Chapter II

LAND USES AND ZONING

The character of a city is determined by (1) the physical conditions of its site and (2) by the manner in which the land is used. It is difficult and expensive to change fixed physical conditions, but the use of land can be directed through zoning.

The individual's power to do as he pleases with his land has been a major factor in the past growth of Des Moines and in bringing about unsatisfactory conditions. Residential, commercial and industrial buildings have been intermingled to the detriment of each, as well as to the detriment of the entire city. Little or no consideration has been given to the amount of land that would be needed for each use.

There is a limit beyond which the abandonment of old residential districts and the development of new outlying areas can go. This limit is the tax burden, already high. There is a definite limit to the population of Des Moines. This population can absorb only so much land area. To develop and maintain facilities in a larger area is absurd and if continued will lead to such a high tax rate that Des Moines will lose population, commercial enterprises, and industries to cities developed on a more sensible basis. The deliberate neglect and abandonment of property in the older areas and the encouragement of suburban property development (frequently with the aid of a direct public subsidy) is indicative of a haphazard urban land policy which is exactly the opposite from what it should be.

Although it will be difficult, steps must be taken to reverse this trend. A well-balanced urban structure must be developed. Zoning regulations should be adopted which are related to future needs. The welfare of the entire city must take precedence over the profit of the individual. The scale of the city must be a major consideration and care exercised that no part of the plan be too large or too small for the future population. And, finally, the coordinated relationships between the different uses, commerce, industry and residence must be carefully adjusted.

EXISTING LAND USES

State legislation under which Des Moines is given the power to zone clearly indicates that such regulations must give careful consideration to existing property uses, to the adaptability of various sections to proposed uses and to the probable future needs of the city. It is therefore necessary to have a clear picture of existing development and of past trends.

It is possible to arrive at a very close estimate of future land use needs by an analysis of the present relation between land use areas and population. For example, in the average city, 100 persons will use about two-tenths of an acre for commercial development. Ratios between units of population and the major land use may vary between cities, but remain relatively constant in the same city over a period of time. By applying such ratios to the estimated future population, close estimates of the areas needed in the future for various uses can be obtained.

To obtain this necessary information a land use survey was made of all property in the city.

General Conditions of Land Uses

Examination of the land use plan of the city reveals the following:

First, the city development is widely scattered. The majority of the blocks contain vacant lots. The only compactly developed areas are in the north central and west portions of the city, parts of the Highland Park area, and in the immediate vicinity of the State Capitol. Development is widely scattered in the northeast, northwest and southern portions of the city. In the area south of the Raccoon and Des Moines Rivers there are only seven blocks without a vacant lot.

Second, it is obvious that the city has been developed primarily for land speculation with no consideration of the general welfare. There has been no regard for the scale of the city, and only 24 per cent of the city is not subdivided. Promoters have created speculative subdivisions throughout the area and there is one vacant lot for every two occupied lots in the city.

Third, there is unwarranted scattering of apartments, stores, and small industries throughout the older areas of the city. There is not a single block within the city completely developed with apartments. The majority of these old areas will always be used for single family residences, and the existence of these more intensive uses has destroyed confidence in these neighborhoods and contributed to their present blighted condition. The more outlying residential neighborhoods are relatively free from these harmful uses.
Fourth, the marked effect that topography has had on the urban development is apparent from the land use map. The majority of the urban development is on the higher ground. The lower areas are largely vacant.

Fifth, there is a large amount of railroad property in the city and the majority of this railroad frontage is undeveloped. This has caused unwarranted scattering of industry in parts of the city. The railroads are generally found in the low areas and adversely affect residential development only in the east central section of the city.

**Areas Occupied by the Various Uses**

The existing land use areas are shown in Table Number 4. A large proportion of the city, 47.98 per cent, is vacant. The largest urban use is single family residences which occupy almost one-fifth of the area of the city. One-eighth of the city's area is occupied by streets and one-thirteenth for public and semi-public uses. Parks and railroads occupy almost the same proportion of the city's area. Commerce, apartments, and heavy industries each occupy but little more than one one hundredth of the city area, while duplexes occupy one three-hundredth and light industry little more than one two-hundredth.

Percentages of the total developed area devoted to the various uses are generally similar to those found in other cities. This is especially true of the single-family residence areas and the areas occupied by commerce, heavy industry, railroads and parks. A larger percentage of the total developed area is used for public and semi-public uses and multiple dwellings, and a smaller percentage for duplexes and light industry than is found in the average of the 22 cities.

**Analysis of Each Use**

The following is a brief analysis of the major land uses:

1. **Single-Family Residences.** Single-family residences occupy fourteen times as much land as duplexes and multiple dwellings combined and four times as much land as industry and railroads. At the time of the survey 32,354 homes were found in the city of which 243 were vacant.

   Much of the city is occupied almost exclusively by single-family homes. The area south of the two rivers is devoted almost entirely to this type of residence.

   In addition to the unwarranted scattering of these homes many of them are located in areas that never should be developed for this purpose. With all the available land in Des Moines, such areas as MacDonell Acres, Vandalia Acres, and Valley Gardens are unnecessary and their development merely reflects their mistaken location and speculative conception. The low areas of Des Moines need not be developed for single-family homes. Ample better areas are available.

   Many single-family homes have been located in industrial districts. Residential development can never be of good character in such areas due to the uncertainty as to length of tenure and the certainty of poor home environment.

   The single-family residences of the city should be controlled in their location and should be given the maximum protection when located correctly.

2. **Two-Family Dwellings.** Duplexes are a more intensive use of urban land than single-family dwellings. Their location in single-family districts has a deleterious effect upon neighborhood values. In general, the duplexes are now located near the center of the city in the older areas. No single area is occupied exclusively by this use, the greatest concentration being immediately east of the State Capitol.

   There are only 668 duplexes in Des Moines even though the present regulations permit them to locate any place within the city limits. It should not be difficult to group these developments and exclude them from the single-family neighborhoods.

3. **Multiple Dwellings.** Apartments and boarding houses occupy but one per cent of the total city area. There are 848 apartment buildings in the city and 1322 boarding houses and other types of multiple dwellings. Of the apartment buildings 442 or 52 per cent are remodeled single-family residences. 114 of these 848 buildings are located above stores.

   **Location.** Multiple dwellings are widely scattered in Des Moines. The great influence the major transportation routes have had on the location of this use can be seen on the land use map.

   The natural tendency of multiple dwellings is to force themselves into single-family residence districts and use the light, air and environment already there, without providing any of their own. They act as parasites on neighborhood values and are often a major cause of blight. They locate as far away from the central business districts as possible. In Des Moines, instead of finding the central
Table Number 4

AREAS OCCUPIED BY EXISTING LAND USES

Des Moines, Iowa

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>USE</th>
<th>Per Cent of Total City Area</th>
<th>Per Cent of Total Developed Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Area in Acres</td>
<td>Per Cent in Des Moines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single-Family Residence</td>
<td>7,035.09</td>
<td>19.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two-Family Residence</td>
<td>111.64</td>
<td>0.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Dwelling</td>
<td>377.09</td>
<td>1.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commerce</td>
<td>415.93</td>
<td>1.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light Industry</td>
<td>228.86</td>
<td>0.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heavy Industry</td>
<td>418.16</td>
<td>1.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Railroads</td>
<td>948.80</td>
<td>2.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public and Semi-Public</td>
<td>2,807.33</td>
<td>7.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parks</td>
<td>1,003.70</td>
<td>2.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Streets</td>
<td>4,450.10</td>
<td>12.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Developed Area</td>
<td>17,796.70</td>
<td>50.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vacant Area</td>
<td>17,049.27</td>
<td>47.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>River Area</td>
<td>684.46</td>
<td>1.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total City Area</td>
<td>35,530.43</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**This includes 1800 acres of water works property. If this were deducted, the Public and Semi-Public area would amount to 6.78% of the total developed area.
business district surrounded with a well developed apartment area, as would seem reasonable, the
apartments are found scattered throughout all the older areas and far out into the newer sections of
the city.

For every apartment that is built in an outlying neighborhood there is a ramshackle house or a
vacant lot in a more centrally located older area. There is no reason why much of the older areas of
the city cannot be developed with apartments and a fine urban environment provided within walking
distance of the central business district. To restrict the location of apartments to these areas would
do much to stop the spread of blighted areas and to assist in revitalizing the older sections of the city.

**Intensity of Apartment Development.** The studies of population density made in Chapter 1 re-
vealed that no section of the city need have a density of more than 30 persons per net acre, which
would permit a lot area of 5,000 square feet per family.

The existing lot area per family in apartment developments is shown in Table Number 5. Almost
one-third of the present apartment buildings provide a lot area per family of less than 1000 square
feet. Of the families living in apartments 49.13 per cent are provided with a lot area per family of
less than 1000 square feet. This not only makes undesirable living conditions for the apartment dwell-
ers because of lack of open space, but injures the city as a whole. There are certain areas in the city
that are best suited for apartments. The proportion of the city’s population that will live in apartments
is limited. If these structures continue to develop with a scattered location and high density only a
small area will be absorbed and the surrounding residences will be irreparably damaged. Apartments
should be encouraged to spread uniformly over a larger area of land at a reasonable density.

The only reason for an intensive development of any multiple dwelling is high land value, usually
speculative in its basis. Municipalities pass no legislation to repay a citizen for losses encountered in
the stock market. Des Moines should not allow the city structure to be undermined to enable indi-
vidual citizens to recover losses in the land market by over intensive uses.

4. **Population in the Three Types of Residential Land Use.** Table Number 6 shows data regard-
ing the population accommodated in the various residential areas. It is estimated that the existing city
population is 153,000 persons.

The area occupied by residences is 7,524.72 acres, or 21.18 per cent of the city area. Single-family
homes account for 93.50 per cent of the residential area and contain 70.50 per cent of the population.
Duplexes occupy 1.48 per cent of the residential area and accommodate 2.79 per cent of the popu-
lation. Multiple dwellings house 16 per cent of the population on but 5 per cent of the residential
area. The population in the single-family residential areas has an average density of 17.32 persons per
acre, in the two-family areas an average density of 38.30 persons per acre, and in the multiple dwelling
development an average density of 64.95 persons per net acre.

