1931

Historical Sketch and Brief Resume of the City Plan of Jacksonville

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HISTORICAL SKETCH AND BRIEF RESUMÉ
OF THE
CITY PLAN
OF
JACKSONVILLE

1931

Prepared by
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Mem. Am. Soc. C. E.
JACKSONVILLE - FLORIDA
"The enormous losses in human happiness and in money which have resulted from lack of city plans which take into account the conditions of modern life, need little proof. The lack of adequate open spaces, of playgrounds and parks, the congestion of streets, the misery of tenement life and its repercussions upon each new generation are an untold charge against our American life. Our cities do not produce their full contribution to the sinews of American life and national character. The moral and social issues can only be solved by a new conception of city building."

—President Hoover

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Members of the City Commission and the City Council that Adopted the City Plan as the Official City Plan of Jacksonville

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STALL, W. A.
INTRODUCTORY

"Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir men's blood and probably themselves will not be recognized. Make big plans; aim high in hope and work, remembering that a noble, logical diagram once recorded will never die, but long after we are gone will be a living thing, asserting itself with ever-growing insistency. Remember that our sons and grandsons are going to do things that would stagger us. Let your watchword be Order and your beacon Beauty."

—Daniel H. Burnham, "Father" of the Plan of Chicago.

To make our city a more delightful convenient, efficient and happier place in which to live, work and play is one of the primary objectives of the City Plan. As conceived by the City Planning Advisory Board, City Planning does not constitute merely the elaborate, impractical dreams or visions of the irrational or idle dreamer, but instead it comprehends the suggestions, visions and plans for the well balanced future city as dictated and revealed by and after prolonged, exhaustive field research and an intensive study into every phase of the city's life. City Planning, among other things, reveals the soul and heart of the city.

As interpreted in Jacksonville, City Planning seeks to develop the most practical, useful and efficient city based on a scientific study of the growing and changing demands of a rapidly growing community. While visions, predictions and dreams play an important role in any planning program, they appear as such only now; within the span of a few years the seemingly fanciful schemes and visionary ideas we are prone to ridicule and condemn as dreams today will become the rigid, cold realities of the future.

To coordinate the physical factors of the city—its transportation facilities, its facilities and advantages for industrial advancement, its housing accommodations and its opportunities for the fullest enjoyment of essential recreational privileges—so that the city as a wholesome, well balanced unit will function more perfectly and advantageously and thereby become a smooth operating machine is a purpose of the City Plan. Stated briefly, it is to take cognizance and advantage of those conditions which will enhance the city's opportunity for more prosperity, better health and a richer happiness.

The benefits to be derived from the gradual execution and realization of a City Plan do not end with the mere achievement of physical improvements to the city. They extend to the creation of an aggressive, enlivened and impassioned civic pride to stimulate ambition and urge serious effort which, when crystallized to an appreciable degree and properly directed, will give to the city a character and dignity outstanding and unique among the cities of the world. It is such noble work that imparts to a city that indefinable quality lately designated as a city's Personality. The distinctive city has a lasting appeal.

It is impossible to focus one's faith and interest on the visionless, purposeless city drifting as a rudderless ship, one whose citizens are constantly wearing blue glasses, who are so shortsighted and selfish that they can see only the petty, small details of our present day. Such a citizenry, obsessed with selfishness, cannot prosper. But what joy and happiness abound in, what enriched spirit and enthusiasm emanates from the broadened perspective, from that vision and determination to look beyond the present day and strive to achieve magnificent results for our city! It is such stuff of which real cities are made. And as the late George Kessler, one of the nation's foremost planning engineers, told the people of Dallas, Texas, in 1910:

"There is not a single thing in this city that you need that you cannot do if you make up your minds that you need it and will have it; you will never establish a city under the feeling that you cannot do things. A way will come and if your present laws stand in the way, secure the best lawyers and get them busy devising new laws that will meet the situation."

