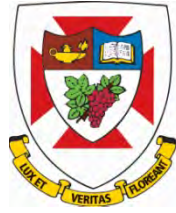


**Address by Lloyd Axworthy, Director, Institute
of Urban Studies, University of Winnipeg to the
Canadian Association of Real Estate Boards,
Wednesday, October 22, 1969, 2:00 p.m.**

by Lloyd Axworthy
1969

The Institute of Urban Studies





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ADDRESS BY LLOYD AXWORTHY, DIRECTOR, INSTITUTE OF URBAN STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF WINNIPEG TO THE CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF REAL ESTATE BOARDS, WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 22, 1969, 2:00 P.M.

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The Institute of Urban Studies is an independent research arm of the University of Winnipeg. Since 1969, the IUS has been both an academic and an applied research centre, committed to examining urban development issues in a broad, non-partisan manner. The Institute examines inner city, environmental, Aboriginal and community development issues. In addition to its ongoing involvement in research, IUS brings in visiting scholars, hosts workshops, seminars and conferences, and acts in partnership with other organizations in the community to effect positive change.

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ADDRESS

By

Lloyd Axworthy

Director

Institute of Urban Studies

University of Winnipeg

TO

THE CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF REAL ESTATE BOARDS

Wednesday, October 22, 1969

2.00 p.m.

One year ago, housing in Canada was treated to an intensive survey and assessment by the Hellyer Task Force. Among its major conclusions was that this country was ill-prepared and ill-equipped to provide the quantity and quality of housing Canadians will require in the next decade.

That assessment still holds true. The deficiencies in policy, program, organization and commitment that were apparent then remain today. We have neither a relevant national housing policy nor the effective means of carrying it out if there were one.

This should be the most important consideration in any discussion of "new housing forms" or "future housing" in Canada. There are many proposals for dramatic new breakthroughs in design, layout, or construction techniques - awareness of the social requirements. There are a number of interesting theories for systems building, modular techniques, multiple use of land. Good ideas for new physical arrangements and accommodation are not what we lack.

But, there is a long jump between ideas and their execution. Proposals for new housing forms, or expressions of deeper sociological concern do not automatically mean that new forms of housing, built with greater care for the individual or family will blossom forth across the land.

The real question is how do you translate the projected innovation or reform into reality? How do you make that critical leap from idea to application? The examination of reform in housing - of building real low cost houses for the poor, of building new cities, of revitalizing old cities, of coping with urbanization, of developing humane, decent living environments for people must go beyond examination of new technologies, new designs, new construction and techniques, or new social and economic knowledge.

The critical factor is implementation. Is the system by which we build, distribute and manage living accommodation in Canada capable of using new knowledge and skills? The ability to develop new and better forms of housing

for Canadians depends as much or more on the capacity for innovation by those governments and private enterprises that produce housing in Canada, as it does on new theories, ideas or proposals.

This is the location of the fatal flaw in our housing program. This is where the bottleneck exists in developing an up to date contemporary response to the housing problem. Little progress can be made in developing new and inventive forms of accommodation until there is a major overhaul in the governmental and private apparatus that controls, finances and constructs housing in Canada. You cannot carry significant highpowered reforms down a rocky, rutted, backwoods road.

Let me enumerate some of the difficulties in the present system that inhibits innovation:

(1) A system of government divided between various jurisdictions, often working in competition rather than co-operation, more concerned with defending prerogatives and power of their respective government than they are with solving the problems. There is little examination on rational grounds as to which level of government - municipal, regional, provincial or federal, is best suited for handling which part of the problem. Instead, reliance is placed on arguments of tradition, convention, ancestral rights, or just plain political muscle as justification for holding on or expanding present housing activities. The result, a system distinguished by its illogic, lack of co-ordination, and inefficiency.

(2) In the single levels of government, there is a further breakdown of responsibilities and fragmentation of function. In the Federal Government alone, CMHC, Department of Finance, Department of Transport, Department of Regional Expansion, Bureau of Standards in Industry and Commerce, Public Works, Crown Assets Corporation all make decisions that have a significant effect on housing and urban development. Yet, there is little co-ordination, decisions are basically made in unrelated fashion, resulting in programs working at cross purposes, with no accepted set of objectives or priorities.

(3) A virtual forest of rules, regulations, codes, bylaws, and zoning ordinances which may have originally been designed for public protection, but result in a stifling of imagination and creativity, heavy additional costs, and policies of exclusion and segregation in our urban areas.