With the population housed at a spacious density on but 7,525 acres and with 17,048 acres of vacant
land in the city, the anticipated population increase of 46 per cent can be easily accommodated.

5. **Lot Area Per Family.** Detailed studies were made and plans prepared showing the lot area
per family for each piece of property used for residential purposes. All of the lots in a neighborhood
should be of a similar size. The development of a number of small homes on small lots in the midst
of large residences on large lots has a depreciating effect upon property values.

The lot areas are much larger in Des Moines than in the average city. Such a condition provides
for a desirable spacious development, which ensures better living conditions and assists in maintaining
these conditions over a long period of time. One of the major reasons for abandonment and depre-
ciation of older areas is that people wish to leave congestion and go to areas where larger lots and more
open space can be obtained.

The lot area per family becomes larger as the outskirts of the city are approached. Larger areas in
the northeast, northwest, east and south portions of the city are developed with lots of 15,000 square
feet or more. The vast majority of the city is developed with lots of 6,000 or more square feet.

There are but few large neighborhoods in the city, however, where any great degree of uniform-
ity of lot size occurs. A few developments with small lot area per family are found in practically
every neighborhood. In some instances this is due to the intrusion of a duplex or apartment. In others
it is due to the subdivision of larger lots. The latter condition is evident especially on corner lots
in the older areas of the city and in the Highland Park district. In certain sparsely settled areas in
the eastern portion of the city small lot areas are found.

Des Moines is paying a high price for a scattered and decentralized city development. The citi-
zens are not getting their money’s worth from this cost. The small areas of congestion scattered
through the residential areas are unnecessary and are ruining the spacious character that is being paid
for. Small lots and subdivision of large lots are not necessary in Des Moines and should be stopped
in any comprehensive land use plan. The character of existing neighborhoods must be protected and
Table Number 5

ANALYSIS OF EXISTING MULTIPLE DWELLINGS

Des Moines, Iowa

(Note: This includes apartments above stores)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lot Area per Family</th>
<th>Number of Buildings</th>
<th>% Total</th>
<th>Number of Living Units</th>
<th>% Total</th>
<th>Total Area Occupied</th>
<th>% Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3,000 and over</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>8.61</td>
<td>318</td>
<td>5.19</td>
<td>29.39</td>
<td>17.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2,000 to 2,999</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>20.75</td>
<td>801</td>
<td>13.08</td>
<td>42.97</td>
<td>25.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,500 to 1,999</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>17.33</td>
<td>733</td>
<td>11.97</td>
<td>29.11</td>
<td>16.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,000 to 1,499</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>21.59</td>
<td>1,266</td>
<td>20.66</td>
<td>34.36</td>
<td>20.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>600 to 999</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>17.33</td>
<td>1,176</td>
<td>19.20</td>
<td>21.78</td>
<td>12.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>400 to 599</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>7.55</td>
<td>674</td>
<td>11.00</td>
<td>7.58</td>
<td>4.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 399</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>6.84</td>
<td>1,158</td>
<td>18.90</td>
<td>6.57</td>
<td>3.83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

848 100.00 6,126 100.00 171.76 100.00

Average Number of Units per Building 7.2.

Number of Blocks Containing Multiple Dwellings 436.

Average Number per Block 6.0.
Table Number 6

DATA REGARDING POPULATION AND LIVING UNITS

Des Moines, Iowa

Estimate of Existing Population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Births</th>
<th>Deaths</th>
<th>Excess Births Over Deaths</th>
<th>Population Increase</th>
<th>Ratio: Natural Increase to Population Increase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1920-1925</td>
<td>14,585</td>
<td>7,733</td>
<td>6,852</td>
<td>8,633</td>
<td>1.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925-1930</td>
<td>14,593</td>
<td>8,263</td>
<td>6,329</td>
<td>7,458</td>
<td>1.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930-1939</td>
<td>25,550</td>
<td>15,941</td>
<td>9,609 (B)</td>
<td>10,570**</td>
<td>1.10* (A)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1930 Population: 142,559
Increase 1930-1939: 10,570
1939 Population: 153,029

1939 Population by Types of Dwellings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Dwelling</th>
<th>Number of Occupied Living Units</th>
<th>Estimated Population per Unit</th>
<th>Total Population in Dwelling Type</th>
<th>% of City Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single-Family Residence</td>
<td>32,111</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>121,880</td>
<td>79.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two-Family Residence</td>
<td>1,334</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>4,276</td>
<td>2.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apartments</td>
<td>5,880</td>
<td>2.37</td>
<td>13,942</td>
<td>9.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boarding Houses</td>
<td>1,331</td>
<td>8.00</td>
<td>10,552</td>
<td>6.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotels and Institutions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2,379</td>
<td>1.55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Estimated
**Item "A" times Item "B"
new neighborhoods developed with a uniform lot area per family if an economic population pattern is to be achieved and preserved.

The lot area per family map reveals the chaotic development of the older blighted areas. In some blocks in these neighborhoods the lot area per family ranges from less than 500 square feet to more than 15,000 square feet per family. A more uniform development must be encouraged.

6. Commerce. Table Number 7 contains information regarding commercial property. The proportion of the total developed area used for this purpose is very similar to that found in other cities. Due to small blocks in the business district and the number of large commercial areas on highways, the frontage used in Des Moines is greater than in the average city. Only a small percentage of the city's area is occupied by this use and consequently no large area need be zoned for commercial purposes in the future.

Only 37.45 per cent of the commercial frontage is found in the central business district (includes both east and west sides of river.) The remainder of this frontage is found on major streets and scattered throughout the residential areas. The wide scattering of the city population invites decentralization of commercial property. Commercial zoning in the outskirts should be restricted to provision for neighborhood needs only. These areas should be located at the intersections of major streets, rather than scattered at random. Properly concentrated neighborhood shopping areas afford many conveniences and adversely affect a minimum amount of residential property.

It is impossible for all major streets to ever be absorbed by commercial uses. In the major street plan for Des Moines (see Chapter 4) there are 155.07 miles of major streets, one-fourth of the total street mileage. If all the major street frontage was used for commerce, one-fourth of the city area would be occupied. (Commerce absorbs only 1.17 per cent of the city area today).

Table Number 8 reveals that only 15 per cent of the frontage on the seventeen heaviest traveled thoroughfares in the city is used for commerce and 42.57 per cent of the frontage is used for residence. These streets are all paved and usually have water and sewer; 30 per cent of the frontage on them is vacant, an unsound condition. Much frontage on major streets will have to be used for residential purposes. These streets should be designed with that in mind. Ample width, deep setbacks and proper street tree planting will do much to overcome adverse effect of traffic on the homes.

14.15 per cent of the commercial development is scattered through the residential districts. These scattered developments are usually small isolated stores. They do untold harm to the surrounding residences, and should gradually be eliminated.

7. Railroads and Industry. Railroads and industry occupy 8.97 per cent of the total developed area of the city.

Heavy industry is found in three general locations: south of the central business district, around the packing plant in the east bottoms and in the vicinity of Sheridan and Second Avenue. With the exception of the district just south of Highland Park, heavy industry does not harm the residence areas.

The majority of the light industries adjoin the business district. The light industries found to the north of the business district create an obstacle to the development of residential areas immediately adjoining the central shopping area. Because of the serious question as to the future extent of the industrial use, property owners in the vicinity have allowed residences to depreciate. This has aided in creating the blighted and shoddy development that surrounds the downtown area.

Many industries are located south of Court Avenue on both sides of the river. These areas are ideal industrial districts. The business district and the rivers provide good buffers between them and any residential development.

There is an unwarranted amount of scattered industry in Des Moines. There is so much railroad frontage that all of it can never be utilized for industrial purposes. Industries should be concentrated in those locations where they will least affect the residential development. Ample property of this character is available in Des Moines.

8. Public and Semi-Public Property and Parks. Public and semi-public property and parks occupy more than one-fifth of the total developed area of Des Moines. This includes the Water Works property, the State Fair Grounds, cemeteries, and schools and churches. As is common in other cities, this use is found scattered throughout the city.

9. Height of Buildings. There are only a small number of structures in Des Moines over three stories in height. Nearly all of these are located within or around the central business district. Even in this area there are but few structures over six stories in height. There is no reason why exceptionally high buildings should be permitted within the business district. It would be much more desirable to encourage a horizontal rather than a vertical growth, since this would enable more property to be absorbed by the higher value uses.
Table Number 7

EXISTING COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Des Moines, Iowa

1. Area occupied by commercial use .......................... 415.93 acres
   Percentage of total developed area ......................... 2.34

2. Number of units .............................................. 3,160
   Vacant units .................................................. 155

3. Total linear feet of frontage ................................ 157,575

4. Average frontage per store ................................... 49.8 feet

5. Linear feet commercial frontage in central business district .... 57,306
   Frontage in business district per 100 persons ............... 37.45
   Average 22 cities ............................................ 28.00

6. Linear feet commercial frontage outside business district ........ 100,269
   Frontage outside business district per 100 persons .......... 65.53 feet
   Per cent total frontage outside business district ........... 63.63
   Average of 22 cities ........................................ 35.7

7. Average commercial frontage of entire city per 100 persons ...... 102.98 feet
   Average in 22 cities ......................................... 63.7 feet

Note: Existing population estimated at 153,000.
Table Number 8

SUMMARY OF THE USES OF STREET FRONTAGE
ON CERTAIN MAJOR STREETS

Des Moines, Iowa

(Includes Cottage Grove, 19th to 42nd; Crocker, Keo to 19th; Euclid and Douglas; Easton; Forest; 6th to Beaver; East 14th Street; Grand Avenue; Harding Road; Hubbell; Indianola; Ingersoll; Keosauqua Way; S. W. 9th; 2nd Avenue; 6th Avenue; University.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>USE</th>
<th>Frontage in Feet</th>
<th>Per Cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vacant</td>
<td>151,144</td>
<td>29.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single-Family Residence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two-Family Residence</td>
<td>184,806</td>
<td>36.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Dwelling</td>
<td>29,264</td>
<td>5.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commerce</td>
<td>76,429</td>
<td>15.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light Industry</td>
<td>12,902</td>
<td>2.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heavy Industry</td>
<td>5,181</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public and Semi-Public</td>
<td>35,240</td>
<td>6.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parks</td>
<td>13,812</td>
<td>2.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>508,778</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Outside the central business district there are very few buildings of three or more stories. With the exception of such public and semi-public developments as hospitals and schools the only apparent concentration is in the area to the east of Woodland Cemetery and on West Grand Avenue.