City Planning, as the City Planner has endeavored to conceive it, seeks to create that
MEMBERS OF CITY PLANNING ADVISORY BOARD

new vision, that widened horizon, as a stimulating incentive to a grand united effort. It shuns partisanship, selfish motives and in its development aims to favor all sections and peoples alike. As Macdonnell, the English Planning authority, has said:

“This is the age of cities, and the world is city building. In a dim sort of way many persons understand that the time has come when art and skill and foresight should control what so far has been left to chance to work out; that there should be a more orderly conception of civic action; that there is a real art of city making; and that it behooves this generation to master and practice it.”

Such a motive has inspired the Planner.

The Spirit of the Forefathers

The courage and faith of Jacksonville’s early settlers is inspiring and commendable but even they could not foresee here on the banks of the river St. Johns the busy metropolis of today or perchance they would have exercised the same vision and wisdom respecting our present city as they did in defining streets seventy feet wide in their initial plat of Jacksonville as suggested by I. D. Hart. Those forefathers eagerly prepared in a determined way for a busy, important city but unfortunately they could not anticipate the feverish, speedy electro-mechanical age of this generation.

HISTORICAL

Jacksonville Chapter, American Association of Engineers

City Planning is not new to Jacksonville. During 1921 the Jacksonville Chapter of the American Association of Engineers devoted itself to a study of City Planning as one of its objectives and at a joint meeting with the Civic Affairs Committee of the Jacksonville Chamber of Commerce in 1923 it was the Chapter’s resolution, accepted by the Chamber’s committee, that requested the Honorable Mayor John T. Alsop, Jr., to name a City Planning Committee. The mayor accordingly, on October 25, 1923, named the following as members of a City Planning Committee: H. C. Avery, E. J. L’Engle, F. O. Miller, F. P. Dearing, G. W. Simons, Jr., C. Buckman, J. C. Cooper, Jr., J. S. Bond and J. L. Irwin, which group subsequently organized with Frank P. Dearing, a member of the present City Planning Advisory Board, as Chairman, and George W. Simons, Jr., present City Planner, as its Secretary. Due to the pressure of civic activities Mr. Dearing resigned as chairman during 1925, being succeeded by Mr. Allen Albert, then a resident of Jacksonville. This City Planning Committee met regularly under Mr. Dearing’s guidance but was unable to make much progress. With Mr. Albert’s departure from the city, the committee disbanded.

Federated Circles of the Garden Club of Jacksonville

During 1926, the Governing Board of the Federated Circles of Garden Clubs of Jacksonville became vitally interested in City Planning and civic improvement and Mrs. George W. Trout, President, now Chairman of the City Planning Advisory Board, appointed a committee to investigate its possibilities and bring it to the attention of the City Commission. Mrs. Arthur Gerrish Cummer, a member of the present City Planning Advisory Board, was Chairman of this Special Garden Club Committee, whose report was accepted by the Governing Board and subsequently on June 28, 1926, presented to the City Commission. A copy of this formal presentation by the Garden Clubs to the City Commission follows:

Jacksonville, Florida,
June 28th, 1926.

Mr. Frank H. Owen, Chairman,
Members of the City Commission.

Dear Sirs:

Realizing the responsibility which rests upon your body in anticipating and providing for the many and diversified needs of our city, and the fact that its rapid and unprecedented growth has
brought about many conditions that have made it difficult, at times, to meet and satisfy the demands of the various classes of your citizens, The Garden Club of Jacksonville, Florida, wishes to assure you of their desire and willingness to cooperate along every possible line.

Believing, however, so fully that there should be some coordination between the city commercial and the city beautiful, they want to go on record as opposed to the needless mutilation and destruction of trees; to the damaging of homes, churches, and other surrounding properties through the injudicious and indiscriminate location of the far too numerous small stores and filling stations; and also to the granting of permits for the erection of tall apartment buildings within the purely residential sections of the city.

Furthermore, they would like to make the following recommendations for your careful consideration, viz:

(a) That an expert should be employed, whose special business it should be, to supervise the trimming of all the trees and shrubs belonging to the city—likewise to see that new trees should replace all those that have been necessarily removed.

(b) That in widening any streets, and in the carrying out of all municipal improvements, trees should be preserved wherever it is at all feasible, even though at some additional expense to the city.

(c) That in order to avoid the use of unsightly poles and to make an end to the mutilation of the trees, it should be the policy of the city to install conduits for a complete underground wiring system, whenever new pavements are laid or any streets are widened.

