

CROW-BOX5-31

[About 1970?]

A RENEWAL AUTHORITY ?

NOTES CONCERNING AN APPROACH TO SOME ASPECTS OF THE PROBLEM OF
INNER SUBURBAN PLANNING AND CONTAINING SUGGESTIONS FOR

1 PRINCIPLES FOR RENEWAL AND REDEVELOPMENT

2 ORGANISATIONAL CHANGES NECESSARY TO IMPLEMENT THESE

By: M. S. CROW

1. PRINCIPLES FOR RENEWAL AND REDEVELOPMENT

To determine the type of machinery desirable for a "Redevelopment Authority" which has been foreshadowed by the Minister of Housing, Mr. Meagher, it is first necessary to be clear about the objects of "redevelopment"

For example, to pose the problem in terms that redevelopment should be only for the benefit of the business interests in the "Golden Mile", or solely for the benefit of master-builders who specialise in large-scale flat construction, or for the conversion of large portions into car parks for terminals of radial freeways might be acceptable for the sectional interests concerned (and these interests may need consideration and integration into an over-all plan) but they would not constitute, by themselves, a proper approach to a policy for inner areas.

Still less, for example, should the problem be approached as one in the interests of this or that Government Department, instrumentality, or local Council, or as a problem to be restricted by this or that currently-existing financial arrangement, although existing authorities and finance too have to be taken into account.

The starting point surely can only be: what is in the "public interest"? The "criteria" or "quality of life" for Melbourne citizens themselves are the basis on which we must erect our planning policies. To improve these human standards should be the object.

For the inner areas it is convenient to divide this problem of deciding human needs into two sections:-

- (1) The functions of the inner areas that benefit the citizens of Melbourne as a whole.
- (2) The needs of those people who live or work in the inner areas.

Concerning (1) we will deal with three factors:

1 (a) All-Melbourne facilities.

The golden mile and the inner areas combined provide many outstanding facilities enjoyed not only by the people who live or work in these areas but by people from all over the metropolitan area and from the country side. These range from city shops, offices, theatres and halls to the M.C.G., the Flemington Race Course, The Botanic Gardens, the Cultural Centre, the Zoological Gardens, the Showgrounds and so on and with an expanding population we may need not less but more land for such-like purposes.

1 (b) Contain "the Sprawl".

The high social cost, especially to women, children and youth, as distinct from the high economic cost of Melbourne's low density "sprawl" means that higher density anywhere would assist to minimise this problem. High densities near the city are logical and desirable because of the high value of the land, the proximity to the "golden mile" and public transport to any part of the metropolis. Therefore, where there is any residential re-building in the inner areas it is reasonable to expect that the trend should be not to densities lower than they now are but to higher densities.

1 (c) Rapid Transport.

As Melbourne spreads ever further, despite higher densities, the ability of people to go from one part of it to another becomes more urgent. If the attempt to solve the acute problem of more and faster transport is to be made by a system of radial freeways, the inner areas will increasingly be carved up with car parks, ring roads, clover leaves and the freeways themselves. Even without a radial freeway system considerable improvement to the increasing parking problems in the inner areas will be necessary although the main way of relieving such pressure is a vastly improved public transport system.

These three considerations will not be dealt with in more detail here, because the more immediate interest of the moment is the fate of people who live or work in the inner areas, but it is quite important for these people to appreciate that the area they happen to live in or work in cannot be planned for their interest only, for that too would be to take a sectional attitude.

(2) Bearing in mind the above three all-Melbourne needs and turning to the needs of the people who live and work in the inner areas and without argumentation in this document we will openly state our "criteria" or "value-judgements" of human needs on which we believe any planning should proceed with the following set of propositions:-

(1) The identity of people with the "community fabric" in which they exist is a precious matter and this should not be arbitrarily disturbed. (This is an important matter especially for elderly people and for migrant communities).

(2) "Income ghettos" or "social ghettos" should not be created e.g. very large estates exclusively for deserted wives, or other low income groups, or exclusively for professional people or exclusively for elderly people etc. nor should there be "better suburbs" and "second-class suburbs" created in the inner areas.