Summary of Major Land Use Problems

Preceding studies reveal the following major land use problems in Des Moines:

1. **The Abnormal Spread of the City Population.** The location of population within the city is the major planning problem of Des Moines. The city's corporate area is large. The present population is badly scattered. Des Moines must have a more compact population pattern in the future if the city is to avoid severe financial difficulties (from the high cost of providing these facilities to a scattered population) or decadence (from the many substandard neighborhoods that develop when these facilities are not provided.)

This thin spreading of population affects all municipal costs—including schools and fire and police protection, as well as the necessary public utilities. For example, an elementary school can serve only a limited area (one-half mile radius from the school). If that area contains less than 200 school children, the annual per pupil cost is $120. However, if this same area contains 300 or more children the school cost is reduced by 50 per cent. A more compact urban development would result in a saving of more than 10 per cent in elementary school costs alone. Similar savings would be effected throughout the other governmental agencies.

The development of compact residential neighborhoods is the first major problem to be solved by a comprehensive land use and zoning plan.

2. **The Scale of the City.** If the area of the zoning districts is properly related to future land use requirements, many widespread benefits can be obtained. One of the major land use problems is that the less restricted districts (commercial, industrial, and apartments) of the present ordinance are much larger than the existing and future requirements for such uses.

3. **Blighted Areas.** One major cause of the spread and the scattering of the population is the deterioration of environmental values in the older residential districts. These old areas must be given maximum protection in any land use plan. They will always have to be used for residence and the first step toward improvement of the area is the assurance, by the municipality, that it will protect proper residual developments.

4. **Intermingling of Uses.** When intensive uses, such as commerce, industry and apartments, are widely scattered as they are in Des Moines, a large number of homes are adversely affected. The commercial, industrial, and apartment developments should each be concentrated in zones of their own. It is to the advantage of the intensive uses to be developed in this manner, and this is the only way in which the residential areas can obtain necessary protection.

**FUTURE LAND USE REQUIREMENTS**

**Amount of Land Needed to Serve the Future Population**

There will probably be about 225,000 persons living in Des Moines in the future. Since the ratio between population and land area will remain fairly constant, close estimates can be made of the amount of land needed to serve this future population with the various types of land uses.

These estimates are shown in Table Number 9. They are based on the area now required to serve one hundred persons. As can be seen, these areas vary considerably from the average of 22 cities. In Des Moines 3.4 more acres of urban land are required to serve 100 persons than in the average city. However, such uses as streets, parks, railroads, and heavy industry are very similar to the average of 22 cities. Des Moines uses 40 per cent more land for single-family residence, three times as much for multiple dwellings, 33 per cent more for commerce, and three times as much for public and semi-public uses for 100 persons as does the average city. Less area is used by duplexes and by light industries for 100 persons than is found in the average city.

8700 acres of new urban development will be needed to accommodate the expected increase in population. Even then there will be 8,300 acres of land within the present city limits that will be vacant or will be used for agricultural purposes. There are now 21,994 vacant lots within the city capable of absorbing, at four persons per family, some 88,000 persons, or 16,000 more than the expected increase. Thirty-four per cent of these lots are provided with water, 29 per cent provided with sewer, and 28 per cent are on paved streets. Of course, many of these lots will be used for other purposes and many of them are so situated that they should never be used for residence purposes, but it is obvious that only a small number of new subdivisions are needed in the future.

These estimates of future land use needs provide an excellent basis for determining the approximate size of the districts that should be included in the revised zoning ordinance. They also form a standard for judging the present ordinance.
Table Number 9

EXISTING AND PROBABLE FUTURE LAND USE AREAS

Des Moines, Iowa

(Note: Existing Population estimated at 153,000; Future Population at 225,000.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>USE</th>
<th>Existing Acres per 100 Persons</th>
<th>Average of 22 Cities</th>
<th>Existing Area—Acres</th>
<th>Amount Needed for Future Population</th>
<th>Amount to be Absorbed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single-Family Residence</td>
<td>4.60</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>7,035</td>
<td>10,350</td>
<td>3,315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two-Family Residence</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Dwelling</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>377</td>
<td>563</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commerce</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>416</td>
<td>608</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light Industry</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>338</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heavy Industry</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>418</td>
<td>608</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Railroads</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>949</td>
<td>949*</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public and Semi-Public.</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>2,807</td>
<td>4,140</td>
<td>1,333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parks</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>1,004</td>
<td>2,250**</td>
<td>1,246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Streets</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>4,450</td>
<td>6,548</td>
<td>2,098</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total City Area</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>17,784</strong></td>
<td><strong>26,512</strong></td>
<td><strong>8,715</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Existing Area—Will probably become smaller rather than larger. See Chapter 5.

**See Chapter 7.
THE EXISTING ZONING ORDINANCE

Is It in Scale?

One of the major defects in the present ordinance is that it is out of scale with the probable future needs of the city. Areas of the existing use districts were computed and divided by the existing acres per 100 persons now used for purposes permitted in that district. It was found that the residence district contained some 16,400 acres, enough for the city of Memphis or Indianapolis. The multiple dwelling district contains almost 5,000 acres, enough area to accommodate the apartment buildings in a city of nearly 2,000,000 persons. There is enough area zoned for commerce to supply Minneapolis. The 1784 acres of light industrial zoning would serve Los Angeles and the 6,100 acres of heavy industry would serve Philadelphia. It is therefore obvious that these areas are too large for a city of 225,000 persons.

Is It Adjusted to Existing Conditions?

An analysis was made of the existing uses in the present use districts. The results of this analysis are shown in Table Number 10 and in graphic form on Plate Number 16.

There is ten times as much land used for single-family homes as is used for multiple dwellings in the multiple dwelling district. There is almost four times as much land used for single-family homes as is used for commercial purposes in the commercial district. There is more commercial property in the light industrial district than in the commercial district; and there is more land used for commerce than for light industry in the light industrial district. There is more area used for residence in the heavy industrial zone than is used for heavy industry. In general, then, the existing districts have little relation to the existing conditions.

Table Number 11 shows the relation between land use and zoning on certain major streets. When the present ordinance was drawn it was believed that the majority of major street frontage would be absorbed for commerce and industry. The facts reveal the fallacy of that assumption. For example, along Hubbell Boulevard only 16.49 per cent of the frontage is used for commerce, while 70 per cent is so zoned. Nineteen times as much frontage is zoned for light industry as is now used on this street.

Blighted Areas

The present ordinance encourages the further deterioration of the older areas of the city. Table Number 12 contains an analysis of certain neighborhoods in the older sections of the city and conclusively shows the lack of protection afforded residential development in these areas by the present zoning. In the area between Sixth Avenue and the river and from University Avenue to Keosauqua Way, for example, there is no residential zoning, but 71 per cent of this area is used for residential purposes.

These older areas have been zoned for intensive uses for many years, but only a few such uses have developed in them. Instead the residences have suffered because of lack of assurance as to the future of the neighborhood. This situation must be remedied at the earliest opportunity.

The present ordinance is also out of character with existing conditions by requiring only 4,000 square feet of lot area per family in the most restricted residence district. The vast majority of the lots in the city contain more than 6,000 square feet, and this would certainly be a desirable minimum in Des Moines. The present ordinance also allows of duplexes to locate anywhere within the city limits. Fortunately, little advantage has been taken of this provision.

Considerable progress has been made in the technique of preparing zoning regulations since 1925, when the present ordinance was prepared. More districts are used in the present ordinances and more protection given to all classes of property. The present ordinance should be revised to take advantage of these new trends, to be more in scale with future needs, to be more in harmony with the city development, and to offer greater protection to the existing and future city.

THE PROPOSED ORDINANCE

The proposed zoning regulations include revisions in the text of the ordinance and in the boundaries of the various districts.

Both the existing development and the probable needs of the future population have been considered in the proposed revisions. The areas allotted to the different uses are quite liberal for the estimated future population. The proposed regulations should bring about a land use pattern that provides ample area for each use, yet protects property values.

An analysis of the proposed zoning ordinance is shown in Table Number 13. The proposed regulations were quantitatively examined and adjusted to existing conditions and future needs, not only for the city as a whole, but for each of the 46 separate census tracts as well.

