

GENERAL VILLAGE PLAN
of
BIRMINGHAM, MICHIGAN

Report to the
VILLAGE PLANNING
COMMISSION

by
ARTHUR C. COMEY
Consulting City Planner



JULY, 1929

"The plan is not a call for great immediate expenditures, but rather a program by which those expenditures which will be made in any event may be most effective and much wasteful expenditure avoided."

Foreword

DURING the past 10 years Birmingham has grown from a quiet village community of 2,500 to a metropolitan suburb of 12,000. Realizing that this growth would continue at the same rapid rate, a Planning Commission was appointed and they, after careful investigations, employed Mr. Arthur C. Comey, a national authority on city planning, to study the situation and needs in Birmingham with the idea of preserving and protecting the natural beauty of this village and making it a highly desirable residential community. This study has been made and we hereby submit the report and maps prepared by Mr. Comey to the Village Commission.

VILLAGE PLANNING COMMISSION.

H. N. Davock, *Chairman*

Chas. E. Lewis

R. J. Coryell

J. A. Wendorph

H. T. Ellerby

Mrs. S. F. Wilson

J. W. Parry

"While no close estimates are, in the nature of the situation, possible, even without counting on a much expanded apartment house population at the center, ninety to one hundred and twenty thousand people will eventually be living within the present area of Birmingham. No planning can prevent this influx however undesirable this may be deemed by the majority of the citizens. Will this change occur without destroying the present attractiveness of the Village?"

OFFICES OF THE
VILLAGE PLANNING COMMISSION
BIRMINGHAM, MICHIGAN

July 26, 1929.

The Honorable Village Commission,
Birmingham, Michigan.

Gentlemen:

We are forwarding to you a copy of the report of Mr. Arthur C. Comey, expert village planner employed by the Village Planning Commission on authority of the Village Commission.

The Village Planning Commission, after various meetings with Mr. Comey and careful study of his report, recommend at this time that action be taken in a reasonable time on the following items embodied in Mr. Comey's report:

1st. That land be acquired so that future east and west traffic may be passed through the center of the Village by a plan approximating that submitted by Mr. Comey.

That land be acquired to provide a future traffic way to parallel the new Grand Trunk Railroad in a way approximating the plan submitted by Mr. Comey.

2nd. That land be acquired to provide for parks and play grounds under the guidance of a definite plan approximating the suggestions as made in Mr. Comey's maps.

3rd. That this Village Commission decide on definite village limits so that the municipal service systems may be logically planned and developed, and the Village Planning Commission recommend the limits as outlined by Mr. Comey.

4th. In order to preserve and enhance the high standards of Birmingham as they now exist, we recommend the preparation of a zoning ordinance for study and adoption, and that Mr. Comey be employed to assist in drafting this ordinance.

5th. That the Village Commission draft and adopt Ordinances that will protect the high standards of a residential community with specific respect to street tree planting, sign control and the architecture of commercial buildings approximating the recommendations of Mr. Comey's report.

Very truly yours,

VILLAGE PLANNING COMMISSION.

By MYRTLE E. CARSON,

MFC:BG

Secretary.

ARTHUR C. COMEY

CITY PLANNER

Fellow, American Society of Landscape Architects

* * *

HARVARD SQUARE, CAMBRIDGE, MASS.

Abbot Building

8 July, 1929

Village Planning Commission
Birmingham, Michigan

Gentlemen:

I beg to submit herewith a general village plan for Birmingham, comprising four main features—(1) a regional plan showing the relation of Birmingham to the surrounding district, especially in regard to major highways; (2) a general village plan, emphasizing general location and widths of major streets, system of parks, and the general location of playgrounds; (3) a general zoning plan, prepared as part of the village plan but presented separately; and (4) a report accompanying and explaining briefly the plan and including a brief survey of all the principal aspects of village planning.

Certain supplementary material has also been filed for your future use in the custody of the Village Engineer, Mr. H. H. Corson. May I state that his cooperation, as well as that of Mr. J. W. Parry, the Village Manager, and numerous other village and township officials, has been most hearty and has contributed much to the progress of the plan. I also received cordial assistance from Mr. Walter Blucher, Executive Secretary of the Detroit City Plan Commission, Mr. John P. Hallihan, Chief Engineer of the Detroit Rapid Transit Commission, Mr. T. Glenn Phillips and staff, in charge of Pontiac city planning, and several county officials and others active in the region, all of which helped to make my task a congenial one.

Respectfully submitted,

ARTHUR C. COMEY.

Contents And Illustrations

Foreword	2
Letter of Transmittal	3
Letter from Mr. Arthur C. Comey	4
Aerial View of Birmingham	6
Introduction	7
Municipal Building	8
Baldwin Library	9
Regional Aspects (Map)	10
Regional Aspects	11
Regional Park System (Map)	12
General Plan for Birmingham	13
Highway System	13
View of Rouge Valley	14
Platting Control	17
View of Pennsylvania Avenue, Washington, D. C.	18
View of Lamp Post in Washington, D. C.	19
Transit	21
Diagram of Street Crossing	21
Park System	23
View of Play Grounds	24
Zoning	25
Street Scene	26
Public Functions	27
Private Property	29



Aerial View of Birmingham

A. INTRODUCTION

BIRMINGHAM is an integral part of the Detroit-Pontiac Region. It is also a more or less self-contained residential community. Neither of these two aspects can be slighted: their harmonizing presents the greatest problem of the plan of the village.

GROWTH

Birmingham is as yet a young community; its population of ten or twelve thousand is but a tithe of that which it is likely to have within a few decades. Situated on a super-highway connecting the great industrial metropolis of Detroit, eighteen miles southeast, with the thriving new industrial center of Pontiac, seven miles northwest, it is in the direct line to receive the full effect of the growth of the region as a whole. If southeastern Michigan continues to grow at all in population, Birmingham seems sure to develop. With even a portion of the continued growth that all expect, Birmingham should grow rapidly until substantially all its area is built upon.