(3) Where there are areas of sound older buildings reflecting the character of an earlier environment, these entire areas should be left intact as a link with our history and for aesthetic reasons.

(4) Where residential re-building is done, the density should be as high as possible consistent with acceptable standards of amenities.

(5) The higher the density, the greater the need for and the possibility of local social facilities and services of all types, e.g. child minding centres, playgrounds, daily needs shops, clinics, libraries and youth centres throughout the whole inner areas and the more all-Melbourne social facilities for all of which the inner areas should be comprehensively planned, the plans to include comprehensive landscaping.

(6) Road networks and car parks should not be allowed to make life a misery for people.

(7) The right of individuals or smaller concerns to build homes or factories to their chosen design should be safeguarded for certain areas.

Using the above seven criteria, we advance the following basic planning concepts

(A) Three Residential Zones

1. Preservation Zones. Hundreds of acres such as Parkville, parts of Carlton, East Melbourne, St. Vincent's Place, South Melbourne and dozens of other big and small locations where there are reasonably sizable groups of basically well constructed terraces, row houses, apartment and other medium-density homes built last century should be classified as preservation zones. The technique of renewal in these zones should be to preserve the external form of the buildings, advancing finance, if necessary, for renovation and adaptation of the interiors to modern standards. Particular buildings within such areas that become uninhabitable could be demolished and re-built, but any new buildings would have to be aesthetically "in sympathy" with the general environmental character of the area.

Apart from such exceptions it would be prohibited to demolish a building in the preservation zone, Design-control consultative committees consisting of architects, National Trust nominees, local associations and other experts would be needed to advise regarding the administration of such zones. Because of the pace of change in the inner areas, it is urgent that such preservation zones be delineated immediately.

2. Redevelopment Zones. Hundreds of acres of new housing is also needed by low income families desperately in need of it. Hundreds of acres of new units are sought by single people, by middle income groups, by professionals and academics, by young married couples and by many people whose jobs are in the inner areas. Up to date, both of these needs have been met to some extent by the Housing Commission or by master builders buying land from the Housing Commission, but only at the cost of acquiring residential areas and completely disrupting the community fabric by the virtual expulsion of all affected citizens from the area and from associations of their choice. Also what has been offered in return is either (a) a high-rise Commission flat in another suburb, or (b) a Commission house in an outer suburb or even in the country.

High density residential buildings can be developed in the inner areas without disrupting the community fabric and without offering high-rise flats as the only alternative in the inner areas.

These are the techniques which need to be employed:

Non-residential land should be publicly acquired, in the first instance, from sources such as the following:-

- (i) "Slum" factories or factories whose uses are historically obsolete.
- (ii) Local municipal council "yards" which should be amalgamated and shifted further out.
- (iii) Unfavourably-sited park land (to be compensated by equal areas of park lands more favourably sited).
- (iiii) Gasometers after the introduction of natural gas.

On such land a variety of medium to high density housing should be erected including courtyard housing, terrace housing, "town houses", walk-up flats and elevator flats (including high-rise). These should be so planned as to separate

vehicular and pedestrian traffic, landscaped and with shops and social amenities as above. Such buildings to be of a standard that makes no distinction between "poorer class" or "better class" accommodation.

Approach should be made then to the nearby residents of houses which have reached the end of their economic life, or nearly so, with an offer to shift a few hundred yards and in groups, if they wish, selecting the new accommodation of their choice. Social workers, welfare workers, Churches and citizens associations would be involved in pre-discussion planning of such projects at the design stage and right through to ultimate acquisition and shifting so that a maximum degree of preservation of the existing social fabric could be retained.

Clearing and redevelopment of the area then vacated could enable this process of building before acquisition to proceed with the minimum of disturbance to the community fabric. Wholesale demolition and scattering of residents could thus be avoided, yet, because of the higher densities extra people could be brought into the area.

3. "Spot" Development Zones.

