

COMPREHENSIVE DEVELOPMENT OF NATIONAL CAPITAL

FEBRUARY 5, 1926.—Committed to the Committee of the Whole House on the
state of the Union and ordered to be printed

Mr. GIBSON, from the Committee on the District of Columbia, sub-
mitted the following

REPORT

[To accompany H. R. 8830]

The Committee on the District of Columbia, to whom was referred the bill (H. R. 8830) amending the act entitled "An act providing for a comprehensive development of the park and playground system of the National Capital," approved June 6, 1924, having considered the same, report it to the House with the recommendation that it do pass.

The original plan of the Federal city, made by Major L'Enfant, an engineer officer of great ability, was made possible through the foresight of Washington and Jefferson. They wished to see on the banks of the Potomac the most beautiful and perfect capital city in the world, worthy in all respects of the growing American Republic.

By this plan the city was bounded by the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers and Florida Avenue, and included only a little less than one-fifth of the District of Columbia. It provided for a growth for 100 years, but the city has long since passed the old limits and is growing more rapidly than ever, spreading far beyond any limits within the dreams of its founders.

In 1901 the so-called McMillan Commission made an intensive study and an exhaustive report covering certain features of further development. The final report (S. Rept. No. 166, 57th Cong., 1st sess.) made many helpful recommendations, especially as to parks and parkways. At the last session of the Congress there was enacted legislation known as the comprehensive park bill, which created the National Capital Park Commission, for the acquirement of lands for parks. This was a great step in advance, but only one in the progress toward the ultimate goal.

There has been a growing conviction that the Federal city ought to have a permanent planning commission, clothed with sufficient

authority and made up so as to command the services of our best experts in city planning in order to give sure effect to the ideals of our people in respect to their national city. That is what this proposal seeks to accomplish. It is another step in orderly progress of development.

The duties outlined in the proposal may well be consolidated with those of the National Capital Park Commission, and save the creation of another commission. Then, too, it places upon the new body the duties heretofore exercised by the highway commission, which is abolished.

The bill provides for the preparation, development, and maintenance of a comprehensive and consistent plan for the city of Washington and its environs. It aims to obtain the maximum amount of cooperation and correlation of effort between all departments working to the common end.

It does away with the highway commission, made up of the Secretary of War, the Secretary of the Interior, and the Chief Engineer of the Army. All the duties of this commission may well be performed by the new organization. These duties are correlated with those of any body charged with city planning.

Planning for the Capital City presents many difficult problems which require in their solution the attention of the best minds of our experts. In the report of the Committee of One Hundred on the Federal City to the American Civic Association, the situation was stated as follows:

In some respects the problem of planning the Washington of the future is unlike the planning problem of any other American city. Washington, in the vision of our forefathers, was not to be a business city, nor an industrial city, nor a place for commerce, but the Federal city, the place of Government, and as such it was planned on a grand scale for that purpose. It is as the development of portions outside the original plan has proceeded, without adequate vision and foresight, that grave errors have been made, great opportunities neglected, and serious damage been done to the dignity, the effectiveness, and the usefulness of the Federal city.

NEED FOR A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Since the L'Enfant plan of 1791 there has been no comprehensive, coordinated, and consistent plan for the Federal City, which has now become a metropolis with an estimated population of half a million people. The L'Enfant plan covered only the area south of Florida Avenue. Many years ago the city spread beyond the old boundary street. The present highway plan may be considered in some respects to be an extension of the L'Enfant plan, but it hardly carries out the spirit of the original plan in the projection of straight street lines over hills and valleys.

The highway commission, operating under the acts of 1893, 1898, and 1913, the McMillan Park Commission of 1901, the National Commission of Fine Arts, created in 1910, the zoning commission created in 1920, the National Capital Park Commission created in 1924 to provide for the comprehensive, systematic, and continuous development of the park, parkway, and playground system of the National Capital and authority to acquire the areas needed for that purpose in the District and in Maryland and Virginia, and the Commissioners of the District of Columbia, have all contributed

within their powers and appropriations to secure improvements for the Capital City. The removal of the railway tracks from the Mall, the building of the great Union Station, the placing of the Lincoln, Grant, and Meade memorials in harmony with the revised plans for the Mall, are outstanding achievements. Park and parkway development is proceeding rapidly and capably through the new Park Commission. But important as these improvements have been and excellent as are the unrealized plans of the Commission of Fine Arts and other agencies, they constitute, after all, piecemeal projects. They fail to provide a comprehensive plan covering all features of city development. Experienced city planners agree that a comprehensive plan requires careful, prolonged study by technical men of all the elements which go to make the physical city. Therefore, the bill provides that the Capital Park and Planning Commission shall prepare such a comprehensive plan and make recommendations to the proper executive authorities as to all of these matters. This is the essence of modern city planning. Anything short of this—any limitation in subject-matter—would mean that the plan would fail to be comprehensive. If any such curtailment were permitted, expenditures might be authorized for specific projects which would meet the requirements in one subject but absolutely defeat the needs in another.