While no close estimates are, in the nature of the situation, possible, even without counting on a much expanded apartment house population at the center, ninety to one hundred and twenty thousand people will eventually be living within the present area of Birmingham.

No planning can prevent this influx, however undesirable it may be deemed by the majority of the citizens. Will this change occur without destroying the present attractiveness of the village?

Further, can this growth be so utilized as to result in enhancing Birmingham's high standards? These are the major problems a village plan must solve.

PLANNING LIMITATIONS

Now is the time and the opportunity to so plan as to care adequately for the future population. On the other hand, the planning that has already taken place, or the growth that has occurred without planning, seriously interferes with any idealistic scheme for the future city and, in fact, has, to a large degree, stamped the physical arrangement of many of its main features, particularly its shopping centers and street system. Practically the entire area within the present village limits and most of the land just outside of the village is already platted. While many of these subdivisions are as yet but little built upon, nearly all have the streets graded and surfaced, with scattered houses already built and the majority of the lots sold to individual owners, thus rendering practically impossible any radical departure from the existing plats. While most of the earlier subdivisions were on a rigid grid-iron system, the more recent ones have departed more or less from the rectangular blocks and straight streets, so that much of the village is now laid out in a charming manner designed to give each block and in lesser degree each lot some individuality of its own.

DESIRABLE VILLAGE LIMITS

The village government has today a certain amount of authority in regard to any future plats within the village limits. If these limits are extended to include farm land before plats are filed, this may in some cases be effective in assuring thereafter

As Birmingham becomes more urban the need for parks and other public recreation areas will develop rapidly. During the same period the opportunities to establish such areas will practically disappear.

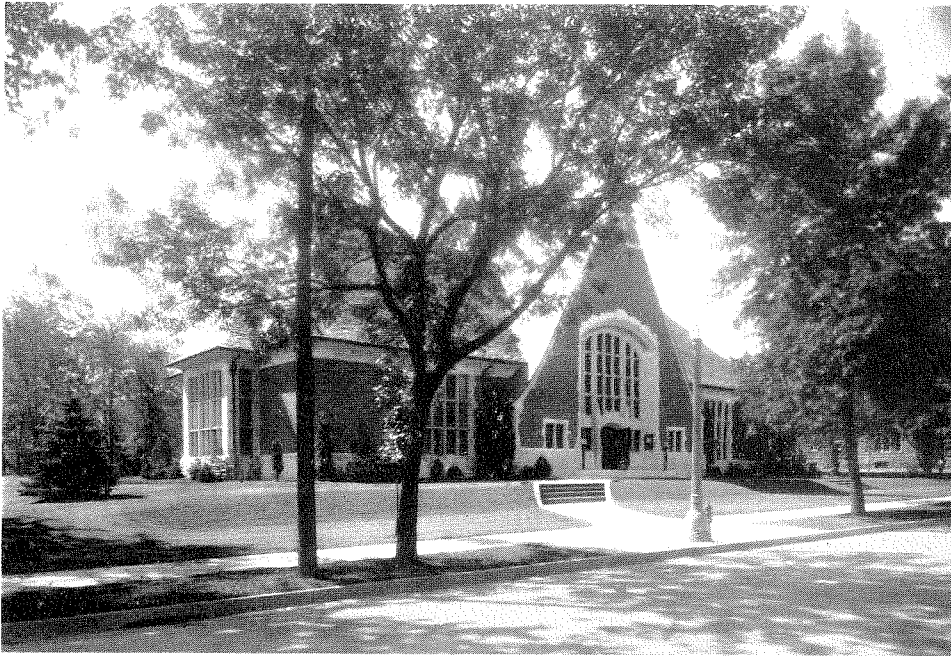


Birmingham has just completed an excellent civic center, with administrative offices, central police and fire departments under one roof.

proper safeguarding of community interests. In Michigan, cities have control of plats for three miles outside their limits. Thus if Birmingham became a city it could control the platting of extensive areas that might at some future time be taken into its corporate area. However, the indefinite expansion of Birmingham in area does not at present appear particularly desirable. Either some regional or metropolitan form of government satisfactory to all portions of the region should be found, or else its local government areas should continue to comprise neighborhoods with considerable common interest. Along the principal radial highway, Woodward Avenue to the southeast and northwest, this subject is now of merely academic interest, as at both ends of the present village other municipalities already exist. East and west as well as northeast and southwest, on the contrary, the village may advantageously be extended a half mile to a mile to include areas likely to be sufficiently similar to the general high type of suburban residential development that characterizes Birmingham's present tendencies. Such a possible future village line is indicated on the Plan of Birmingham and Vicinity, utilizing natural or artificial barriers where feasible to separate Birmingham physically from surrounding municipalities.

NEEDED LEGISLATION

New plats are now made to conform in regard to widths for main highways and "superhighways" to the standards recently adopted by most of the townships in the three counties embracing the region. Many mistakes were, however, made in the