A brief description of the proposed districts and regulations follows:
EXISTING USES FOUND IN PRESENT USE
DISTRICTS OF EXISTING ZONING ORDINANCE

DES MOINES, IOWA

CITY PLAN & ZONING COMMISSION

TOTAL DISTRICT AREA

LEGEND

ONE & TWO FAMILY DWELLINGS
APARTMENTS & BOARDING HOUSES
COMMERCE
LIGHT INDUSTRY
HEAVY INDUSTRY

USED DISTRICT AREA
Table Number 11

EXISTING USE AND EXISTING ZONING OF STREET FRONTAGE
ON CERTAIN MAJOR STREETS

Des Moines, Iowa

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Street</th>
<th>Hubbell Avenue</th>
<th>S. W. Ninth</th>
<th>Grand Avenue</th>
<th>University Ave.</th>
<th>Forest Avenue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% Used</td>
<td>% Zoned</td>
<td>% Used</td>
<td>% Zoned</td>
<td>% Used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One- and Two-Family Residence</td>
<td>12.36</td>
<td>5.24</td>
<td>42.2</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>43.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Dwelling</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td></td>
<td>6.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commerce</td>
<td>16.49</td>
<td>70.19</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>92.8</td>
<td>21.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light Industry</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>22.89</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heavy Industry</td>
<td>1.85</td>
<td>1.68</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public and Semi-Public</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td></td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td></td>
<td>8.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parks</td>
<td>2.49</td>
<td></td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vacant</td>
<td>64.64</td>
<td></td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>11.50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table Number 12

ANALYSIS OF CERTAIN NEIGHBORHOODS IN OLDER AREAS OF THE CITY
SHOWING LACK OF PROTECTION AFFORDED RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT BY PRESENT ZONING

Des Moines, Iowa

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Census Tract No.</th>
<th>No. 25</th>
<th>No. 24</th>
<th>No. 23</th>
<th>No. 42</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Keo. to Sixth Ave.</td>
<td>Sixth to River, University to Keo.</td>
<td>River to E. 14th University to Grand</td>
<td>S. W. 9th to S. E. 14th, River to Fulton, Hillside and Hartford</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Existing Use</td>
<td>Existing Zoning</td>
<td>Existing Use</td>
<td>Existing Zoning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USE</td>
<td>Acres</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Acres</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single-Family Residence</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two-Family Residence</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Dwelling</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commerce</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light Industry</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heavy Industry</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public and Semi-Public</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parks</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>136</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Difference in totals between existing use and existing zoning caused by omission of vacant land from existing use.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District and Use</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Existing Area Occupied by Uses</th>
<th>Existing Zoned Area %</th>
<th>Possible Population Under Regulations</th>
<th>City Population That Would be Served by This Area According to Present Ratios of Land Use Area Per 100 Persons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B District Single-Family Homes</td>
<td>8,653.45</td>
<td>28.70</td>
<td>15,505.36</td>
<td>51.42</td>
<td>321,442</td>
<td>337,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C District Single-Family Homes</td>
<td>6,851.91</td>
<td>22.72</td>
<td>7,055.09</td>
<td>81.94</td>
<td>186,391</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total B &amp; C</td>
<td>15,505.36</td>
<td>51.42</td>
<td>16,380.93</td>
<td>53.89</td>
<td>392,327</td>
<td>1,257,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D District Two-Family Homes</td>
<td>879.91</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>111.64</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>70,883</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total B, C &amp; D</td>
<td>16,385.27</td>
<td>54.34</td>
<td>16,492.57</td>
<td></td>
<td>392,327</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E District Multiple Dwelling</td>
<td>851.11</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>377.09</td>
<td>4.39</td>
<td>50,656</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F District Multiple Dwelling</td>
<td>475.82</td>
<td>1.58</td>
<td>4,984.03</td>
<td>16.40</td>
<td>98,163</td>
<td>530,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total E &amp; F</td>
<td>1,326.93</td>
<td>4.40</td>
<td>4,984.03</td>
<td></td>
<td>98,163</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G District Commerce</td>
<td>400.67</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H District Commerce</td>
<td>146.11</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I District Commerce</td>
<td>148.71</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total G, H &amp; I</td>
<td>695.49</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>1,146.31</td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td></td>
<td>257,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J District Light Industry</td>
<td>403.72</td>
<td>1.34</td>
<td>228.86</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>1,784.05</td>
<td>269,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K District Heavy Industry</td>
<td>1,435.89</td>
<td>4.76</td>
<td>418.16</td>
<td>4.87</td>
<td>6,100.53</td>
<td>532,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A District Agriculture &amp; Mining</td>
<td>9,903.16</td>
<td>32.86</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30,150.46</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>8,586.77</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>30,395.85</td>
<td>490,400</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: Railroads are zoned in proposed ordinance but have not been included in computations. Area in streets not included in either ordinance. Commercial frontage zoned amounts to 224,021 linear feet, sufficient to serve 218,000 persons.
Agricultural and Mining District

Table Number 14 contains data on the existing and probable future extent of the urban area. The City of Des Moines has a total area of 35,530 acres of which 17,049 acres are undeveloped, 1,600 acres are owned by the Water Works, 684 acres are water areas (rivers) and 16,197 acres are now used for urban purposes.

The estimated urban area required to serve the future population is 24,903 acres exclusive of the river area and the Water Works property.

Since the total area now served with water is 15,136 acres, the area now served with sewer is 15,704 acres, and the area served by elementary schools is 17,322 acres, it would seem to be a basic principle of municipal economy that any extension of public services such as water, sewers, schools, and the like, should be limited to a maximum of 25,000 acres. It is economically necessary to prohibit the construction of buildings or the use of land requiring public services in the 10,530 acres not needed for the future development of the city.

For these reasons a new district has been created in the proposed zoning plan and ordinance to be known as the Agricultural and Mining District in which it would be possible to extract natural resources such as sand, gravel, and coal, and to permit agriculture, forestry and public uses such as parks, water works, sewage disposal plants and cemeteries, but in which no ordinary private land uses of an urban character would be permitted. An area of 9,903 acres is contained within this district.

This district is located in the low property along the two rivers. Property that would be difficult to serve with sewers lying in now undeveloped portions of the city has also been included in this district. The Water Works property and certain other large public uses have been placed in this district also.

Residential development would be restricted to farms containing 10 acres or more.

Single-Family Districts

The present ordinance permits two-family dwellings in any portion of the city. The proposed ordinance provides two districts in which only single-family homes and such uses as churches, schools, and libraries are permitted. The main difference between the two-single-family districts is in the lot area per family regulation. The “B” district is confined to those areas where a more spacious type of development prevails and provides that the lot area for single-family houses be 10,000 square feet and the “C” district requires a lot area of 6,000 square feet.

The present residence district provides an area of 16,380.93 acres for one- and two-family homes. The “B” district under the proposed regulations has an area of 8,653 acres and could accommodate 135,000 persons. 186,000 persons could be accommodated in the 6,852 acres of the “C” district. It is obvious that there would be ample area for the future single-family homes of the city.

Two-Family District

A new district has been provided for two-family dwellings. It should be understood, of course, that single-family dwellings will be permitted in this district and that a major portion of it will be occupied by this use. The district does, however, contain a majority of the existing two-family development and provides ample area for the future development of this use. There is no reason why all of the duplexes cannot be confined to this large area. The majority of this district is adjacent to the central business district and to the major industrial areas and contains the older and more intensively developed sections of the city.

Apartment Districts

Apartment development has now spread itself over a large area. The dangers of such a policy have been mentioned. To adapt the proposed regulations to the existing conditions requires that the majority of the existing development be included in the proposed zones. Because of this, two apartment districts are provided. In one of them, the “E” district, a lot area per family of 2,000 square feet is required. This would permit a three or four family unit to be developed on the average existing lot and would enable a reasonable use to be made of existing large residences. It also provides for the rooming and boarding houses which are quite abundant in Des Moines. This district contains 851 acres and could absorb 50,600 persons if completely developed under the proposed regulations.

At the present time 377 acres are used for multiple dwelling purposes in Des Moines and contain 24,500 persons. The proposed districts contain 1,327 acres and could accommodate 98,000 persons.
### Table Number 14

**EXISTING AND PROBABLE FUTURE EXTENT OF URBAN AREA**

**Des Moines, Iowa**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Acres</th>
<th>Percentage of City</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Total Area of City</td>
<td>33,530.43</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Amount of land now vacant</td>
<td>17,049.27</td>
<td>47.98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Area not served by sewers</td>
<td>19,826.00</td>
<td>55.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Area not served by water</td>
<td>20,394.00</td>
<td>57.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Area more than 1/4 mile from elementary school</td>
<td>18,208.00</td>
<td>51.86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Area more than 1/4 mile from a transit line</td>
<td>15,066.00</td>
<td>42.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Amount of land necessary to serve future population of 225,000 (from land use calculations)</td>
<td>26,512.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Amount of land still vacant when 225,000 population is achieved</td>
<td>8,334.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Water works property</td>
<td>1,600.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>River area</td>
<td>684.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Total, Items Nos. 8, 9 and 10</td>
<td>10,618.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Area of proposed mining and agriculture district</td>
<td>9,903.16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Commercial Districts

Three commercial districts are proposed. The central shopping area is placed in the "I" business district. This district includes all the intensive downtown retail and business development and contains an area of 149 acres. Industrial uses are permitted and an intensive use of the land would be allowed. Building heights are restricted to six stories at the street line, but can go above the six-story limit if a setback is provided. This makes possible a use of land in conformity with existing development and, at the same time, makes mandatory the proper admission of light and air where taller buildings are erected.

Commercial uses in the more intensively developed areas of the city immediately surrounding the business district are placed in the "H" district. A three-story height limit is required and no industrial uses are permitted. Buildings could be erected to the street line. This district contains an area of 146 acres.

Outlying or neighborhood shopping districts are placed in the "G" district. These centers have been located in accordance with both the existing development and with the probable future needs of the population. Whenever possible they have been confined to the intersections of important major streets. Only in a few instances are there any residential lots more than a half-mile from a shopping center. Ample provision has also been made for the development of filling stations and tourist camps on the major highways entering the city.

At the present time there are 416 acres of land used for commerce within the city. The proposed commercial districts contain a total acreage of 695 acres and would, at the present rate of use, provide commercial development for a city of 257,000 persons.

Industrial Districts

Light industrial districts have been distributed primarily in accord with existing development and contain 404 acres, adequate to accommodate future expansion. In certain instances light industrial zones have been located to serve as a buffer between the heavy industrial zones and the surrounding residential districts.

The heavy industrial district includes the majority of the existing heavy industries and contains 1,436 acres. This is a very liberal area for this use and, at the present rate of use in Des Moines, would provide adequate heavy industrial area for a city of 532,000. It is located along the railroads and in areas where there could be little offense to residential development.

Residential development is prohibited in the heavy industrial district. Past experience has shown that the residential development that takes place in a heavy industrial district is very poor in character.

Non-Conforming Uses

When zoning ordinances were adopted some twenty years ago, it was believed (1) that the courts would not approve of retroactive provisions and (2) that non-conforming uses would gradually be eliminated because of their inability to expand and because of restrictions against repairs in building structures of a non-conforming use.