A third type of zone, in character suitable neither for wholesale preservation nor wholesale clearance, is that which contains a mixture of sound buildings with others that are at or near the end of their economic life.

In such zones, re-building would not be subject to design control as in the preservation zones or comprehensively re-built over wide areas as in the redevelopment zones, but "spot development" would be encouraged but not compelled. A combination of the techniques in other zones might here be appropriate e.g. finance for renovations of sound older buildings where judged worthwhile and subsidy by way of cheaper price for land for new "spot development" as with the master builders. Groups of residents, if they wished should be assisted to form co-operatives for the purpose of re-building to their own design and financial assistance adapted to this form of development provided. However, density controls for such a zone would ensure higher minimum densities so that gradual average density of such areas would slowly increase.

(B) Car Control

The problem of the pressure of car congestion and car parks on the inner areas will increase in severity unless controlled and will inevitably play such a dominating role in the inner areas whether they are planned comprehensively or not, that it is unwise to omit them at this stage from consideration, even though the burning issue at the moment appears to centre around housing.

Without space for argument or explanation here, two principles are baldly stated:

1) Radial freeways converging on the city will tend to bring "blight" to large areas and should be avoided. Attention should be concentrated on updating and improving public transport systems instead.

2) Undergrounding in car basements over all big estates in the "redevelopment zones", provision for off-street parking for all re-building in the "spot Development" zones and a miscellaneous increase in on-street parking facilities in all zones by judicious creations of one-way or dead-end streets to enable angle parking would provide parking space. In preservation zones it may be possible in some places to create landscaped utility courtyards by combining back lanes with prudently chosen spaces from long back-yards.

(C) Social Amenities and Recreational Facilities

None of these items will be dealt with here except to point out that higher densities both for factories in factory zones and for shops and offices in commercial zones, as well as for homes in residential zones, can provide economically and on a pedestrian scale in many cases local, social amenities and cultural and recreational facilities that are difficult or impossible in the suburbs, or even in the traditional densities of the inner areas. These must be preplanned in the comprehensive replanning of the inner areas or the opportunity will be lost.

2. ORGANISATIONAL CHANGES TO IMPLEMENT PRINCIPLES

(Proposals for a Renewal Authority)

If some set of principles such as the above (or any other set of principles that are at all adequate to meet the situation) are to be adopted, they can no longer be effected through a system of regulations such as the Uniform Building Regulations, combined with a system of zoning such as that in the Metropolitan "master plan". Although the proposed M.M.B.W. "Residential Planning Standards" would modify both and this would bring welcome reform to the relationship between buildings, siting, daylighting, set-back and the like, they are inadequate for the task of the inner areas.

Comprehensive inner-area planning is one of the most complex, delicate and exacting functions.

Although many skills will be involved in the total process, those of planning and sociology appear to be the key skills required for the outline plans with close co-operation of landscape architects, architects and social workers in the design phase.

It is not that accountants, builders, engineers, traffic experts, economists, valuers, solicitors, publicists and administrators are not necessary. Such persons however cannot be expected to have the skills required for planning so many changes which should be so sensitively integrated in a style which also involves public participation in the planning process both at the creative conceptual and design phases.

The very nature of the desired changes are such that without public participation any programs attempted will create more and more resentment and accumulate problems to the point of ultimate failure.

Incidentally, the term "renewal authority" might be better than "redevelopment authority", because the word "redevelopment" in Melbourne has tended to be associated in people's minds with widescale acquisition of homes and complete re-building projects, whereas "renewal" could be used to cover the idea of renovation as well as re-building in various different ways.

The proposed "Renewal Authority" therefore should, it is suggested, be led by a top-level planner and sociologist, assisted by a highly-skilled landscape architect, architect and social worker and every one of the team need to be dedicated to the sort of criteria and principles of renewal outlined.

On the other hand, the "Renewal Authority" although given a completely separate identity should be set up as a separate Division of the M.M.B.W. This is important because the M.M.B.W. has the responsibility already of the over-all planning of the metropolitan area, the zoning, the residential standards (to be) and the main road system. It has a team of planners and the closest inter-planning between the inner areas as a whole and the balance of the metropolitan area is inevitable.

