Land use and resource planning

Notes for remarks by TOM KENT, Deputy Minister of Regional Economic Expansion, to the Canadian Institute of Forestry's 62nd Annual Meeting, Winnipeg, Manitoba, on 5 October 1970. (National Film Board photograph.)

As everyone now realises, thanks to all the concern about pollution, resource planning is crucial to the kind of future people are going to have, or not have.

Planning — land use planning or any other kind — is really just thinking ahead. It is trying to decide how we want our resources, in a broad sense, to be distributed. And that, in turn, forces us to try to see what end results we want from our resources.

I do not know who the first land use planner was. But I am willing to guess that he became one because he could see and feel — perhaps he could even smell and hear — the results of **not** planning.

Until very recently, land use planning was thought of in terms of physical problems. Which land was best suited to agriculture, which to forestry? Which was best for wheat, which for potatoes and which for tobacco? Where would irrigation make sense, where would it be a waste of water? Should a particular forest area be harvested, or left to mature?

The improvement in our ability to answer such questions has been very great. Land use planning has had a great deal to do with the advances in agricultural productivity. Our future forest wealth will be much greater because of the improved practices based on planning. No one knows how much better our cities will be because of the mistakes that land use planning has helped to prevent.

But the mistakes people see are the mistakes that remain, not those that have been avoided.

I want to suggest to you that, if we are going to make fewer mistakes in future, we have to recognise that we are currently experiencing a very fundamental shift in the requirements that land use planning has to meet.

It is a revolutionary change. I do not mean that it has sprung up from nowhere. But, to take an obvious parallel, an aircraft can build up speed from 400 to 500 to 600 mph, and nothing is very different. But at the point when it breaks the sound barrier, there is a fundamental change.

That is what has happened in our concern about the environment. Obviously, people always have had some concern. But lately it has been growing a great deal, and this has now reached the point of a dramatic shift of perspective with regard to environmental questions.

Even ten years ago, people occasionally talked about pollution but nobody paid much attention. Suddenly, you can hardly open a newspaper without finding something about pollution or ecological imbalance. Community groups to preserve the environment or to reclaim it have sprung up everywhere. The foulness of city air, of recreational waters, even of the oceans — these are common topics of conversation, in taverns as well as in classrooms.

Some people may say this is a fad, a temporary fashion. I do not think so. I suggest that there has been a basic change of perspective, and nothing is going to be the same again. The range of concerns to which land-use planning must respond is and will remain quite different, in scope and in emphasis, from the viewpoint of even a few years ago.

Until now, we have been primarily concerned about the best use of resources in order to meet an assumed goal of maximum productivity. Now we have to take a broader view of people's needs and wishes. If planning is looking ahead, it means looking ahead to what society is going to demand, not now or tomorrow, but ten and thirty years from now. That is what we must try to plan for.

Almost overnight, people have become much more concerned with their environment. Already they are demanding action on pollution from all levels of government. We must expect that the demand will broaden beyond the simple matter of pollution. It will become a much broader concern about the quality of our environment.

Well, what does this mean for land use and resource planning?

It offers a major opportunity to provide leadership in a new direction. Planners must foresee the new priorities and widen the scope of their enquiry and activity.

Increased production and maximum efficiency can no longer be the only goals of land use and resource planners. In many areas productivity may be sacrificed to higher priorities of clean water or recreational facilities. We have to fit productivity into the context of goals concerned with the quality of our environment, in the widest sense of the word.

Because different people and groups have different wants and needs, there always have to be choices about the proper allocation of our land resource. In the past, those who looked at land use in narrowly economic terms often won the day with little opposition. Now the opposition is growing. In the past, land was a factor of production. It still is, of course, but it is something more. "Land for production" must be thought of in the context of "land for living".

Let me elaborate.

Land as a factor of production has two aspects. It is a medium for producing certain things — potatoes and lumber and so on. Secondly, land has a spatial aspect, a real estate function in the productive process. It often derives most of its value from its location, not from its productive capacity as such.

Some trends in the use of land for production are clear. Our agricultural land base, measured in acres, is pretty certain to decline, for some time to come. Continued increases in output per acre and output per person will enable us to do more with less. On the other hand, more land will be used for forestry. This results from the combination of high world demand and a relatively slow rate of increase in output per acre. It means that areas once ignored will now be harvested. More use will be made, more productively, of small woodlots. Lands now used for marginal farming will probably be turned over to forest. Reforestation will become more and more the major interest of foresters.