After twenty years of experience, it appears that the removal of non-conforming uses is a very slow process and they have the opposite tendency to become monopolies. Furthermore, the presence of non-conforming uses in residential areas has a tendency to induce or promote blight of these districts. If ever the fundamental purpose of zoning is to be achieved, non-conforming uses must be eliminated.

On the assumption that the courts will support some regulation for their elimination that might be reasonable, a section of the proposed ordinance requires that the non-conforming use of land shall cease at the end of one year, and that certain non-conforming use of buildings shall cease within a certain period of years, depending on the age of the building.

Summary

Plate Number 17 shows the relation between the present and future land uses and zoning in Des Moines. It is evident that the present ordinance is very much out of scale with the present developments and the probable future land use areas. The proposed ordinance is much more closely related to future needs and to the future scale of the city. All proposed districts are ample to care for the future requirements of a city of 225,000. The relation between the amount of land that will be vacant in the city in the future and the proposed agricultural and mining district serves to make the proposed ordinance much more in character with the future city development. The regulations of this district will do much to make Des Moines a more economic and efficient urban area.
ADMINISTRATION OF THE ORDINANCE

The zoning ordinance can produce effective results only if it is strictly enforced and subject to a minimum number of changes.

The administration of the present ordinance has not been as thorough or as rigid as it should have been. Several illegal developments have been noted on which the city has taken no effective action. There have been far too many changes, the vast majority of which were made purely for selfish speculative reasons and not for any benefit of the city as a whole.

A city changes and no one man or group of men can foresee all future happenings. Because of this it is necessary now and then to change a zoning ordinance. Nothing, however, does more harm than numerous changes. Sporadic, haphazard, unsound changes quickly result in a public attitude of suspicion and indifference to the whole field of planning and zoning.

When illegal variations are permitted to exist the effectiveness of the entire ordinance is ruined.

Without public understanding and support no regulation and no plan can be successful. There should be neighborhood organizations throughout Des Moines to protect the various residential areas of the city. The purpose and the meaning of the zoning ordinance must be disseminated to every property owner. Neighborhood organizations are the only possible way of accomplishing this.

The zoning ordinance outlined herein is a comprehensive land use plan for the city. It is one of the most essential and logical ways by which Des Moines can be developed as an economical city. With the approaching stabilization of population and the consequent competition between cities, Des Moines will be at a great disadvantage because of the fundamental weakness of the city structure. Through rigid enforcement of this ordinance over a period of years, these weaknesses can be overcome. The city can be a far better place in which to live and work. The tax rate can gradually be decreased instead of constantly increased.

This plan is a comprehensive plan for the welfare of the entire city. It cannot be passed or enforced without causing some contended injury to a minority of taxpayers. In fact, if it did not do this, it would not be a comprehensive plan as then everyone would be doing as he pleased with his land and the ruinous trends of the past would go on unhindered. When protests and petitions for changes are presented they must be carefully inspected. They must not be judged from the standpoint of a single lot, an individual's personal problems or a neighborhood's particular desires of the moment. The comprehensive plan must be the major consideration. Its integrity must be preserved if the future welfare of the city is to be protected.
Chapter III

HOUSING

The health and welfare of the people of a city are dependent upon the character of the housing. Housing is a major factor influencing taxation and the economic resources of the community.

Housing is especially important in Des Moines. The city's economic structure is being undermined by the widespread scattered developments on the outskirts and the abandonment of blighted areas in the older sections. Many dwelling units do not contain running water or indoor toilets. Many new homes of a deplorable character are being erected in the city and just beyond the city limits. A large portion of the city's families are unable to afford housing of minimum standards.

This chapter contains a description of the present housing conditions, an analysis of the relation between housing and the general welfare, and a discussion of the major principles of a comprehensive housing program.

Data relating to existing housing conditions was compiled by the Real Property Inventory conducted by the Department of Commerce in 1934. This data is for the metropolitan district of Des Moines and covers the adjoining suburban areas as well as the city itself. Since only a minor portion of the urban development is outside the city limits these figures give an adequate picture of the city's housing. Further investigations of housing in the city were undertaken by the Iowa State Planning Board in its "Report on Housing in Des Moines," that was made in 1935. Reference should be made to this report for a more detailed picture of existing conditions than it is possible to present herein.

Data for the Income and Cost Survey discussed in this chapter was compiled by the WPA project, sponsored by the City Plan Commission.

EXISTING HOUSING CONDITIONS

Basic Economic Factors

Des Moines is a city of home owners, 45 per cent of the living units being owned by the occupants. The housing units are bought, sold and rented in the open market.

Sociologists agree that a family should not buy or build a home for more than two times the family's annual income, nor should the rent comprise more than one-fourth of the family's monthly income. In accordance with these standards, a man making $2,400 a year could build or buy a home costing $4,800 or rent a home or an apartment for $50 a month. The character of housing obtained is thus directly related to the income of the family.

In seeking to buy, rent or build a home, a family is faced today with three conditions that complicate their problem. One is the high real estate tax rate of Des Moines, caused, not so much by excessive expenditures, but because real estate pays a far larger proportion of urban governmental costs in Iowa than in other states. This increases the cost of housing. A high labor rate caused by the sporadic nature of home construction also increases the cost of housing. The third condition is the manner in which the houses are built. Each home is constructed as an individual project on an individual basis. None of the mass production features that have so reduced the price of automobiles have been introduced into the housing market.

The Income Groups

To gain an understanding of the housing problem, the income groups must first be known. Data on this important subject is not adequate, but some conception of the relative size of the various groups can be gained from the rental and value data collected by the Real Property Inventory, shown in Table 18.

The lowest income group, paying less than fifteen dollars a month for housing, occupies 30 per cent of the rental units of the city. Families paying less than $20 a month in rent occupy 45 per cent of the rental units. Persons paying $20 to $50 a month comprise the largest group of renters, almost one-half of the total. Of the owner occupied homes, 31 per cent were valued at less than $2,000 and only 19 per cent at over $5,000.

From this data, an estimate can be made of the income groups of the city. One-sixth of the city's families cannot pay more than $10 a month for housing; one-third of the city's families cannot pay more than $20 a month for housing (the low income group). One family out of every two can pay between $20 and $50 a month for housing (the medium income group). About one-sixth of the city's families can pay over $50 a month for housing (the upper income group).
Table Number 15

RENTALS AND VALUES OF HOMES

Des Moines, Iowa

Monthly Rental of Rented Units

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monthly Rental Rate</th>
<th>Approximate Value</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Per Cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under $10</td>
<td>Less than $800</td>
<td>2,545</td>
<td>10.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$10 to $15</td>
<td>$800 to $1,200</td>
<td>4,420</td>
<td>18.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$15 to $20</td>
<td>$1,200 to $1,600</td>
<td>4,023</td>
<td>16.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$20 to $30</td>
<td>$1,600 to $2,400</td>
<td>7,114</td>
<td>29.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$30 to $50</td>
<td>$2,400 to $4,000</td>
<td>4,970</td>
<td>20.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50 to $75</td>
<td>$4,000 to $6,000</td>
<td>1,180</td>
<td>4.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$75 and over</td>
<td>$6,000 or more</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>0.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>24,433</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Value of Owner Occupied Homes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Equivalent Rental</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Per Cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under $1,000</td>
<td>$12.50 or less</td>
<td>2,152</td>
<td>11.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$1,000 to $1,500</td>
<td>$12.50 to $18.75</td>
<td>1,832</td>
<td>9.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$1,500 to $2,000</td>
<td>$18.75 to $23.00</td>
<td>2,062</td>
<td>10.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$2,000 to $3,000</td>
<td>$25.00 to $37.50</td>
<td>4,093</td>
<td>21.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$3,000 to $5,000</td>
<td>$37.50 to $62.50</td>
<td>5,405</td>
<td>27.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$5,000 to $7,500</td>
<td>$62.50 to $93.75</td>
<td>2,445</td>
<td>12.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$7,500 and over</td>
<td>$93.75 and over</td>
<td>1,345</td>
<td>6.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>19,334</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data from Real Property Inventory.
An analysis of the homes built between 1927 and 1934 substantiates these estimates. Twenty-one per cent of these homes cost less than $2,000; one-third cost between $2,000 and $4,000; 30 per cent between $4,000 and $6,000, and 16 per cent, more than $6,000. Of the total homes built between January 1, 1936, and October 1, 1939, 292 or 18 per cent were classified as "temporary dwellings" and cost less than $1,000. Furthermore, at the peak period this year, some 5,800 persons within the city were on the WPA rolls (14 per cent of the city’s families), and received an average wage of $61 a month.

It is thus evident that there are a large number of the city’s families that can afford but a small expenditure for housing. More low income families rent than own their own home. In 1934, 10,988 rental units had an approximate value of less than $1,000 (rented at less than $20 a month), while only 3,984 homes valued at less than $1,500 were owner occupied.

Location of Income Groups in the City

The Low Income Groups. The family of low income finds housing of two types in Des Moines.

First, they locate in older areas around the central business district, areas of old homes that have been abandoned by higher income groups. These areas are characterized by obsolete buildings, congested living conditions, and an unsightly, run-down appearance.

The second type of low income housing is found in the outskirts of the city and in low ground along the rivers. To escape from areas of congestion and obsolescence, low income families have gone out into outlying sections where they could raise some of their food and build their own home. Many such families have even moved outside the city limits. This solution to their housing problem has not proved satisfactory. Individual wells and outdoor toilets, concomitants of such developments, are a constant health hazard; the shacks that have resulted hardly offer primitive protection against the elements, and schools are not within a reasonable distance. Before such locations for this type of housing can be considered successful, there must be adequate sanitary and water facilities, a minimum standard of home construction, and an economical relationship of the housing with school location. These requisites have not yet been met in Des Moines. Only a cursory inspection of the city reveals that these lower income groups have not been able to provide themselves with minimum standard housing.

The Medium Income Groups. Persons who can afford to spend $20 to $50 a month for housing comprise about half of the families in Des Moines. Housing of this class is found in all the geographic sections of the city in both new and older areas. This income group has no trouble in securing housing of a good standard.