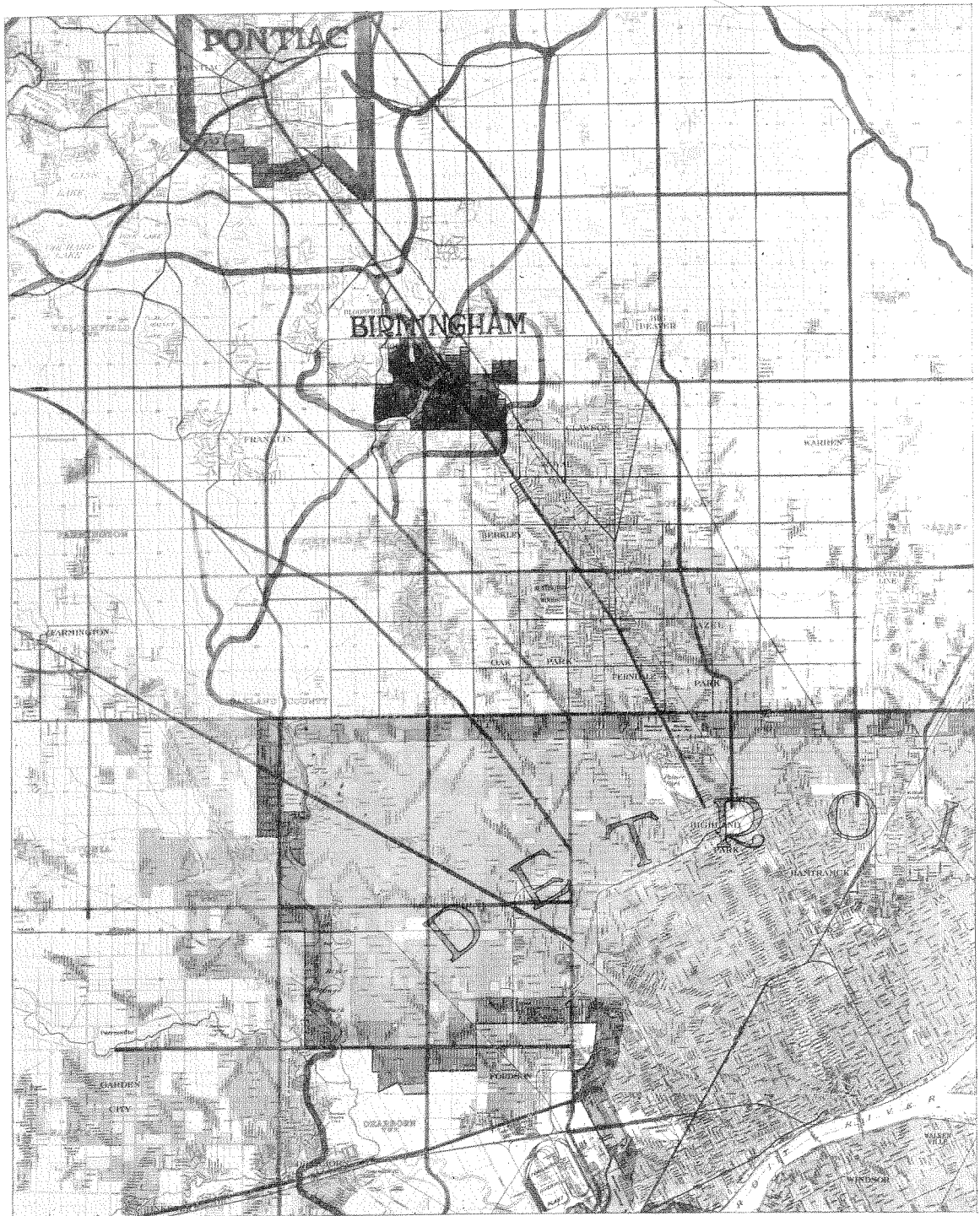
Beyond a block destined for park treatment lies the new library.

past. Under present laws, to remedy these would often prove tedious and unduly expensive. The United States Department of Commerce under Secretary Hoover's guidance in 1928 promulgated a model planning enabling act, which among other things would authorize the establishment of an authoritative city or village plan, effectively preventing buildings hereafter from being erected so as to block the future widening of those main highways now seen to be too narrow for future needs. This principle may also be extended to protect the locations of future park lands. It is recommended that a similar enabling act be secured for Birmingham. Doubtless other municipalities in Michigan can be brought to cooperate in securing this legislation.

The official village plan should also be an effective guide to the location of future municipal buildings, schools, and playgrounds. Further legislation along the lines of the "Hoover" act would prevent hasty action overturning the plan. One part of the general scheme, the zoning plan, may and should be adopted at an early date, so that private activity may not be out of harmony with the needs of the community as a whole. After considering certain inter-relations between Birmingham and the surrounding region which vitally affect Birmingham itself, the plan for its future will be considered in some detail under the specific elements that go to make it up: highways and other means of circulation, park system, zoning, various public functions, and the proper development of private property.

The plan is not a call for great immediate expenditures, but rather a program by which those expenditures which will be made in any event may be most effective and much wasteful expenditure avoided.

In the quality of the appearance of its street improvements Birmingham has an opportunity to retain and enhance its well-deserved reputation as a suburb of distinction. High grade pavements not too wide for the traffic that will use them, well constructed curbs with broad curves at intersections, ample park strips for trees and in some cases shrubbery, uniformly placed concrete walks, again of a width that is needed for the pedestrian travel, all go to stamp a community as a desirable one in which to live.



Regional Aspects—In order to plan intelligently for the village itself some attention must first be given to its relation to the region within which it lies. Only after effectively meeting the problems of regional origin that occur within the village limits can a sound and enduring solution to the local village problems themselves be found

B. REGIONAL ASPECTS

DETROIT-PONTIAC REGIONAL PLANS

In order to plan intelligently for the village itself some attention must first be given to its relation to the region within which it lies. Only after effectively meeting the problems of regional origin that occur within the village limits can a sound and enduring solution to the local village problems themselves be found. Working from the larger area to the smaller the foundations of the plan may be well laid. Much excellent planning work has already been done in the region. As a result of early efforts of the Detroit City Plan Commission, including a report on Suburban Planning by the present author in 1915, and later amplified and carried over a larger area by the Detroit Rapid Transit Commission, a Detroit regional highway plan has been promulgated, relating Birmingham on the edge of this region to Detroit. The Detroit City Plan Commission has also prepared a preliminary parkway plan covering an even larger area, but this has never been followed up to any degree. Quite recently the Pontiac City Plan Commission has had a Pontiac regional plan prepared as a part of its city planning studies, again relating Birmingham, which appears on the edge of this smaller region, to Pontiac. Hitherto, however, no plan has expressed the relationships of the portions of the region of which Birmingham is the approximate center to one another. A preliminary skeleton of such a regional plan is presented herewith as a necessary basis for Birmingham's village plan. It would be very desirable if a regional plan conference of all municipalities, townships and counties interested could work out such a plan more completely, or, better yet, a larger group develop a comprehensive plan for all southeastern Michigan.