Ultimate political responsibility for the expression of public opinion then would reside in the local Councils which are represented on the Board, although the appropriate expertise and the guidelines as above should be established by the Government through the Minister for Local Government.

The Renewal Authority would be assisted both by a team of other experts such as those listed above and by consultation with representative citizens' organisations and the Municipal Councils in the various areas.

It is noted that the Report on "The Community and Welfare Facilities in Fitzroy" advocate that "opportunities ought to be regularly given for local citizens' groups to make effective comment on the progress of plans which need to be presented to them in such a way that they can easily see all the implications of the various phases of the plan" (page 39). This type of activity in this style is quite correct. It is precisely why, of all experts, a combination of a planner and a sociologist are the key for such a scheme.

The need for "two way consultation co-ordination and co-operation between those responsible for the various functions" listed by the Report on Page 39 is certainly also vital. It is, in fact, the particular skill and training of the planner to co-ordinate all the agencies and services mentioned and this he cannot do without the two way consultation and co-operative action. As some of the agencies and services mentioned in the report have a distinctly social rather than "physical" character (health, education, sociology, social welfare etc.) a planner closely assisted by a sociologist would be the best top co-ordinator of such a list of items. Perhaps special powers could be given the Renewal Authority to require such organisational co-ordination of different agencies at local level as is suggested.

However, when the Report mentions the necessity for the involvement of the various groups at central government level, it may have overlooked the recent formation of the State Planning Council which is charged with co-ordination of quite a few of the functions listed. Maybe the composition or functions of the State Planning Council could be or should be modified somewhat, but there should not be another co-ordinating authority duplicating this responsibility at central government level which largely overlaps that of the State Planning Council.

What should be the relationship between the Renewal Authority and other existing authorities?

There is not a single existing authority that does not need a radical expansion of its functions and finance to cope with the expansion of population and the improvement to the quality of life required for the inner areas.

The Housing Commission, for example, which has never yet been equipped with sufficient funds to meet the demand for low cost housing needs a charter which will enable an expansion of its activities and improvement in the range and quality of design and construction with much more emphasis too on experimentation

The local Councils will have tremendous responsibilities in tailoring the social facilities to the particular shape and size of the many different types of nationalities and occupational strata in the inner areas.

Neither the Housing Commission, the Local Councils, the M.M.B.W., the Town and Country Planning Board (which has an overall co-ordinating "frame-work" planning responsibilities for the whole State) nor any other authority should be regarded as a "rival claimant". All have plenty to do and should start work right now, each on his own particular aspect of the many-sided problems.

The "Renewal Authority" must be an authority operating according to some of the best criteria we are capable of formulating. These criteria must be openly disclosed to the public and those highly trained experts deliberately selected who alone are capable of evolving and implementing plans to meet these criteria, must be found and given sufficient weight within the new organisation to permit their ideas to win public acceptance and overcome the inertia of traditions that arose from different problems in different periods.

There is room in the inner suburbs for many different types of people to live in many different styles according to taste. Those who want to live in terrace or row houses should have the opportunity to do so, as should those who prefer modern court-yard houses, walk up flats or those who prefer high rise towers.

The whole of inner Melbourne is not worth preserving any more than the whole is deserving of destruction. It would not be in anyone's interests, least of all those who live there, if the residents were to form up into two hostile camps, each seeking some rival "authority" to champion and each intent on political manoeuvre to overcome other members of the community who happen to have different personal residential tastes.

The adoption of coherent, humane and yet flexible planning principles solidly grounded in public opinion can overcome the apparent contradictions. It is best for the residents and all others interested to support some scheme of an all-inclusive plan (some aspects of which have been suggested) and insist that all tiers of Government - Local Government, the second-tier M.M.B.W. and the State Government - co-operate with each other and with all the various agencies and peoples' organisations at different levels to achieve it.