Upper Income Groups. There is no housing problem for a family that can spend more than $50 a month for this purpose. Located to the west of the business district and in limited areas to the south of the city, housing for these families is an outstanding feature of the city. The fine, home-like character of such areas need not, however, be limited to the upper income groups. Through proper planning and control somewhat similar amenities could be afforded the other income groups.

Condition of Existing Housing

Minimum Standards for Urban Housing. To properly appraise data relating to existing housing, a yardstick is needed. What are the minimum standards a home should have in Des Moines? There are several obvious features that should be present to properly protect the health and welfare of the occupants and of the city as a whole. These can be summarized as follows:

1. Each living unit should have running water and an indoor toilet. Such facilities are essential to public health in an urban area.
2. Each unit should be structurally safe and in a good state of repair.
3. There should be adequate light and air for all the rooms.
4. The living units should not be overcrowded; there should not be more than one person per room in each unit.
5. There should be an adequate heating system and facilities for lighting, cooking, and refrigeration.

Age of Homes. Table 16 shows the age of dwellings in the Des Moines area. Sixty-four per cent of the structures are less than thirty years old and thirty-eight per cent less than twenty years old. Only 18 per cent of the total dwellings are over forty years old. Three out of every four homes are built of wood. Frame construction depreciates fairly rapidly, and older homes are frequently in poor condition. Often such homes are not well maintained and are permitted to grow obsolete rather than to be properly repaired and reconstructed.

Structural Condition. Table 17 shows the structural condition of homes at the time of the Real Property Inventory. One-third of the homes were found to be in good condition and almost half
### Table Number 16

**STRUCTURES BY AGE**

*Des Moines, Iowa*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Per Cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 10 years old</td>
<td>3,743</td>
<td>9.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From 10 to 20 years old</td>
<td>11,195</td>
<td>28.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From 20 to 30 years old</td>
<td>10,289</td>
<td>26.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From 30 to 40 years old</td>
<td>6,751</td>
<td>17.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From 40 to 50 years old</td>
<td>5,084</td>
<td>12.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 50 years old</td>
<td>2,221</td>
<td>5.65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Total Structures 1934      | 37,299 | 100.00   |
| Added since 1934           | 1,984  |          |

**Total:** 39,283

Data before 1934 from Real Property Inventory.
Data since 1934 from office of Building Inspector.

### Table Number 17

**CONDITION OF STRUCTURES — 1934**

*Des Moines, Iowa*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Per Cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>13,051</td>
<td>34.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need minor repairs</td>
<td>17,100</td>
<td>45.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need major structural repairs</td>
<td>6,426</td>
<td>17.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unfit for use</td>
<td>722</td>
<td>1.94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Total                      | 37,299 | 100.00   |

Data from Real Property Inventory.
needed but minor repairs. However, almost one home out of five needed major structural repairs and one home out of every fifty was unsuit for habitation. The location of dwellings needing major structural repair and of dwellings unsuit for use is shown on Plate 18. These homes are most numerous in the older areas and in areas of low income housing.

Obsolescence of Homes. Every year the ravages of time and neglect destroy the usefulness of a large number of homes in Des Moines. Changing standards of design and invention of new household appliances bring about obsolescence long before the building itself wears out. The Iowa State Planning Board made a special study of 5,775 homes in Des Moines and concluded that there was a 1.25 per cent obsolescence of the city's homes each year. This would mean that approximately 560 new residential units are needed each year just to replace those worn out. (576 homes were built in the first nine months of 1939; 487 in 1938; 333 in 1937; and 260 in 1936.)

The older residential sections are depreciating rapidly and there is no concerted effort to rebuild them. This is particularly true of the areas immediately surrounding the central business district. Without corrective measures, depreciation will become worse year by year as new sections of the city become obsolete, and old sections more dilapidated.

This is a major housing problem. Corrective steps must be taken immediately. Residential districts should be used year after year, decade after decade, by maintaining the property in good condition, or by rebuilding the homes when they become obsolete.

Sanitary Facilities. Table 18 contains data regarding sanitary facilities found in existing dwellings. Of the living units inspected in 1934, one-fourth did not have an indoor toilet. This does not mean that all these families used outdoor toilets, but that some shared indoor facilities with another family. One living unit out of every six had no running water; one out of every three homes did not have its own tub or shower. In a survey conducted by the Health Department this year, a total of 5,153 outside toilets were found in the city. One out of every four outside toilets was in a location readily accessible to a sewer main. Of the 3,256 outside wells, over one-half were located on streets containing water mains. These facilities are used by families having such a small income that the necessary connection charge of $150 to $200 cannot be afforded. The plan of the Health Department to require the installation of these connections and to have the property owners pay for them over a period of ten years in the same manner as a special assessment should prove successful in eliminating this absurd condition.

The presence of many families without adequate sanitary facilities is not due to shortage of sewer and water mains. There are 7,550 vacant lots in the city served with sewer and 6,419 served with water. The existing vacant lots in the city, situated on streets with paving, sewer, and water would, if placed side by side, front on both sides of a street 34 miles long (farther than from Des Moines to Ames).

The location of residential living units without separate indoor toilets and without separate water connections are shown in Plate Number 19. The areas in which this condition is concentrated are the same as the areas in which buildings needed major structural repairs. They are occupied by low income families. These plans further indicate the need for rebuilding and rehabilitation in such districts.

The absence of toilets and baths not only affects the health of the occupants, but, through possibilities of epidemics, is a direct menace to the health of the community. Considerable improvement is needed in existing facilities. The presence of many families without minimum standard sanitary equipment, many vacant lots provided with the needed services, and many families not using the existing mains, is ample evidence of the need for a constructive housing policy.

Summary

From this analysis it can be concluded that at least one-fourth of the homes in the city do not measure up to the minimum standards for urban housing. These facilities have been provided by individual initiative and undoubtedly represent the best housing that can be provided in this manner for the various income groups of the city. Many of the dwellings for the lower income group erected in the past several years have been mere shacks and have depreciated rather than enhanced the appearance and welfare of the city. Their valuation is so low that any income from them in the way of taxes cannot equal their proportionate share of city expenses. Large scale rental facilities would undoubtedly be much better for the low income persons that live in such facilities and for the city as a whole.

The desirability of a family owning their own home has been stressed, especially in Des Moines. However, there is a serious doubt that the lower income families should ever own their own living quarters. All too frequently the wage earner in this classification invests too large a portion of his income and savings in a home and his entire economic status is seriously affected by any slight change in the general business conditions.

One of the major reasons why there are so many unsatisfactory housing facilities is that these facilities have been developed by piecemeal and uncoordinated methods. An individual or several
Table Number 18

SANITARY FACILITIES

Des Moines, Iowa

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Per Cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dwelling units without indoor toilets</td>
<td>12,057</td>
<td>26.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dwelling units without running water</td>
<td>7,538</td>
<td>16.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dwelling units with neither tubs nor showers</td>
<td>14,594</td>
<td>32.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total dwelling units</td>
<td>44,858</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data from Real Property Inventory.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Per Cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of outside toilets</td>
<td>5,153</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number on streets having no sewer main</td>
<td>3,988</td>
<td>77.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number on streets having a sewer main</td>
<td>1,165</td>
<td>23.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of wells</td>
<td>3,236</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number on streets having no water main</td>
<td>1,563</td>
<td>48.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number on streets with a water main</td>
<td>1,673</td>
<td>51.70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data from a survey of the City Health Department, 1939
individuals might build nice homes in a certain area, but one or two other owners could erect an inferior type of residence or some other obnoxious use that would depreciate the entire neighborhood. There is little uniformity of character throughout any of the residential districts of Des Moines.

This condition could be corrected by large scale operations where areas containing twenty or more acres are developed with uniform and harmonious facilities having the same general character. Such developments could also offer important economies in construction and maintenance and thus insure better facilities at a lower cost and a lower rental.

**HOUSING AND THE GENERAL WELFARE**

**Attendant Evils to Poor Housing**

The low income family, because it can afford no better, lives in a poor district. The housing is poor in character; sanitary facilities are not adequate; disease results. The morale of people in poor circumstances cannot be high; the housing and the neighborhood character discourage good citizenship; crime and delinquency result. Thus, there is ever present the poor family, the bad neighborhood, the disease and the crime. The consequences are not the result of the people. Experience in other cities and in other countries, particularly in England, reveals that the slum dweller, given minimum standard housing, improves in morale and in character.

The following studies show the relation between poor housing and the health and crime of the community.

**Housing and Health.** Considerable data has been compiled throughout the country regarding health conditions in areas of bad housing. The per capita rate of disease is much higher in these areas than in the entire city. The public as a whole must assist in treating these diseases since the low income groups require free medical treatment.

Plate 20 shows the location of communicable disease cases in Des Moines. This plan offers a good indication of health conditions in the various areas of the city. Areas of poor housing account for concentrations of communicable diseases and the pattern formed by this plan is startlingly similar to the plan showing structures needing major repairs. Similar studies made by the State Planning Board of child mortality and tuberculosis reveal the same condition.

**Housing and Crime.** Plate 21 shows the location of major and minor crimes and of juvenile delinquency in Des Moines. Persons convicted of crimes and juvenile delinquents are concentrated primarily in the older areas around the central business district. Areas of poor character produce juvenile delinquents and then criminals. Court costs, police costs, and insurance costs are paid by the entire city.

New housing could not be expected to eliminate crime, but new neighborhoods with homes of minimum standards and adequate play space would have an important influence on lessening juvenile delinquency and in building citizens of better character.

**The Income and Cost Survey**

It has been known for some time that the poorer districts of a city do not pay enough taxes to even balance the cost of governmental services. In other words, these poorer areas have been subsidized for many years. What is the extent of this subsidy? Who pays the bill? To answer these questions a survey was made of the entire city of Des Moines by the 44 census tracts and by two sub-tracts.

**Major Facts Revealed by the Survey.** Only nine of the forty-six districts pay in more in taxes than it costs the governmental agencies to provide services. Of these, one, the west business district, contributes almost $2,000,000 a year to the residence areas. Two industrial areas contribute $250,000; and six residence districts contribute $555,000 annually. Two residence areas and the east business district just about break even. Thirteen districts cost between $10,000 and $50,000 per year more than they pay in taxes. Sixteen districts cost between $50,000 and $100,000 annually more than is paid in taxes. Five districts require a subsidy of over $100,000 a year.