(4) A primitive system for housing analysis and planning. It is critical that there be basic, hard data on the housing market, so that government and private enterprise can effectively plan investments, development projects and use of manpower. There needs to be a constant flow of up to date information on market changes, housing needs, shortages and over supply, prices and cost, combined with the analytical methods and forecasting techniques, to adjust investment choices, financial policies, and future requirements. Good management depends upon sophisticated methods of planning and decision, as any large corporation making cars or lightbulbs will testify. But, we treat housing as if it were a cornerstore operation. You cannot really begin developing new forms of housing until you more accurately know how many, for whom, at what price, in which region.

(5) There is a starvation in research or development. Aside from the efforts of CMHC and the CURR there is really no concerted attempt to fund and support experimentation and exploration. Private industry appears to be contented with tried and true formulas. This means missed opportunities for developing new work by spinning off new products. For example, the business of rehabilitation of existing homes is virtually unexplored. It could be a prime business opportunity, if effective, cheap means of fixing older homes through industrialized methods, components forms, electrical circuitry could be tested and researched. Many talk about the possibilities, few experiments are run. Private industry can hardly be blamed, however, if they judge the usefulness of research by what is presently being produced in our universities and by other "thinkers". The academic world appears to have forgotten that housing and urban redevelopment are real immediate problems requiring applied, practical problem-solving research. Instead, the universities produce volumes of journal articles or abstract treatises highlighting the urban world of the year 2000, instead of looking at the difficulty in rehabilitating the downtown areas adjacent to their own location.

The contributions of the professional "thinkers" in the urban area are too often based on the conventional wisdoms of thirty years ago, or borrowed from some British, Swedish or American source. Universities have an essential role in sponsoring the kind of experimental exploration that can help government and industry develop new methods suited to contemporary Canadian housing needs and urban issues, but the academic response has been well described by an American sociologist who says "They lecture on navigation while the ship is going down".

This approach is one that we are attempting to correct in the new experimental Institute of Urban Studies at the University of Winnipeg. We are hoping to capitalize on the real advantage of the university-based operation - its freedom to begin research projects directly relevant to those issues concerned with how people can better live in an urban world, unencumbered by the restrictions imposed on government planning and research bodies. But, aiming our sights at specific issues of downtown development, low cost housing, taxation, the forms of local government, the places where urban people can enjoy their leisure.

(6) Finally, one can't forget the timidity and conservatism in the financial system that moves our housing market. We have a tax system that encourages slums, we have a mortgage system that neither attracts enough money or invests it where it is needed, and we have investment policies, both public and private, that shun the experimental or unorthodox. There is little development capital available for new entrepreneurship in our cities, and little adventure in the heart of the moneylender, public or private. Let me illustrate. Those in the private housing market have long been advocates of ownership as the best means of securing accommodation. Recently, this has been a concept under attack by the sociologists and European trained housing experts. Instead of reacting by explaining different ways of ownership, trying variations on condominium for low income families, letting imagination and financial skill find new answers, the businessmen have passively submitted or resorted to old fashioned ideological exhortations. Here was a chance to examine a basic ingredient of the housing question, develop new answers, and make constructive proposals, but the challenge

as yet, has not been taken up.

Canadians will not make any serious breakthroughs in the development of a more effective, modern, useful housing market until there is a breakthrough in the log jam of competing confused programs, creaky, overly rigid bureaucracies, antiquated rules, lack of exploration incentives, and the absence of any compelling spirit of adventure to probe the new or unknown.

We urgently need a strategy of innovation. There needs to be a well laid plan for creation of policies, institutions and practices that encourages and utilizes a whole range of new techniques and technologies for providing better homes at lower cost to more Canadians. That is the crucial test now facing responsible men in government, industry and the universities.

The initiation of this strategy should be with government. It has the greatest effect on housing, and can have the most significant leavening influence for reform.

A NATIONAL POLICY

Its first priority is a rational, co-ordinated policy for housing which integrates federal, provincial, local activities, and assigns direct responsibility according to functional measures, not abstract legalisms. The federal government's role is particularly important. It must exercise its right to set national priorities, as only it can do, and create a useful system of analysis, statistical collection, and investment projection so that housing capital goes where it is needed, not just where the pressure of requests comes from. There is no constitutional reason inhibiting a stronger federal role, just political reasons, and they can be changed. For example, it is essential that a workable national program of public land development be established. It is the basis for cutting housing costs, and insuring sane urban planning. A co-operative mechanism between governments can be worked out to insure an easy simple flow of federal loans

to municipalities or similar agencies to acquire land, service it, then lease or sell to private developers as fits the demand. Such a program works only if it is fit into a national scale, and avoids the present ad hoc approach. To argue for continuing the federal role of passive banker, is to deny Canadians the strength of the senior government in grappling with one of the more serious issues.