SUPERHIGHWAYS

Township authorities have in most instances adopted the Detroit superhighway plan and now require new plats to dedicate the full width of 204 feet thereon indicated for superhighways. The plan herewith presented extends this superhighway system and articulates it with the Pontiac regional plan. Between the two regions it indicates such additional superhighways as are needed to afford a complete system throughout the region. These will be discussed more in detail under the chapter on the highway system.

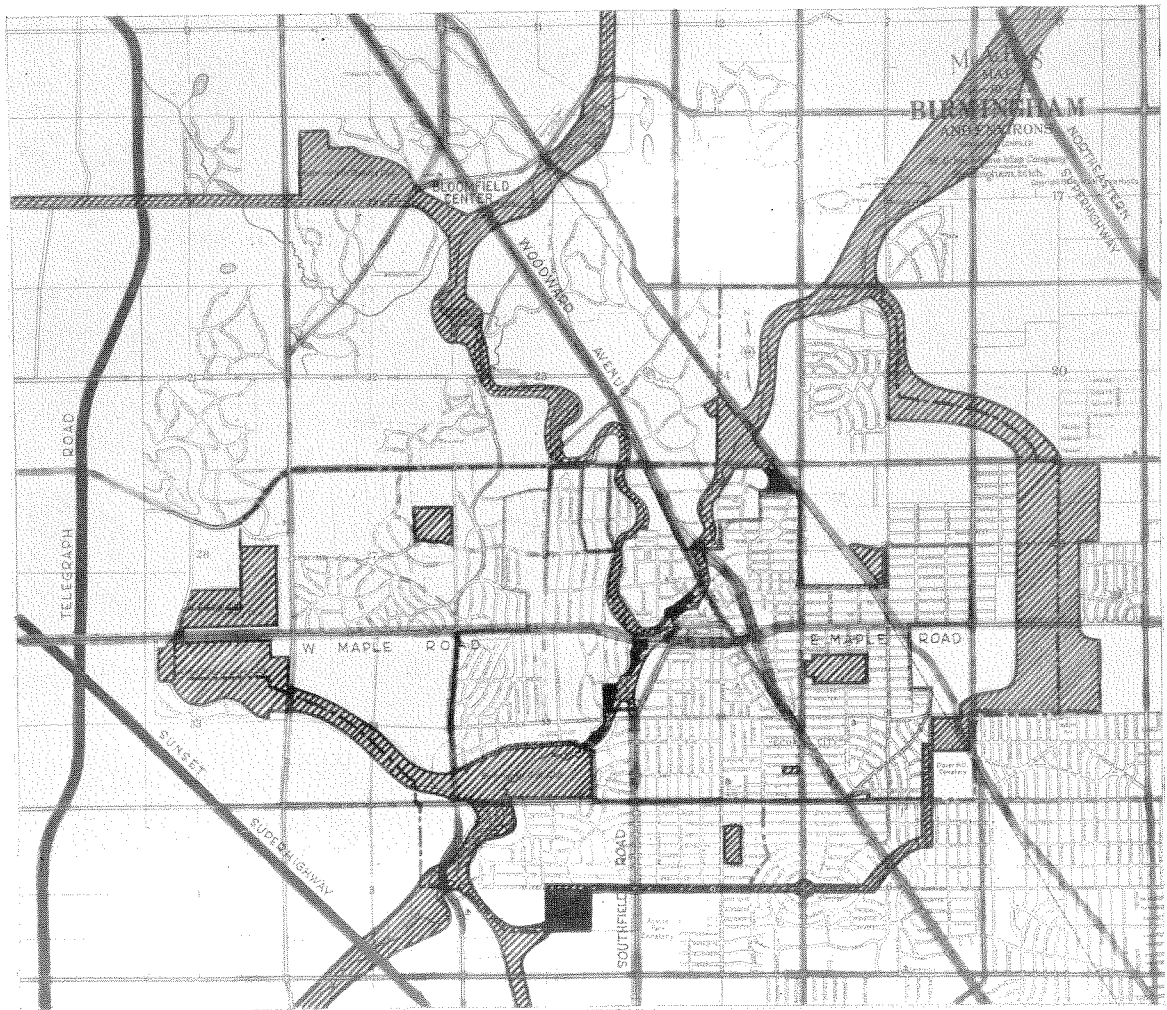
INTERVENING HIGHWAYS

The same authorities incorporated as part of their plan and platting requirement the proposition that in general all section-line roads should be 120 feet wide, thus fitting in between the superhighways with a rectangular net of wide thoroughfares one mile apart. We see no reason for departing from this standard except in an occasional instance where local conditions make it inappropriate. They likewise established the width for highways on quarter-section lines at 86 feet. These we have also incorporated in the plan wherever a fairly close ultimate building development is anticipated. On the west side of the village, however, the very open development on large lots makes some of these intermediate thoroughfares unnecessary.

East and west as well as northeast and southwest, on the contrary, the village may advantageously be extended a half mile to a mile to include areas likely to be sufficiently similar to the general high type of suburban residential development that characterizes Birmingham's present tendencies. Such a possible future village line is indicated on the Plan of Birmingham and Vicinity, utilizing natural or artificial barriers where feasible to separate Birmingham physically from surrounding municipalities.

REGIONAL PARK SYSTEM

In the matter of parks, the village system is so planned that it may later become part of a comprehensive park system for the region. Until such time as the latter is developed the village parks will continue to serve local needs. There is a law in Michigan under which inter-county park commissions may operate. It is recommended that the possibilities of action by such a commission in the region about Birmingham be studied. Several of the other elements of the comprehensive village plan having regional aspects will be alluded to as each is taken up in subsequent chapters.