The city subsidizes county activities outside the city (mostly county roads) and the school district areas outside the city to the amount of $273,000 annually. The total subsidy to residence areas within the city amounts to $2,320,000 annually.

The older, blighted areas north and west of the business district, south of University and east of Harding Road, cost the city every year a quarter of a million dollars more than is paid in taxes. The low areas in the east and south bottoms around the Roadside Settlement and the Southside Community House require a subsidy of $183,000 annually. The area to the north of the two rivers costs the governmental agencies $385,000 more each year than the area pays in taxes. The scattered development in the northeast, north of University Avenue and east of Delaware requires an annual subsidy of $405,000 annually.
The residential areas paying more in taxes than is received in public services are located between University Avenue and the Milwaukee Railroad and west of Harding Road. The area between University Avenue and Hickman Road and west of 30th Street pays in about as much in taxes as is received in services.

Plate 22 shows the relation between governmental costs and taxes paid in the various sections of the city. The greatest subsidy is in the area around the Roadside Settlement where costs exceed income by a ratio of five to one. The areas where governmental costs are two to four times the income are primarily the sparsely settled scattered development in the southeast and northeast sections of the city, emphasizing the difficulties and burden that these areas place upon the city. The older areas around the business district, where development is intensive and population densities are high, cost the city from $1.10 to $2.00 for every dollar that is paid in taxes. Medium income housing in the north central, northwest, and Highland Park area is also costing the city more than is paid in taxes.

A very large proportion of each tax dollar, 34.66 cents, comes from the business district, revealing the necessity for encouraging and protecting high values in this area. This district is paying for much of the maintenance cost of the city’s residence areas. Any depreciation of the downtown values will be felt immediately by every home owner. Eighteen cents of every tax dollar is paid by residential areas south of University and west of Harding Road. The large area south of the two rivers pays but three cents of every tax dollar, while the industrial districts south of the business district pay 5½ cents of every tax dollar. The Highland Park district pays 6 cents of every dollar. The great area in the northeast portion of the city, north of University and east of East 14th Street pays but 3 per cent of the city’s taxes.

**Relation of Income and Cost to Density.** Tracts with a density of less than five persons per net acre require an annual subsidy of $80 per family. As the density increases the subsidy required decreases, the residential areas having a net density of over twenty persons per acre requiring a subsidy of only $31 per family. In the tracts showing a gain over costs, the gain per family decreases as the density increases. This is due to the larger lots and more expensive developments in the lower density areas. In the tracts showing a loss, the loss per family is almost three times as high in the areas having a density of less than five persons per acre as it is in the tracts having a density of over twenty persons per net acre.

**Widespread Influence of Housing.** Owners of business and industrial property have a great financial interest in the development of the city’s housing. They are paying for much of it now. The man with a fine home on the west side has a definite interest in a subdivision developed in the northeast part of the city. He will eventually pay for some of it. The tax burden of the city is already high. It can be reduced through wise planning and proper protection of residential areas in order that necessary city services can be provided as economically as possible.

It would never be possible for all the areas of the city to pay the exact proportion of their cost in taxes. The better residence areas and the business and industrial districts will always have to help the poorer residence areas. A change in the tax base will not alter the situation. The cost of building and maintaining the city will continue. It will have to be paid. The following section of this chapter outlines measures that can be taken to alleviate present undesirable conditions.

**MAJOR PHASES OF A COMPREHENSIVE HOUSING PROGRAM**

The present housing has been provided by individuals each seeking to solve his own problem, sell his own lots, or build his own buildings. Even though the community has a major interest in housing, there has been no community action or program. The disadvantages of the present system have been indicated. A definite community housing program and policy is badly needed. This section of the report is concerned with the major phases of such a policy or program.

There are many factors to be considered in a comprehensive housing program. Both citizens and officials are responsible for such a program and both must understand the many problems and cooperate in securing their solution.

There are three major problems to be solved:

1. Minimum standard living facilities must be provided for the lower income groups in such a manner that their maintenance cost is as low as possible. They are being subsidized now. Why not make the subsidy as intelligent and purposeful as possible instead of maintaining at a high cost areas of substandard housing?

2. A more economic and efficient city must be built. Scattering of population must be stopped. Past mistakes must not be repeated.

3. Existing investments must be protected. Decentralization of the business district must be stopped and the blighted areas rebuilt and rehabilitated. Areas of good residence must be protected against depreciation.
Housing for the Low Income Groups

The major housing problem is in the provision of standard facilities for low income families. It is this income group that now occupies the older areas and that erects the shanties on the outskirts of the city.

Necessity for a Subsidy. It has been impossible for these families to provide themselves with decent housing under present conditions. One-sixth of the city's families cannot pay over ten dollars a month for housing. Private enterprise and individual efforts have not provided minimum standard housing at this price. Instead, conditions dangerous to the health and welfare of the community, as well as the low income families, have been created, conditions requiring an annual tax subsidy, the proportions of which are endangering the city's economic structure.

Over a period of years it will be cheaper for the community to give these families a direct subsidy to enable them to live in minimum standard homes, properly located.

Amount and Form of Subsidy. The amount of the subsidy that will be necessary for these families will depend on the cost of the living facilities provided, and it is essential that this cost be held to the minimum necessary for the development of decent housing. There is no justification for the provision of subsidized housing for low income families that is better than the facilities that can be obtained by the medium income groups, which have to obtain their own living quarters without any assistance.

The form that the subsidy should take is also open to question. Tax exemption, which places much of the burden on other residence areas is questionable. In any event, some contribution to these persons must be made. The areas in which they now live are operated at a loss to the city and there would be probably little, if any, additional expense in the provision of decent facilities.

Possible Plans for Providing Subsidized Housing. At present, two plans for building homes for low income families could be initiated.

(1) Homes Built by Relief Labor. There are several thousand families on relief in the city. Their income is so low that minimum standard housing cannot be obtained. It has been proposed that these persons engage in construction of homes for themselves. By not charging their labor to the home, a minimum standard house could be erected that would rent for or could be purchased for as little as eight dollars a month. These homes could be built on vacant lots now supplied with sewer and water and owned by the county. Such homes should be erected in neighborhoods where there is a somewhat similar character and should not be too widely scattered.

The plan for utilizing relief labor to build low cost homes has been worked out in detail by city officials. All that is needed is a public housing authority with the legal power to obtain land, capital, and erect the homes.

It has been estimated that 5,000 homes of this type are needed in the city. The erection of these homes would help insure the proper distribution of the city's population that is so essential if Des Moines is to be the best possible city in which to live and work. It would also gradually eliminate all slums from the city. The program for a work relief program shows no signs of diminishing, and persons on relief could certainly do nothing that would be of more assistance in the building of the city than the construction of minimum standard homes for themselves, in accordance with the program outlined above.

(2) The United States Housing Authority Program. The present housing program of the Federal Government is designed to care for low income families. Through the United States Housing Authority, funds are advanced to local authorities for the development of housing projects and for assistance in maintaining these projects. That is, if a rental of $20 a month per unit is necessary to maintain, operate, and amortize the project and the persons that should live therein can pay only $15 per unit per month, the federal government will pay a substantial portion of the $5 deficit. The money to build the project is loaned to the local authority and is paid back over a period of 60 years.

Before the government will assist a local community in such a project the community is required to have a local housing authority, appointed by the city council, under the authority of a state enabling act. The local authority is responsible for sponsoring, maintaining, and operating these projects. The government also requires that such projects be tax exempt, although the local authority can pay service costs to the local government agencies. At the present time there is no enabling legislation in the State of Iowa that would permit the appointment of local housing authorities or tax exemption.

It is recommended that legislation be enacted to enable Des Moines to have a housing authority with the necessary powers to obtain funds from the United States Housing Authority.

Measures of City Wide Importance

Continuous Study of Future Needs. There should be a permanent agency, a local housing authority, to serve as a clearing house for all information regarding existing conditions, probable future trends, and housing requirements of the entire city.
RELATION BETWEEN ANNUAL COST OF GOVERNMENTAL SERVICES AND ANNUAL TAXES PAID
DES MOINES, IOWA
CITY PLAN COMMISSION

LEGEND

AREAS PAYING MORE IN TAXES THAN IS RECEIVED IN SERVICES

TAXES AMOUNT TO MORE THAN COST OF SERVICES

AREAS RECEIVING ABOUT AS MUCH IN SERVICES AS IS PAID IN IN TAXES

TAXES AND COSTS BALANCE WITHIN 5 PERCENT

AREAS COSTING MORE THAN IS PAID IN IN TAXES

COSTS AMOUNT TO 1.5 TO 4.0 TIMES TAXES PAID
COSTS AMOUNT TO 4.0 TIMES TAXES PAID
COSTS AMOUNT TO 2.0 TO 4.0 TIMES TAXES PAID
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Such an agency could compile data on current trends in housing in other cities and enable local persons to keep in touch with modern practices. Data could be prepared regarding the possibilities of large scale housing developments, to encourage this type of enterprise.

Through proper publicity, such an agency could keep the public informed on the housing problem and stimulate interest therein. It could aid in coordinating the efforts of individuals and public bodies.

Subdivision Control. The subdivision of land is the first step in providing housing facilities. Several of the areas of bad housing in Des Moines are largely due to poor platting. The requirement that all new subdivisions must contain minimum sanitary facilities before lots are sold will aid in insuring minimum standard housing. The exercising of complete subdivision control beyond the city limits is badly needed. Substandard dwellings beyond the city limits now almost completely encircle the city. Epidemics of typhoid in such areas would endanger the health of the people inside the city limits.

Zoning. The revised zoning ordinance will do much to improve the housing conditions. It will prevent housing development in low areas that should never be used for residence. It will give maximum protection to existing residence areas and aid in enabling them to continue as desirable places in which to live.

Zoning regulations are also seriously needed in the areas outside the city.