EXPERIMENTATION

The role of the federal government could be particularly effective as an initiator of experimentation: (1) Federal land in cities could be used to develop different forms of housing techniques - experiment with ground level high density housing, see if industrialized housing really cuts costs. Experimental conversion of existing federal buildings, warehouses, barracks could explore the possibilities of multiple use land techniques - while at the same time provide needed housing and facilities. (2) Perhaps the federal government should stipulate that 15% of funds for subsidized housing must be channelled into experimental forms of housing. It could encourage different private groups, universities, business associations, unions and churches to try different physical arrangements and different financing methods of rental or ownership to assist low income families. (3) This means that many of the strict rules and standards of CMHC need to be relaxed. One of the restrictions to building low cost housing is the requirement to meet excessively high building standards which add only to cost, not to basic safety or protection. (4) In other words, the federal government should see itself more in the position of an initiator of the new and creative, and base its actions on flexibility and performance, not on rules and manuals. Presently, the NHA is an exclusionary document that sets precise requirements for the kind of low cost housing, with defined interest rates and conditions to meet. The Minister for housing should have greater freedom of decision to support projects that vary from the conventional mold. Perhaps a separate capital development fund, that could be used to finance a series of low interest loans or grants for various kinds of new housing developments would be useful. (5) This kind of assistance is particularly important as a source out of which a network of small housing development enterprises can grow, many of them taking the form of neighbourhood housing corporations operated and managed

by neighbourhood residents. One of the reasons that we make so little progress in the field of low cost housing is because it has been an activity of government bureaucracies. They do the planning, the building and often the management. This inhibits the kind of flexibility and inventiveness that could grow out of having many smaller corporations attuned to particular needs, trying many different ways to meet the problem. I believe Jane Jacobs in her new book, highlights the advantages in growth and new enterprise that results from having a decentralized system of production.

What I am pleading for here is that government should become an effective manager of larger priorities and sponsor of development funds, but that private enterprise, universities, non-profit groups, or resident corporations be given the freedom and incentive to undertake the projects and explore the alternatives. This decentralization may in fact be the prelude to the emergence of forms of neighbourhood government, where local concerns are dealt with by public bodies based on small enough constituencies that private citizens have free and open access to where decisions are made about their basic needs.

In any event, the thesis I am advocating is that the present system must be basically altered so that the maximum in inventiveness can be encouraged. Martin Meyerson of the State University of Buffalo expressed the same thought this way; "The new urban reform ought to focus on process rather than huge public programs; on the humanity of the person served rather than on the service to be rendered. It should aim to create an environment in which change can take place and should try public remedies on a well-founded experimental basis, rather than through massive across-the-nation, all-or-nothing types of programs.

There is one final question, however, and that is if such reform or change is possible? If the experience of the Task Force and the later negotiations over new legislation is any test, then the difficulty of significant reforms in this field, or in any field of domestic, economic, social policy must be faced. The way we make decisions is suited more for patchwork amendments and shaded compromise than it is for making bold, fresh advances. There are a hundred veto groups - a well connected network of private interests, government officials, well-entrenched experts and competing governments which make it

an arduous task to make clearcut reforms. If the Task Force report, for example, had simply advocated doing more of the same thing - spending more money to perpetuate present mistakes, it probably would have enjoyed a wider degree of acceptance. The fact that it challenged a number of pet notions and conventional wisdoms meant an instant barrage of attack. Reform can only occur when there is a readiness by enough people to discard obsolescence and search for better ways.

A sign that this is happening is seen in the discontent and indignation of a growing number of average Canadians. Whether it be the angry residents of public housing, the young couple who cannot afford to buy, or the miner who can't bring his family north because there is no room, they share dissatisfaction, with the way things now work, and a demand that things change. That feeling is shared by a number of businessmen, government officials, and professional architects who find that their own urges to test, explore and advance are also doomed to frustration.

There is emerging a force for reform. The question is who will lead it, where will it go? There needs to be a direction, a set of constructive proposals which go beyond the superficialities of the political party platform, or the annual conference resolutions, or the pieties of the after dinner speaker.

The Task Force was a beginning and should not be forgotten. It opened the whole housing system to re-examination, and challenged many of the myths. But a series of steps should follow. Each group in this country, concerned about the lack of progress in housing should shape its own proposals for change, test out its propositions, sponsor its own experiments, then use every ounce of its power to compel the present institutions to change their ways.

Perhaps the first priority of this meeting should not be a discussion of new housing forms, but rather the art of radical new politics.