Plan of Birmingham and Vicinity—The shaded areas indicate proposed future parkways some of which will form artificial barriers to separate Birmingham from surrounding municipalities.

C. GENERAL PLAN

For convenience, the village plan may be divided into component parts according to function, but in practice no complete separation can ever be made. The inter-relation of these parts is the essence of the plan itself. In the order of their importance, there arise problems of circulation by highway and otherwise, the park system, zoning, public functions, and the use of private property.

I. Circulation

Means of movement have been likened to the arterial system of the body, giving it its life blood. Circulation of persons and goods may be by highway—by far the most important part today—by rail, by water where available, or by air.

THE HIGHWAY SYSTEM

INCREASE OF SUPERHIGHWAY EFFECTIVENESS

To secure efficiency it is essential to classify the highways of a community according to the type and volume of service. The greater Detroit superhighway system calls for a network of great roads about three miles apart and two hundred and four feet wide. These are at present being constructed with two forty-foot pavements at grade and a forty-foot reserve strip in the center. Local streets enter these through traffic pavements wherever platted, and in built-up sections there are direct crossings of the central reservation at frequent intervals, with as a rule a stop and go control system of traffic lights. As a relatively inexpensive initial development these methods are reasonably effective. By synchronizing the lights progressively, speed may be maintained, even though traffic capacity is reduced, and the number of vehicles turning on or off from side streets or parked along the edge of the main thoroughfare is as yet so small as to constitute little hindrance to through traffic. The ultimate ideal may be a single or even a pair of roadways separated entirely from other roads in grade, but this will be so extremely expensive that some intermediate design should be found which will permit through traffic to flow practically uninterruptedly, even after the region is fully built up. As this problem is common to all superhighways in the district, a solution acceptable to all authorities should be found before being put into effect in Birmingham or elsewhere.

ALTERNATE ROUTES

The superhighway with heaviest traffic in the vicinity of Birmingham will doubtless continue to be Woodward Avenue. Most fortunately, the state is now planning to complete this 204 foot route (1) by relocating the Grand Trunk Railway about one mile to the east and merging its present right-of-way with Woodward Avenue where it is adjacent to it, and (2) by widening this right-of-way as it by-passes the center of the village. This route may then be made capable of handling an enormous traffic. In addition, however, means for through traffic not destined for local points along its course to completely by-pass the Woodward Superhighway will be very de-

On the east no topographic features serve as a basis for large parks, except several scattered groves of fine trees. On the other hand, this district will stand in even greater need of such recreation facilities than that along the River Rouge, as a more intensive residential development is already beginning and likely to continue, particularly if the Grand Trunk rapid transit is inaugurated.



Birmingham has within its limits the first real landscape unit other than the flat plain that one meets in coming out from Detroit—the valley of the River Rouge, nearly 60 feet deep in spots, and now for the most part a delightful tangle of natural vegetation.

sirable, thus not only relieving Woodward Avenue but also preventing congestion on those routes that feed into Woodward Avenue. On the southwest the new Northwestern Superhighway is too far away to be of much benefit, but nearer to Birmingham Sunset Superhighway has recently been authorized from the Eight-Mile Road to the Eleven-Mile Road. It is very desirable from Birmingham's point of view that this should be extended as far as W. Maple Road, for it would then constitute, in conjunction with Telegraph Road, now opened 150 feet wide, a complete by-pass on the west of Birmingham. Similarly on the northeast the Northeastern Superhighway project from Stephenson Superhighway to the outskirts of Pontiac would form another great by-pass.

EAST-WEST SUPERHIGHWAYS

Running east and west, Eleven-Mile Road, four miles to the south of the village center, is already adopted as a superhighway and Square Lake Road, four miles to the north, is definitely projected as a similar route under the Pontiac plan. The logical location for a superhighway between these is Maple Road. A diversion to any other through route involves complications that would be likely to defeat the purpose in view and would harm the village more than help it. Maple Road should be 200 feet wide where feasible and at least 150 feet wide throughout, except in the village center where present building interferes with widening. Here a new route following Merrill Street and extending it through to rejoin Maple Road near Elm Street will be a less expensive and more efficient solution. Ultimately a broad roadway should pass under Southfield Avenue and over both Woodward Avenue and the new Grand Trunk Superhighway. To compensate for the land taken from the Hill School lot, Martin Street may be turned over to the School District between Chester Street and Southfield Avenue. Opposite the village center the total width of the thoroughfare may be reduced without reducing its capacity, and also between Woodward Avenue and the Grand Trunk, where a two-level street will give full capacity for through traffic.

NORTH-SOUTH SUPERHIGHWAYS

Running from south to north are Telegraph Road on the west and Stephenson Superhighway on the east. Between them lies Southfield Superhighway, a very important by-pass route, though the completion of Telegraph Road will relieve it somewhat for a time. Its present northern terminus at Lincoln Avenue presents the village with a serious prospective traffic problem. It is recommended that the northbound commercial traffic be routed by Southfield Avenue, widened to 86 feet, and Merrill Street as extended to Woodward Avenue or the Grand Trunk Superhighway, and southbound by way of Maple Road at its present width into Southfield Avenue, and that eventually for passenger cars a park road be provided in the Rouge Valley park, with a broad connection from Southfield Superhighway at Lincoln Avenue. This will by-pass the village center and form an attractive route through the village, where automobiles will be adequately provided for, and will not destroy the charm of the village landscape. Similar park roads along "Muddy River" in the Fens in Boston and Brookline, along small streams in Westchester County, New York, and elsewhere have proven the value of this type of improvement in enhancing both aesthetic and financial values. To the north the Pontiac plan calls for developing Opdyke Road as a superhighway, one branch by-passing Pontiac, the other swinging over to the Dodge Road at a point several miles north. Taken in conjunction with the Northeastern Superhighway, this constitutes a sufficient traffic net and obviates any necessity of developing Adams Avenue as a superhighway.