Building Code. The zoning ordinance indicates where different types of buildings should be erected and protects them after erection. The building code insures that individual buildings are of proper construction. It should be kept modernized in accordance with changing trends in construction.

Demolition of Structures. Section 23 of the Building Code gives the building department power to order the removal or repair of dangerous and unsafe buildings. After an owner of such a building has been duly notified and then fails to remove or repair the building, the building department can employ persons to do this work and assess the cost against the owner. This procedure has not always been successful. The dilapidated properties have little value and the owners frequently refuse to pay demolition costs. Salvaged building materials cannot legally be used as payment for demolition.

These unsafe and dilapidated buildings are eyesores and have markedly deleterious effects on neighborhood values. The cost of such demolition is small, averaging $50 a building. A small annual appropriation of between $2,000 and $5,000 to do this work in cases where owners cannot or will not pay the costs would solve much of the problem of demolition of unsafe residences.

Minimum Housing Regulations. The Iowa Housing Law provides minimum standards of light and air and certain sanitary standards for the erection of new homes. This legislation was passed in 1919 and has done much to insure the development of sanitary living facilities with adequate light and air in Iowa cities. This law does not, however, prevent the erection of shacks or the building of dwellings without minimum sanitary facilities where there are no sewer or water mains.

A new type of regulation has just been introduced in a few American cities. This is known as the minimum standard housing ordinance and insures that any structure used for residential purposes must meet minimum requirements from the standpoint of health and safety. It prevents the construction of shacks and requires minimum standards of water supply and sewage disposal. The city has built many miles of water and sewer mains. It is not unreasonable to require that these be used to the fullest extent before more are laid.

A shack or substandard housing facility is a direct liability to the city. Such structures have such a low value that the tax return can never cover the cost of governmental services. The city assumes a definite net loss on each one that is erected. Furthermore, such facilities greatly depreciate the value of good residences in the vicinity. Neighborhood values in vast portions of the city of Des Moines have been ruined by the erection of shacks.

A large portion of the housing problem could be solved through passage of a minimum standard housing ordinance. It would prevent the erection of unsatisfactory housing facilities in the first instance. The appearance and general character of the city would be improved, and the entire population would benefit. The present water and sewer mains would be more fully used, thus encouraging better distribution of urban population.

Protection and Maintenance of Residence Districts

The existing residential areas must be maintained and protected.

One major cause of neighborhood depreciation has been that, while the majority of owners may desire to maintain their property, a certain few allow their homes to depreciate. The individual owner feels that improvement of his property could not counteract the effect of neighborhood obsolescence.
Remodeling, repair, repainting, or rebuilding seem a waste of money; those who can afford to do so move out. If a basis were provided whereby all owners could be assured that the neighborhood would always be a desirable place in which to live, each one would undoubtedly be willing to do his part.

A possible solution to this problem has been proposed by the National Association of Real Estate Boards. Each neighborhood would be organized into a workable unit. Neighborhood organizations would have certain powers enabling them to insure the improvement and maintenance of the neighborhood.

The residential area of the city should be organized into districts, each district being large enough to be a self-contained unit or community and having a homogeneity of character in relation to the city as a whole. All persons living in each neighborhood would have an equal desire to maintain their homes and the surroundings in a desirable condition.

The citizens in each neighborhood should form an organization, elect officers, and adopt a program. This could include such improvements as paving of certain streets, planting of street trees, improvements of lighting, enlargement of school grounds and park areas, encouragement of proper maintenance of buildings, rehabilitation and repair of homes, annual contests for lawns and gardens and the like. The organization could work with public agencies in securing certain improvements. Repair and painting of homes could be undertaken on a wholesale basis at reduced costs to the individual owner.

Much can be accomplished by informal neighborhood groups. More could be done if these neighborhood organizations had certain legal status and powers. Legislation is required to permit this.

A "Neighborhood Improvement Act" has been prepared which follows generally the recommendations of the National Association of Real Estate Boards. This act or a similar statute should be adopted in Iowa.

Types of Housing Areas

Plate 23 shows a division of the city's area into four classifications of housing character.

A. The Areas in Which There Should Be No Residences

This classification includes commercial and industrial areas, low property, and land difficult to serve with sewers. The proposed agricultural and mining and heavy industrial districts in the new zoning ordinance will prevent residential development in much of this area. In certain portions, however, particularly the area east of Four Mile Creek and the area north of University Avenue and east of Second Avenue, it was necessary to zone the property for residence purposes even though it should not be used for that purpose. This was because of the extensive existing development that could not be ignored in the zoning. These areas cannot be readily served with sewers, the primary reason for excluding residential development from them. The proposed minimum standard housing ordinance, which would prohibit the erection of any home unless it was connected with a sewer or water main, would eliminate further residential construction in the remainder of this area. By these two ordinances, further residential development in these areas could be stopped.

The gradual elimination of existing homes within this area will be more difficult. Any homes becoming publicly owned through tax delinquency should remain in public ownership and the homes demolished until a tract of ten acres has been acquired. The ten acre tract should then be restricted and sold for agricultural purposes.

Many of the homes in the low areas designated as non-residential in the housing plan are occupied by persons on relief. By providing minimum standard housing for these families as recommended previously, substandard dwellings in the non-residential areas could be demolished. An arrangement could be devised whereby the existing home and lot would be turned over as a down payment on the new home. Areas thus acquired could be added to the land acquired through tax delinquency and then sold for farms as recommended above.

If this coordinated program of building and demolition were undertaken, all residential uses could be eventually eliminated from those portions of the city that cannot be served with sewer and water and in which the provision of schools, police, and fire protection is now such a drain on the public agencies.

B. Areas that are Obsolete and Blighted and Need Mass Rebuilding and Rehabilitation

These areas include the oldest residential property in the city. The buildings are in such poor condition that little good would come of individual rehabilitation. Areas of this character are found on high ground north of the business district and in low ground along the rivers around the Roadside Settlement and the Southside Settlement. This latter land is so strategically located in regard to the business and industrial districts that it should always be used for low income housing.
Prevalence of smoke makes older neighborhoods undesirable. Measures should be taken to eliminate this smoke nuisance.

**Rehabilitation.** Mass rehabilitation of existing structures could be undertaken successfully in certain of these areas. An area of several blocks would have to be brought under unified control. Existing buildings of good construction and design would be remodeled and repaired. Dilapidated buildings would be removed. Certain new building would be done. These measures, along with a general repainting and cleaning up of the neighborhood, planting of trees and surfacing or resurfacing of streets where necessary could bring about a reclaiming of the neighborhood. Such a mass rehabilitation could be undertaken by a public housing authority or by an individual or group of individuals.

**Rebuilding.** At the present time conditions do not make possible the economic rebuilding of these areas. The land values are high in comparison with the large number of vacant lots of low value in the city. It would be impossible for private capital, even with the power of eminent domain, to erect homes on this land and be able to bring in any return on their investment with the competition they would now have from the many vacant lots in the city. However, the values in these older areas are constantly depreciating. Every year the time is coming closer when the areas can be economically rebuilt. Plans must be prepared for this now.

Only a small portion of this area needs complete rebuilding now. Mass rehabilitation would result in desirable neighborhoods in most instances. If the program of the United States Housing Authority is initiated in Des Moines, the projects should be confined to the areas needing mass rebuilding.

C. **Areas of Depreciating or Poor Character that Should be Rehabilitated**

The areas that need rehabilitation are of two kinds:

1. **The Older, Compact Area.** Many of the residential areas of the city are old. They are depreciating in value but are not yet in need of rebuilding or mass rehabilitation. The homes in these areas are often large and do not meet today’s living requirements. To rehabilitate such an area the following steps are necessary:

   a. Confidence in the neighborhood must be restored. Much can be done by consistent zoning and the continuous assurance by the city that the neighborhood will be protected and maintained as a good residential area. When the old homes become obsolete it must be worthwhile to replace them.

   b. Non-conforming uses must be eliminated. In many of these older residence areas small stores and industries are found scattered among the residences. The great harm that these uses have done to the neighborhoods cannot be estimated. No one will maintain a home in good condition next to a store or an industry, or in an area where stores and industries may locate promiscuously. Adequate shopping areas have been provided for in the zoning ordinance. The elimination of scattered stores and industries will assure residence areas that the residence values will be maintained.

   c. The formation of neighborhood organization as described in a preceding section.

   d. The provision, by the city, of neighborhood parks and larger school grounds for these older areas. (See Chapter 7.) The lack of adequate open space is one reason why these areas are not as attractive to the home owner as the newer areas. Provision of more open space will help make them better places in which to live.

A housing authority or similar public agency should choose one specific neighborhood that is in need of rehabilitation and try out all these suggestions as an experiment. The cost would not be great to the public and proof would soon be had as to the efficacy of these suggestions.

2. **The Sparsely Settled Area.** Large areas in the northeast and southern portions of the city are developed with a scattered, poor residential development. The income and cost survey showed that these areas were very costly to the city. The development in them is "spotty". There are areas of good homes and areas of shacks. The proposed minimum standards housing ordinance would stop further shack development. In some instances development is poor because of bad platting. Where the development is poor and sparse and badly platted there are possibilities of replatting through cooperative pooling of land and through county ownership of many tax delinquent lots. One such example of replatting has been accomplished in the area north of Washington Avenue and east of East 14th Street. The city could aid in this replatting, particularly in the southern portion of the city, by developing parkways along the ravines.

Neighborhood organizations and adequate park and school grounds are also needed in these areas.

**Areas of Good Development to be Protected**

One of the most important phases of the housing program is the protection of the existing development of good character and the careful development of new areas. New subdivisions should be protected by deed restrictions. The zoning ordinance should be rigidly enforced and the encroachment
of apartments, rooming houses, and duplexes stopped. The proposed neighborhood organizations are the key to this protection. By keeping the property owners interested and busy in the improvement and defense of neighborhood values, these newer areas can continue to be of good character for the life of the city.
Table Number 10

EXISTING USES FOUND IN PRESENT USE DISTRICTS
OF EXISTING ZONING ORDINANCE

Des Moines, Iowa

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