(d) That in as much as it has been the experience of numerous American cities, that in order to bring about the greatest benefit to their municipalities, they have found it to be essential to follow out a comprehensive plan of city development—a condition which even our great metropolis of New York is now facing—the City of Jacksonville should take steps immediately toward the consummation of some such carefully thought-out system of procedure.

Once more asserting our earnest interest and willingness to be of service to our city, and with a feeling that because of the almost daily changes, there is need for prompt action in regard to these civic problems, we remain,

Your very sincerely,

THE GARDEN CLUB OF JACKSONVILLE,
FLORIDA,

MRS. ARTHUR G. CUMMER,
MISS LILLA WHITE,
MRS. M. FLEISHIEL,
MRS. B. L. ARMS,
Special Committee.

Following this presentation to the City Commission, City Planning as a primary objective of the organized Garden Clubs of Jacksonville under the leadership of Mrs. Trout was adopted and henceforth the several units of the Federated Circles assumed the happy task and great responsibility of stimulating an interest in city planning and inspiring a more favorable demand and enthusiasm for it.

Men’s Advisory Board

“In the summer of 1925 the realization came that the work of the Garden Club to be effective in a large sense must be supplemented by the advice and counsel of a men’s advisory committee.

The question was considered by the Governing Board and it was voted to have such a committee composed of representatives from the men’s leading civic organizations— provided these organizations desired to cooperate. A letter was written by your president to each of the presidents of the various men’s clubs and without an exception each president responded by appointing a member of his organization to serve on the Men’s Advisory Committee of the Garden Club of Jacksonville.

The Mayor, the Hon. John T. Alsop, Jr., has been an honorary member of that committee since the beginning and has attested his interest in the work by attending every one of the meetings. As a result of these meetings the Rotary Club, through its representative, Mr. Millar Wilson, invited the members of the Governing Board of the Garden Club to one of its luncheons on Tuesday, Dec. 7, 1926. The program of the day was devoted to the presentation of Garden Club plans and ideals.

—(From Annual Report—Mrs. Trout’s, 1927.)

The foregoing excerpt from Mrs. Trout’s annual report relates the manner in which the Men’s Advisory Board to the Governing Board of the Federated Circles of Garden Clubs of Jacksonville was conceived and formed.

During 1926, at a luncheon in the Mason Hotel, the Men’s Advisory Board was informed of the objective being initiated by the Garden Clubs and each member was urged to encourage the cooperation and interest of his organization in furthering this task for the benefit of Jacksonville.

Throughout Mrs. Trout’s active administration the positive, aggressive fundamental work of City Plan education was advanced to such an extent that during the summer of 1927 the objective adopted earlier was rapidly being realized. That the ladies of the many Garden Clubs took their respective tasks seriously and with a determination to succeed is reflected clearly in the following excerpt from Mrs. Trout’s annual report for 1927:

“There has been a steady and remarkable change for the better in the appearance of our city. All realize, however, that to make our slogan—Jacksonville an Evergreen City—come true, the work of city beautification must be systematized. There should be a definite, well thought-out city plan, supplemented by wise zoning ordinances for the protection of property holders. It is earnestly recommended that every Circle devote at least one program to a study of city planning and city zoning.”

In 1927, Mrs. John T. Alsop, Jr., succeeded Mrs. Trout to the Presidency of the Federated Circles of Garden Clubs of Jacksonville and
with enthusiasm and interest she actively continued and supplemented the work so well organized and ably initiated by Mrs. Trout and aggressively executed City Planning as the primary, outstanding objective of her administration. The persistent, continual efforts of the Garden Clubs culminated to a successful conclusion when the City Council, during 1927, made provisions in its budget to make certain that planning activities would actually start during 1928.

City Planning Advisory Board

During the early part of 1928, when it became known universally that Jacksonville was about to initiate planning activities, the City Commission was besieged by applicants to make the fundamental planning studies. In order to refer the applicants to some unbiased, independent non-political group for review and subsequent recommendation, the City Commission during January, 1928, created the present City Planning Advisory Board at the suggestion of Mr. T. C. Imeson, then chairman of the Commission. Representatives of twenty-one civic organizations, selected by their respective organizations at the request of the City Commission, were assembled by Commissioner Imeson who explained that the City Commission was very desirous of having this informal group of representative citizens organize to assist the Commission in initiating City Planning. Subsequently this informal group organized themselves into the City Planning Advisory Board with Mrs. George W. Trout as chairman, Mr. T. B. Hamby as vice-chairman, and Mr. M. C. Greeley as secretary.

