68TH CONGRESS } HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES { REPORT
2d Session } { No. 1499

CITY PLANNING COMMISSION FOR THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

FEBRUARY 16, 1925.—Committed to the Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union and ordered to be printed

Mr. ZIHLMAN, from the Committee on the District of Columbia, submitted the following

REPORT

[To accompany H. R. 12223]

The Committee on the District of Columbia, to whom was referred the bill (H. R. 12223) to create a Federal city planning commission, refer the same back to the House with the following amendment:

Page 2, section 2, line 20, after the word "other" and before the word "expenses," insert the word "necessary,"

with the recommendation that the amendment be agreed to and the bill as amended do pass.

Washington is unique among the capital cities of the world in that it was created especially to be a capital city. Athens, Rome, Paris, London became capitals by process of evolution, but the capital of the United States alone, by the wisdom of its founders, was laid down at the beginning, predestined, and planned with a vision so far ahead of time and events that a century elapsed before the greatness of the plan and its adequacy to the dignity of the Nation became apparent.

Difficulties have arisen, however, in the development and carrying out of the founders' and designers' great plan for the Nation's Capital, due to its being taken up detail by detail by detached groups without coordinating head and to the complications resulting from changing times and conditions, the motorization of traffic or the expansion of building methods, which even genius had no basis for anticipating. If these conditions had been before the original designer he would in all probability have met them as rationally as he met other problems, but, unfortunately, the development of the plan passed through the hands of many others who either lacked the vision and versatility of L'Enfant, or without reason projected the straight lines of his

AUTHENTICATED
U.S. GOVERNMENT
INFORMATION
GPO

down town, nonarterial streets over the picturesque and irregular suburban residential districts.

The Washington centennial celebration led to a revival of interest in the L'Enfant plan and produced another, the "Plan of 1901," which was excellent so far as it went, but was confined to the study of parks and public buildings alone, without touching streets, utilities, regulations, or any other element of modern city planning. This was followed by the creation of the Commission of Fine Arts, which also is limited to expressions of opinion on the merits of park and public building developments.

In all the time since the inception of the L'Enfant plan, there has been no return to the methods of Washington and Jefferson—the study of the Federal City as one great problem, and it has long been realized that the District of Columbia is without an adequate and comprehensive plan for the orderly physical development of the Nation's Capital.

The effectiveness of modern city planning comes from the coordination of the different factors in city development—the street system, the parks, playgrounds, school sites, zoning districts, bridge locations, and water-front improvements. If these elements are developed without proper correlation we have a scrambling, inconvenient, and poorly integrated city.

Washington was fortunate in having been established on the L'Enfant plan, but this original plan covered but about one-sixth of the area of the present District of Columbia.

The park plan of 1901 caused the revival of the L'Enfant plan, particularly as to the park system, but of 53 areas recommended at that time for acquisition as park sites but 6 have been acquired in the intervening 24 years.

During this period the population of the District of Columbia has doubled. It is reasonable to be anticipated that in the next 25 years the undeveloped area within the District of Columbia will be occupied. No one can observe the awkward and scrambling street system which is being extended over the hills surrounding the area covered by the L'Enfant plan without being impressed with the imperative need of an intelligent and rational scheme in conformity to which both public and private improvements in the District of Columbia and environs shall be projected and constructed. The highway system especially demands intelligent study. Motor traffic has brought new problems which must be solved.

The old highway plan is obsolete and the park plan has never been coordinated with an adequate highway plan. Many things have been done and are being done which are inconsistent with the accepted principles of modern city planning. Flagrant errors have been made which require correction. The Key Bridge, for example, projected and constructed without provisions for adequate approaches and connections. Other cities of less importance than the Capital of the country, are expending large sums to correct the mistakes of the past and to establish plans for potential improvements and development. The great Federal city established as the seat of government should become the most beautiful and well arranged capital in the world. The physical development and improvement of the city are under the direction of a number of distinct departments which pursue distinct policies. There is no planning commission to lay down prac

tical lines for orderly improvement, to prevent the overlapping of functions, and to forestall the recurrence of mistakes which have been made in the past because of lack of foresight and proper city planning.

It is especially urgent at this time to take measures to better adapt traffic ways to existing traffic requirements. Since the highway plan of the District was given technical attention great changes in traffic requirements and usages have taken place.

Frederick Law Olmstead, jr., who was retained to advise upon the highway plan for the District many years ago, makes this comment upon the problem as presently presented:

> Professional advice about highway plan alone given 30 years ago, even if it had been more influential in perfecting that plan at that time than actually happened, is no substitute for comprehensive planning to-day or coordinating highways, parks, zoning, and other elements of city and keeping the combination properly revised from decade to decade.

Conflicting and inconsistent schemes for the improvement of the District of Columbia are offered at each session of Congress. This session has brought forth suggestions to raise building heights and to lower them, to widen streets, to cut traffic arteries, and to convert parks into parking space for automobiles. A thoroughgoing physical examination is necessary before any intelligent or rational correction may be made. That is the function of the planning commission created by the bill. The commission will not interfere with existing agencies, but through interlocking memberships it proposes to examine each project in its relation to other projects and to general conditions, and to develop lines of activity in the order of their relative importance.

The country is in favor of the orderly and proper development of Washington as the seat of government. The societies representing the fine arts and municipal planning and engineering professions have been keenly alive to their responsibility for the future improvement and beautification of the Capital. Men of professional eminence have served without compensation as members of the Commission of Fine Arts, which advises the Government as to the location and acceptability of new public monuments and other structures for the embellishment of the city. The professional societies have worked consistently to stimulate public interest and to focus the attention of the country upon the possibilities for the improvement of the Capital, and we are assured that men of the highest technical attainments will be willing to serve upon the Federal city planning commission without compensation and as a matter of professional pride and patriotism.

The creation of the Federal city planning commission as proposed in the accompanying bill has the approval and support of the American Civic Association, the American Institute of Architects, the American Society of Landscape Architects, the City Planning Institute, and other distinguished groups and individuals throughout the country.

O