No time should be lost in putting zoning into effect, now that its general scheme has been related to the comprehensive village plan. On the basis of the present or a similar tentative plan an ordinance should be drawn up and hearings held prior to the adoption of a "final" plan and ordinance. Such plan itself, it should be remembered, is in no sense crystallized, but by the state law may be changed after suitable procedure to meet new requirements.

SECTIONLINE ROADS

Between the superhighways practically every sectionline road should be 120 feet wide. In the vicinity of Birmingham, running east and west these will be, on the south, Fourteen-Mile or Clawson Road and, on the north, Big Beaver Road, which should be extended through to connect with Quarton Road, the latter also extended northwest and west at its westerly end to regain and then follow the section-line. Running north and south, on the east the 120 foot highways will be Crooks Road, Coolidge Highway, Berwick-Adams Avenue connected via Cummings Street, and, on the west, Evergreen Road as far north as Maple Road and Lasher Road. One other important 120 foot connecting and distributing avenue should be opened by widening Kensington Avenue and extending it along the New Grand Trunk Railway through from the southern edge of Pontiac to Crooks Road in Royal Oak. With the development sure to come along this new railroad route, especially if rapid transit service is provided, this possibility of securing direct communication among neighborhoods on its east side without crossing and re-crossing should not be lost.

QUARTERSECTION ROADS

Within the village, 86 foot east and west quartersection roads should be established on Lincoln Avenue and Derby Road. The latter should be extended via Mohegan Avenue to the Grand Trunk Superhighway. Oak Street extended should be 86 feet wide from the superhighway to Woodward Avenue, but owing to the open type of development need be made only 66 feet wide west from Woodward Avenue. North and south the 86-foot roads will be Eton Road and Pierce Street. Chesterfield Avenue should be uniformly 80 feet wide north of Maple Road and at least 66 feet wide from Maple Road to Lincoln Avenue. Cranbrook Road should be 86 feet wide in extension of the 120-foot Evergreen Road.

LOCAL STREETS

While little change can be made in existing system of local streets, near the village center several minor streets should be so extended as to facilitate local circulation of traffic on the west side of Woodward Avenue. Ann Street should be extended 60 feet wide north to the extended Merrill Street; Henrietta Street should be extended 60 feet wide to Willets Street; and Bates Street should be extended at least 50 feet wide by a curving road along the proposed river park to Woodward Avenue.

ALLEYS

Wherever detached houses are to be the standard type, alleys are probably not worth their expense nor the usual attendant evils of unkemptness. Rear lot-line easements will meet sufficiently the requirements. In apartment house areas alleys may or may not be incorporated according to the type of service provided within the block. In business blocks, however, the alley is more likely to prove its worth for service access and should be included in the plats for such areas. The subsequent provision of business alleys in plats where none exist is a matter of determination of relative cost and benefit in each case.

PASSENGER DRIVES

In addition to the principal system of highways serving all types of traffic—passenger and commercial—such a region as this will find it advantageous to develop a partial

A further step should be taken in a progressive community such as Birmingham. Whenever a building is proposed to be erected unsuited to its site it will be worth while to sit down with the designer and owner and suggest how to improve the design. Elsewhere this is successfully done by committees of architects, by fine arts commissions, or by the planning commissions themselves.

secondary system of passenger drives of more attractive type in conjunction with the park system, utilizing natural topographic features where they exist. Provision should be made for a continuous drive through park lands along the entire River Rouge north from the present large park within Detroit city limits. In connection with a series of border parks on the east side of Birmingham a less important but nevertheless valuable circuit drive may be established from the River Rouge on the north to the bounds of Clover Hill Cemetery at Clawson Road on the southeast, thence by Beechwood Avenue and the "Parkway" across Woodward Avenue and along Beverly Road, all much widened, to Dodge State Park No. 6. A short parkway connection will then bring this drive back to River Rouge, making a complete circuit. Other aspects of these park drives will be considered in the section devoted to the park system.

PLATTING CONTROL

Reference has already been made to the desirability of exercising greater control over plats despite the fact that the "horse is stolen"—nearly all the land within the large limits being already platted. Plats for the remaining farm land in the vicinity should require approval by the Village Plan Commission before being recorded. Standards should be adopted by the Plan Commission as a guide for such work. Fortunately, the Detroit City Plan Commission has already adopted a code of principles and standards eminently suited for this locality, so that, using this as a precedent, little or no change need be made before a similar adoption for Birmingham.

STREET TREATMENT

In the quality of the appearance of its street improvements Birmingham has an opportunity to retain and enhance its well-deserved reputation as a suburb of distinction. High grade pavements not too wide for the traffic that will use them, well constructed curbs and broad curves at intersections, ample park strips for trees and in some cases shrubbery, uniformly placed concrete walks, again of a width that is needed for the pedestrian travel, all go to stamp a community as a desirable one in which to live.

ROADWAY TYPES

For the main highway system the widths of pavement at first constructed will be narrower than those ultimately needed. Curbs, trees, poles, etc., should be placed, however, so far as possible, in their permanent position, and the remaining width grassed over until needed. Each superhighway is a problem in itself. Woodward Superhighway will be constructed by the State of Michigan. Its cross-section in Birmingham should doubtless be uniform with that elsewhere. Whether the present double roadway type is the best adapted to heavy traffic through built-up regions is a moot point. It may prove that a system of virtually four roadways—two one-way express ways with one-way local roadways on the sides—will pass a larger volume of traffic. Further study should be given to this by all authorities concerned, local and regional.