The first task confronting this newly organized Board was that of selecting and recommending to the City Commission a Planning Engineer or City Planner. After reviewing the credentials and qualifications of more than twenty candidates and interviewing many, the City Planning Advisory Board unanimously chose and recommended George W. Simons, Jr., of Jacksonville, as City Plan Engineer.

Financial Difficulties

No sooner had the City Planning Advisory Board recommended a City Planner to the City Commission than the latter learned that after certain general eliminations from the budget by the Council there remained insufficient funds with which to initiate planning. With their usual alertness and persistency, assisted by Mayor Alsop, the ladies of the Garden Clubs soon had sufficient funds allocated to the City Plan account to enable the City Commission to execute a formal contract with Mr. Simons on May 7, 1928.

Planning Board Operations

From January, 1928, until July, 1930, the City Planning Advisory Board held regular monthly meetings and frequently they were obliged to call and deliberate in special session. Monthly conferences were held with the City Planner who would relate progress on the plan and submit matters of importance for advice and guidance. And as the work progressed both the City Commission and Council would frequently refer problems confronting them to the Planning Board for advice and recommendation, so by degrees the City Planning Advisory Board became an important and valuable adjunct of the city governing bodies.

Adoption of the City Plan

From May, 1928, to October, 1929, the numerous intensive planning studies were being carried on, field facts were collected, many maps prepared, and the final report made, all of which are related specifically in the detailed report submitted to the City Commission. During the final stages of the planning work the City Planning Advisory Board met in several continuous sessions to hear the various details of the plan disclosed and described, thereafter approving the work as prepared and submitted. On September 20, 1929, the City Planning Advisory Board adopted the following resolution:

"WHEREAS, Mr. George W. Simons, Jr., City Plan Engineer, has this 20th day of September, 1929, outlined to the City Planning Advisory Board, the principal features of the City Plan for Jacksonville, Florida, as so far developed by him and as to be presented to the City Commission in the near future, and

WHEREAS, the Board has been most favorably impressed by the thoroughness of the studies, by the logical consideration of the various problems involved, by the excellent form of the data and exhibits prepared, and by the continued value to the future development of our City which should come through this work, now therefore be it,

RESOLVED, by the City Planning Advisory Board that Mr. George W. Simons, Jr., City Plan Engineer be, and he is hereby heartily commended for the high excellence of his services as rendered."
This is a true copy taken from the minutes of the City Planning Advisory Board dated September 20, 1929.

MELLEN C. GREELEY,
Secretary.

On October 1st and October 3rd, 1929, the City Planning Advisory Board and City Commission in joint session heard the many details of the City Plan explained by the City Planner and on the latter date adopted the plan officially.

On November 12, 1929, the City Plan was presented in detail to the City Council, after which the following resolution was adopted by this body:

From the records of the City Council Session November 12, 1929. Resolution introduced by Councilmen Merrill, Rogers, and Rutherford:

BE IT RESOLVED by the City Council that the plan for the City of Jacksonville, prepared by George W. Simons, City Planner, and the Planning Board, submitted to the City Council tonight, be accepted and the same is hereby adopted as the City Plan for Jacksonville.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that zoning, fire and similar ordinance hereinafter prepared be formulated with a view to following this plan wherever possible.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the thanks and appreciation of the City Council be extended to the said George W. Simons and to the members of the Planning Board for their untiring efforts in giving to Jacksonville this comprehensive plan for our City.

Councilman Rogers moved that the resolution be adopted. The motion was carried. (Attest): R. T. SMOTHERMAN, Recorder.

During 1930, after the adoption of the comprehensive plan by the City Commission and Council, the City Attorney commenced to compile the new zoning ordinance in conformity with the findings of the plan. During September, 1930, the new zoning ordinance was adopted by the Council, concurred in by the City Commission and approved by the Mayor. The following letter and resolution recount the incidents affirming the new zoning measure:

September 11, 1930.

