighborhood linkages to transportation and utilities, and provided location of speculative land. The more sophisticated tools of community planning would not be introduced for many years.

It took a young civic-minded citizen to bring St. Louis into urban planning. Dwight F. Davis, chairman of the newly established St. Louis Plan Commission of 1916, presented a new tradition to renovate, develop and improve this chaotic and congested metropolis.

At this century's commencement, Da-

vis was, with Holcombe Ward, the reigning national doubles tennis champion. While at Harvard University in 1900, he unceremoniously presented a tennis challenge cup for future competition. This event would become today's Davis Cup International Tennis tournament.

But tennis, as Arthur Ashe noted, is "played for selfish reasons." Dwight Davis wanted to do more. He dedicated his position in the community to the betterment of that community, and the quality of the resultant society.



Fitzpatrick/Post-Dispatch, Jan. 7, 1953

'We Ought To Do Something About It'

In June 1903, Davis retired from tennis to devote himself to a private St. Louis organization working to provide playgrounds for city children. Working with Charlotte Rumbold, he worked to improve living conditions in St. Louis' slums. Davis was a progressive part of a national movement.

In St. Louis, progressives advocated reforms in city government and improvements in housing, sanitation and education for the poor.

The appointment of the first planning commission in the United States took

place in 1907, at Hartford, Conn. That same year, Davis proposed that St. Louis establish its first city plan. His involvement with the Civic League and his placement on the St. Louis plan commission provided Davis with a platform for urban reform.

These early planning commissions intended to insulate city planning from political and administrative influences. Knowledgeable citizens were to be drawn into public service by appointment to planning commissions. They were to formulate long-range comprehensive plans for guiding the growth and development of their communities. St. Louis' planning commission worked to reshape the community with several innovative planning efforts, which were to some extent, implemented during the following 75 years.

The challenge to plan is an important heritage of this region. Approximately 1,000 planning commission members live in the St. Louis area. When one considers the few professional planners (60 professional planners work for local governments, in addition to another 30 professional planning consultants) the burden for planning and plan implementation must assuredly fall on planning commissions. They are the citizens to lead the charge for responsible change and guidance for the success of our communities.

Dwight Davis' challenge for tennis excellence resulted in an international competition, the Davis Cup; his St. Louis vision and

planning commission charge brought about a challenge to improve and develop this St. Louis community for society's better position. Today, with extended urban problems, and subdued fiscal resolutions, we must again embrace Davis' challenge to plan.

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