Outside agriculture and forestry, the production of goods and services uses very little land. To get the most convenient bit is often worth a lot, per acre and even per square foot, to the producer. But

it is also now extremely important to the community that industrial and commercial uses of land should not spoil the environment. We must find better ways to get rid of wastes. Carelessness in the past has led to pollution of streams, to unsightly deposits, to devegetated areas. We must learn to avoid these problems. We must learn to reclaim the land that has been misused.

We must also bring the productive aspects of our "water lands", of our lakes and rivers and our continental shelf, within the scope of national and international planning. Obviously, the utilization of our "water lands" cannot be planned independently of planning for forestry and agriculture. Indeed, such things as fish "farms" and seaweed "farms" are with us now. Their widespread use may be just around the corner.

All of these concerns with land related to production will remain with us. They are not abolished by the shift in the emphasis of society from production to living. But they are put into a new context.

The living is going to continue to be more urban living. And as population becomes more concentrated, location, rather than usefulness as a medium for production, becomes a more and more important element in land values.

This is especially true in or near cities, but it also applies in growing small towns, resort areas and along major highways.

This means, necessarily, that communities will have to make increasing important decisions about the allocation of lands between the public and private sectors. We must develop balanced communities with land for industry, land for recreation, land for homes, and land for community uses. The steps we take now will largely affect the efficiency with which we can meet our future community needs, including the social and aesthetic aspects of those needs.

We must be aware that a city structure which emphasized satellite towns would be radically different from one which emphasized suburban areas or urban renewal. We must also be aware of the increasing problems arising from real estate speculation, which can create artificial demand and artificial shortages.

These are just some of the factors that are involved in our response to the growing concern about "land for living" — land not just as a financial factor or a productive factor but as a vital element in our quality of life and in our style of living.

In the recreational use of land, there are especially difficult choices to be made between the public and private sectors. It may be necessary to stop or reverse the trend to private cottages, to limit the number of such units in some areas. It will almost certainly be necessary to put more efforts into a system of public parks. And we must recognize that recreation is just as valid a use of forest land as is the production of paper or lumber.

There is nothing new in what I am saying. It has been creeping up on us for years. But the point is that it has gathered force. We have entered a new

era, in terms of the degree of concern of people about their environment.

The daily encroachment of organized society into what has always been considered wilderness ensures that no decision can be made in isolation. The combined impact of all the land use decisions made in places like Fort St. John, British Columbia, and O'Leary, Prince Edward Island, will undoubtedly be felt by — and may even be seen by — the citizens of Toronto.

But these examples, which I am sure do not surprise you, capture only a small part of what I mean by the phrase "land for living". We must now recognize, more than ever before, that decisions about how land will be used are really decisions about how society will function, about how people will live.

- A decision about a pipeline across the Tundra is a decision about how Canadian Eskimos will live.
- A decision about urban throughways is a choice between the spirit of Los Angeles and the spirit of Amsterdam.
- A decision to build satellite cities may well turn out to be a decision about our ultimate political structure and the way people participate in government.

What we see today as a concern about the problem of pollution is just the tip of the smoke stack. It is really a concern about the nature of the environment in its broadest sense. Pollution is just the most obvious part.

I do not, I am sure, need to remind you that half the population of Canada is under 25 years of age.

Their values are in many respects very different from the values of the older half.

The spirit of what I am trying to say is far better expressed in the folk singers of the new generation than it can be in any paper. In the words of a Joni Mitchell song:

They paved paradise
And put up a parking lot.

The concern of the new generation with styles of living, with the ways in which people relate to people, is what is implicit in our changed perceptions about the environment. To meet the needs that people are **going** to have, to develop the sort of society that will enlarge the spirit rather than crush it, our planning must look ahead in a way that has never before been dreamt of.

It must look in a new direction. It must plan our physical resources in relation to their impact on the social environment, the society that we are making.

This, of course, will not simplify life for those of us who are concerned in a day-to-day way with land use and resource allocation problems. But it will help us to avoid the isolation of the specialist.

The land use planner, I suggest, must establish closer links with the sociologist, the economist, the urban and recreational planner, to mention only the most obvious. The techniques of land use planning will have to be linked to those of other disciplines.

I suggest to you that this broadened perspective — this view of land as "land for living" — is essential. We should not fear it. We have to get with it.

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