Hon. R. T. Smootherman,
City Recorder,
Jacksonville, Florida.

Dear Sir:

Ordinance No. U-125, Bill No. U-163, entitled "AN ORDINANCE ADOPTING a Comprehensive Plan for the Zoning of the City of Jacksonville for the Purpose of Regulating the Location of Trades, Industries, Apartment Houses, Dwelling and Other Structures and Other uses of Property; Providing Rules, Regulations and Requirements Relative to the Erection of Buildings and Uses of Property in each of said Zones; Providing for the Administering and Enforcing of the Same; and Providing Penalties for the Violation of the Several Provisions Hereof," passed by the City Council September 9th, 1930, and approved by the Mayor September 10, 1930, was approved, concurred in and ratified by unanimous vote of the City Commission at the regular weekly meeting held yesterday afternoon.

The ordinance is returned herewith so that it may be published and become a law.

Enclosed find two certified copies of the resolution adopted by the City Commission concurring in, ratifying and approving said Ordinance U-125.

Respectfully,

M. W. BISHOP,
Secretary City Commission.

RESOLUTION.

WHEREAS, the City Commission of the City of Jacksonville on the 16th day of July, 1930, submitted to the Mayor and City Council of the City of Jacksonville a comprehensive zoning plan for the zoning of the City of Jacksonville, together with proposed ordinance pertaining thereto, and

WHEREAS, the City Council on the 9th day of September, 1930, adopted said comprehensive zoning plan and proposed ordinance with certain amendments, differences or departures from the plan submitted by the City Commission, namely, Ordinance No. U-125, and

WHEREAS, the City Commission has considered said amendments, differences and departures from the said original plan certified by it to the Mayor and City Council,

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, by the City Commission of the City of Jacksonville, that all violations, differences, departures or amendments from or to the comprehensive zoning plan herefore submitted by the City Commission to the Mayor and City Council on the 16th day of July, 1930, and all violations, differences, departures and amendments to the ordinance also then submitted by the City Commission to the Mayor and City Council of the City of Jacksonville, pertaining to said comprehensive zoning plan, and enacted an Ordinance No. U-125, be, and the same are, hereby concurred in, ratified and approved.

(Attest): W. M. BISHOP,
A TRUE COPY. Secretary, City Commission.

Jacksonville Newspapers

No commentary on the City Plan of Jacksonville would be complete without deserving and proper tribute to the press of Jacksonville, particularly to the Florida Times-Union and the Jacksonville Journal. At no time have these papers failed to devote adequate space and timely discussion to the various features advocated by the City Plan and to them thanks are due.
Scope of Plan

Contrary to a popular prevailing misconception that it relates solely to beautification, city planning applies more particularly to the utilitarian and practical. To possess charm, to radiate beauty, to fascinate and impart a distinctive personality a structure must be symmetrical in form, well balanced and constructed around a framework possessing a strength and arrangement commensurate with its needs. To achieve practical and reasonable results extensive study and investigation should be supplemented by intensive research and field observation.

Throughout the numerous studies incident to the plan the practical aspects of the problem have been predominant; an earnest effort has been made to avoid elaborate or impractical schemes too expensive or remote of realization. Wherever possible, existing physical structures or frameworks are utilized, strengthening or expanding here and there as studies indicate advisable; for example, instead of advocating superhighways of enormous width entailing the purchases of extensive properties it has seemed advisable to stress and urge the use of existing and adjacent parallel streets and in suggesting a future street widening program for realization during the next thirty to fifty years a definite policy of now establishing setback or future street lines is recommended. In other words, the utilitarian and practical have been sought rather than purely the idealistic or aesthetic, it being the planner's belief that the latter will automatically follow a consistent, honest effort to execute the suggestions submitted.