A comprehensive city plan is considered in modern cities to be the most important method of effecting economies. Only through the preparation and adoption of such a plan can the public officials make sure that the money which they spend annually on public improvements will be expended on projects which will not have to be destroyed before they wear out because they have been located without plan and with lack of foresight.

In the next 25 years the population of the District of Columbia may be expected to reach close to a million people. Many square miles of territory, both within the District and in the environs, will be occupied. It is imperative that a comprehensive plan be prepared and put into operation before streets are cut through, hills sliced off, and valleys filled.

FUNCTION AND POWERS

Mr. Frederick Law Olmsted, an eminent authority, has maintained that a plan commission should be a "permanent, central, coordinating" body, "free from the bias of special interest in any one particular kind of an improvement and free from the overwhelming pressure of the routine work of construction and administration." H. R. 5044 represents the combined judgment of the public officials consulted and the appointed representatives of the American Society of Civil Engineers, the American City Planning Institute, the American Institute of Architects, the American Society of Landscape Architects, the National Conference on City Planning, and the American Civic Association. The bill in the hearings was supported by the American Engineering Council, the citizens' associations, and several prominent citizens.

In the testimony offered Mr. George B. Ford, former president of the American City Planning Institute, stated that in his judgment a comprehensive plan should be binding. He thought the provision in the bill that the members of the commission "adhere in principle"

to the plan, perhaps, fell short of what was desirable, but that it was the very mildest form in which a plan could be made in the least binding. There seems to be no good reason why time and money should be spent on working out a comprehensive plan of Washington if it may be set aside in any or all of its particulars by the opposition of one of its constituent members.

The bill aims further to provide for a maximum cooperation and correlation of effort between the departments, bureaus and commissions of the Federal and District Government which have to do with the District of Columbia. Consolidated with the National Capital Park Commission, the abolition of the Highway Commission and the transfer of its duties to the National Capital Park and Planning Commission will make for correlation and should result in an economy of effort and expenditure.

PERSONNEL

A study of the composition of existing plan commissions in American cities discloses the fact that most of them are made up of from three to five administrative officials serving as ex officio members and from two to six or more eminent citizens. The bill, therefore, provides that the National Capital Park and Planning Commission shall be composed of the Engineer Commissioner of the District of Columbia, the Director of the National Park Service, the Director of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital, the chairmen of the Committees on the District of Columbia of the Senate and House of Representatives "and four eminent citizens, experienced in city planning, one of whom shall be a bona fide resident of the District of Columbia." The citizen members serve without compensation and the ex officio members without additional recompense.

STAFF

It is absolutely impossible to make the necessary preliminary studies and to prepare a comprehensive plan for the Federal city without an adequate technical staff working under a planner who gives his entire time to the work. The Engineer Commissioner of the District testified that the planning for the Federal city was falling further behind each year because of lack of funds and technical staff. He stated that he would welcome the facilities to be provided by this bill. In line with this practice, provision is made for a planning director. This is a position which Mr. Olmsted states "no one can properly perform unless he applies continuous, concentrated thought and attention to it for long periods at a time, undistracted by other duties."

H. R. 5044 SUPPORTED BY TECHNICAL GROUPS

The measure represents the best opinion of the civil engineers, architects, landscape architects, city planners, and lay supporters of planning in this country and is supported by such eminent authorities as Mr. Morris Knowles, chairman of the planning commission of Pittsburgh, chairman of the committee on the Federal City of the American Society of Engineers; Prof. C. M. Spofford, of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and member of the board of

directors of the American Society of Civil Engineers, Mr. George B. Ford, former president of the American City Planning Institute; Carl R. Parker, representing the American Society of Civil Engineers; Horace W. Peaselee, chairman of the Federal City Committee of the American Institute of Architects; Frederick Law Olmsted, William Adams Delano, Stephen T. Child, Milton B. Medary, and Edward H. Bennett, all eminent planners. Mr. Frederic A. Delano, president of the American Civic Association and chairman of the Washington Committee of One Hundred on the Federal City, who invited the technical groups to confer concerning the provisions of the bill, presented the draft as the work of the leading planners of the United States.