The 120-foot highways should probably be as a rule ultimately of the two one-way roadways type, local traffic mingling with the stream of through traffic, weaving across it, and turning in the central reserved area into the opposite stream of traffic in order to

The "superhighways" themselves, and particularly the Woodward Superhighway, soon to be completed through Birmingham, should be planted with some larger species of tree, such as the American Elm, so that the present hideous perspective of lines of telegraph poles may be replaced with great vistas of massive foliage.

reach a point on the opposite side of the highway. Here again, however, more complete study of the great region is necessary for a positive determination. The 86-foot intermediate thoroughfares will be developed with a single wide roadway, 40 or even 60 feet across according to the traffic actually using each particular portion. On 66-foot streets when carrying considerably more than local traffic there will be needed a 40-foot pavement. Purely local streets, on the other hand, need never be constructed with more than a 32-foot pavement, and short stretches may be but 24 feet wide. Sidewalks on local streets need be but $4\frac{1}{2}$ to 5 feet wide, leaving ample space, preferably 6 feet or more, for tree planting strips.

TREE PLANTING

Trees, signs, lights and wires are all capable of being handled in a way to increase the beauty and interest of the village. Hitherto only two or three of the species of trees that will grow well in this latitude have been planted. While the rule of planting but one species on a street is an excellent one a much greater variety of trees can be used to advantage on different streets. The Detroit City Plan Commission has published an authoritative document (now on file with the Birmingham Planning Commission) setting forth succinctly the opportunities in this direction, listing a wide range of species, some of them suited to certain special types of streets only, and also outlining the best schemes of spacing as well as methods of growing trees for street use. In the near future it will be desirable to replace the present part-time forester with one on full time within the Park Department and having charge of the trees both in the parks and on the streets.



The irregular line of upper stories will be masked and yet the business entrances and show windows will not be shut off. In this way Birmingham may regain its distinctive appearance of an attractive suburban community. (Pennsylvania Avenue, Washington, D. C.)

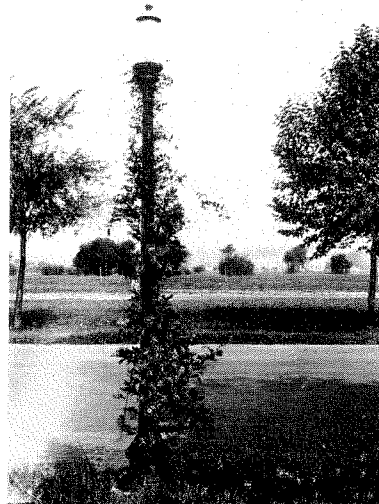
Woodward Avenue running through the heart of the village presents a special problem and a special opportunity in the use of street trees. The one thing of prime value that attracts people to Birmingham and makes them prefer to stay is the getting away from the intensive city conditions of Detroit. Yet Woodward Avenue today, with its wide pavement adorned only by "white-way" light poles and flanked by a heterogeneous collection of stores and other business buildings, some good, some bad in facade, but none harmonizing with another—this Woodward Avenue is but a small-town copy of Woodward Avenue in down-town Detroit minus the dignity of the great buildings of the latter street.

Birmingham should indicate on its main street that it is distinctly an open community with tree-lined streets. The most appropriate treatment for such a business street, however, will not be spreading or dense shade but trees used more formally in the nature of a high hedge along the curb, as is common in many European cities and occasionally seen in this country. Only a few species are really well adapted to such treatment, notably the Horse Chestnut, the Plane, certain Lindens, certain types of Elms and the Hornbeam. Some of these do not do well under such artificial conditions in the Detroit region. While the Hornbeam grows slowly, it may prove to be the best in the end, or experiment may demonstrate that some other well-known species may be adapted to this type of use. Such trees, spaced rather close together, will soon be high enough to permit clear trunks for the first ten or fifteen feet, thus in no way impeding the view or access to the first floor business frontage. They will also be kept (by clipping, etc.) well away from the buildings themselves and should not be allowed to spread over the center of the street. Eventually the effect will be of a great vista between high walls of foliage, with the store windows showing between the trunks below. The inevitably inconsequential irregular line of upper stories will be masked and yet the business entrances and show windows will not be shut off. In this way Birmingham may regain its distinctive appearance of an attractive suburban community.

The "superhighways" themselves, and particularly the Woodward Superhighway, soon to be completed through Birmingham, should be planted with some larger species, such as the American Elm, so that the present hideous perspectives of lines of telegraph poles may be replaced with great vistas of massive foliage.

ORNAMENTAL FIXTURES

Other street furnishings should receive equal attention. Street signs, lighting poles and fixtures are already to a large degree standardized. Special types will doubtless, be needed in certain locations, as for instance a few years after the new trees are planted on Woodward Avenue, when a light held farther out from the curb than the present ones will be more effective. Ornamental posts should gradually be installed throughout the village.



Trees, signs and wires are all capable of being handled in a way to increase the beauty and interest of the Village. (Wisteria growing on lamppost, Washington, D. C.)

The United States Department of Commerce under Secretary Hoover's guidance in 1928 promulgated a model planning enabling act, which among other things would authorize the establishment of an authoritative city or village plan, effectively preventing buildings hereafter from being erected so as to block the future widening of those main highways now seen to be too narrow for future needs. This principle may also be extended to protect the locations of future park land.

WIRES

Overhead wires are an unmitigated eye-sore. They should be placed underground as fast as financial circumstances permit, particularly where concentrated on main streets. Elsewhere the present standard of a pole line on an easement along the rear lot line should be insisted upon if at all possible.