Naturally, in the formulation of a comprehensive plan of wide scope incorporating a great number of subjects, some recommendations of a seemingly elaborate character will result, elaborate only in popular conception because sufficient foresight and vision was not exercised years ago in providing for the same improvements. And further, recommendations of this character are not necessarily for the immediate time but rather for consideration when the demand is greater, minds clearer and the financial realization more promising. This brief explanation is made to offset any criticism or ridicule by those motivated and inspired largely by selfish ideas, who for the accomplishment of their own particular plans would sacrifice the entire plan and urge widespread scrapping and in lieu thereof a substitution of their own pet schemes.

A City Plan is never finished; the physical structure of the city is constantly changing and the plan to be a most serviceable instrument for the public good should be kept up to date. The fundamental conceptions and ideas of the planner are subject to change. To be a virile active force in the community the plan should be kept fresh and up to date.

The comprehensive city plan as studied, developed and presented for Jacksonville considers and contemplates the following subjects: (a) Major Street Plan, with detailed discussion of rectification of street system, street widenings, street pavement, etc., (b) Traffic movements, control and parking, with discussion of street uses, street signs, directional guides, (c) Parks and Parkways, with discussion of park administration and means of park land acquisition, (d) Recreational Facilities and Needs, with discussion of administration, (e) Zoning; review of present ordinance with suggested changes or modifications, (f) Rules for controlling Subdivision and Plotting of lands, for future protection, (g) Public Buildings, location with discussion of Civic Center, (h) Fire Protection, with discussion of present equipment and future needs, (i) Street Plantings, (j) Public Utilities, with discussions relating to Water Supply, Sewage disposal, drainage, refuse collection and disposal, (k) Air Ports, (l) Transit via street cars and buses, (m) Port Development, relationship to major streets and transportation, (n) Viaducts and Bridges, (o) Street lighting and overhead poles and wires, (p) Schools and School Locations.

And finally, it is the sincere hope of the Planner that from the ideas submitted something inspiring and worth while may develop. To realize and appreciate that a City Plan of itself on paper means little or nothing, is significant. The real work of Planning now starts with the presentation of the plan. The same type of enthusiasm and persistence that started the plan movement is essential now to a more intensified degree. Without a whole-hearted, sympathetic understanding the plan will move slowly or die—which course it pursues depends upon the civic-minded citizens of Jacksonville.
SCENES IN THE METROPOLITAN PARK AREA
Top Views—Scenes Along Ribault River Near Moncrief Road. Lower Views—Scenes Along Roadways Skirting Trout River.

METROPOLITAN PARK AREA

An examination of the regional topography surrounding Jacksonville reveals a most fortunate natural condition conducive to the development of a magnificent metropolitan park system. Two streams have their origin in the highlands about seven miles west of the City Hall in the vicinity of Marietta near Hart Park: one Ribault River, the other Cedar River. The former flows northeasterly into Trout River while the latter flows southerly into Ortega River (McGirt's Creek) near Lake Shore. No point in this circular area is more than seven miles from the City Hall. The acquisition of lands along these streams from Lake Shore to the Lem Turner Road would enable Jacksonville to gradually develop a parkway system as magnificent as any in the southland and one of the outstanding in the world. Such a comprehensive park system would provide for a scenic boulevard along two of the most beautiful waterways in the state — streams bordered by lowlands, highlands, dells and bluffs fringed and filled with masses of tropical native shrubbery. Such a development would also lend itself to the development of large open areas and scenic spots to which the tired and weary could retire for relaxation and enjoyment of picnic, fishing, boating and camping. As a part of this program both streams could ultimately be joined, creating thereby a waterway from Ortega on the south to Trout River on the north. Certainly such a splendid possibility is worthy of our best thought.
"The individual human beings, in response to whose urge cities grow, never think about the conditions that are to be created by the bringing together of a great mass of other people like themselves. If we build a house, we build it in what we think is a convenient and a comfortable, pleasant place to have a home. A thousand others, ten thousand, a hundred thousand, all have the same idea, but nobody thinks about the water supply; nobody thinks about the sewerage; nobody thinks what it is going to cost to deliver coal there; nobody thinks how far it is going to be from market; nobody thinks about the multitude of difficulties that are created by a great aggregation of human beings within a small territory. As a result, the growth of the city is without any intelligent thought whatever regarding the great difficulties that a city has to meet."

ELIHU ROOT, in an address at the inauguration of the Regional Plan of New York and its Environs, 1922.