BILLBOARDS AND STREET SIGNS

Advertising signs have, of course, value where placed on premises to which they relate. Billboards advertising things not carried on the same premises have less reason for existence. They should certainly be excluded from all residential areas and placed under reasonable control in business areas. Birmingham cannot afford to lose its attractive suburban character through the occupying of the landscape by numerous large advertising signs, whether billboards or not. All signs should be limited in height and in length. If any signs are allowed over the street they should not in any case be permitted to project more than two feet. This will permit all forms of signs flat against the building otherwise acceptable, and also permit vertical signs standing out at right angles to the building. The passer-by can then see a series of such signs along the street, none obscuring the next, and this may be considered an added convenience and attraction, particularly if all projecting signs are required to be electrically lighted. Such signs as are frequently found on business streets projecting five or even ten feet out over the sidewalk soon defeat their own end by obscuring one another, besides destroying whatever beauty the business facade may have and constituting a potential danger to pedestrians. The placing of signs over the sidewalk is a revocable right which a municipality may at any time cancel.



The present hideous perspectives of lines of telegraph poles may be replaced with great vistas of massive foliage

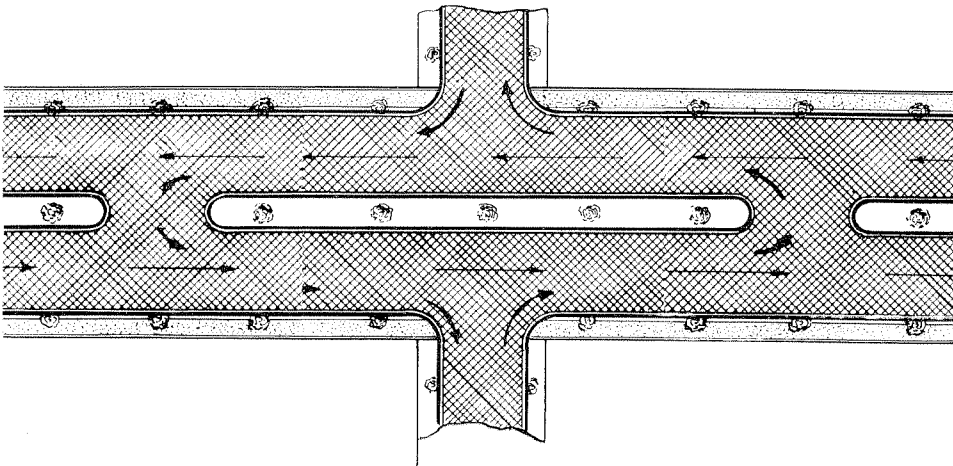
Transit

AUTOMOBILE BUSES

While today the private automobile is the largest factor in transportation in the Birmingham region, as population densities increase some one or more forms of mass transportation will become more and more important. Today bus and electric street car travel is practically limited to Woodward Avenue. Electric street cars do not seem likely to regain their former place in such suburban regions as this and may safely be disregarded, except insofar as they approximate rapid transit service. Buses will doubtless increase a great deal in numbers, and eventually in number of routes operating, but, as they are free-moving vehicles, from the point of view of city planning they constitute simply one of the many elements that go to make up the mixed vehicular traffic on the thoroughfares and do not require separate provision in the plan. The precise routing of future lateral feeder bus lines cannot now be foreseen, but they will as a rule naturally run along the major highways, which are designed on the general plan to be of ample width to include such traffic. The principal local bus route will remain along Woodward Avenue, with long-distance buses operating by the new superhighway along the Grand Trunk Railway.

RAPID TRANSIT

Likewise, rapid transit by rail, when the passenger traffic becomes dense enough to support it, will be chiefly along the Woodward Superhighway, with possible routes in the distant future along certain of the other superhighways. The great width of these has been designed with a view to providing for such rapid transit on the central reserved strip. On the other hand, large cities elsewhere are providing rapid transit along the existing steam railroad rights-of-way. Only one such possibility occurs within the Birmingham region, but, especially in view of the fact that proposals are again being made by the railroad company, the possibility of electric rapid transit along the



The 120-foot highways should be of the two one-way roadways type. Local traffic mingles with the stream of through traffic, weaving across it, and turns in the central reserved area into the opposite-stream of traffic in order to reach a point on the opposite side of the highway.

Grand Trunk Railway between Detroit and Pontiac should be kept in view. With one or more stations within the Birmingham village limits this would revolutionize commuting conditions and permit a stream of population to pour into Birmingham now held in Detroit by the length of time necessary to reach the down-town office or store. Stations on this route are recommended to be at Clawson Road or Coolidge Highway, East Maple Road, and Big Beaver Road or Adams Avenue. If this rapid transit on the Grand Trunk Railway comes before conditions for fast trolley service along Woodward Avenue are materially improved—as for example by a subway from down-town Detroit out to the Six-Mile Road—it is likely to shift some of the emphasis of the growth of Birmingham for the time being at least to the east side.

THROUGH RAILROADS

With the removal of the Grand Trunk Railway to its new right-of-way modern freight yards may be developed near E. Maple Road, with space for expansion as the region grows in population. No other facilities for car-load rail freight appear likely ever to be provided within the village. Trucking will, of course, bring much of the freight destined for the village, both from other railroads and from the nearest water terminals in Detroit.

AIR TRANSPORT

With airplanes increasing in number and mileage flown, attention should be paid to their convenient use by people residing or doing business in Birmingham. At present outside of sight-seeing and similar recreational uses their greatest value seems likely to be in long-distance trips. It is, therefore, not essential to have terminals distributed at close intervals throughout the region. These at present involve large areas of land and are an unmitigated nuisance to residential areas nearby. Advances in the art may at any time reduce the areas needed for landing fields, and much of the noise may be obviated. However, that caused by the beat of the propellers on the air may not be readily susceptible of elimination. Therefore, for Birmingham's best interest an airport should be within a few miles but not close in to its center. Moreover, a study of the southeastern Michigan region as a whole shows four airports within twelve to sixteen miles of Birmingham, to the south, southeast, east and northwest, respectively. In the future a single new airport located just east of Birmingham, in the general location recently proposed for one, would be almost midway between these four and bring every point in the region within seven or eight miles of a port. This is not too great a distance for local automobile travel to and from the port in suburban communities of this type. Until the time when such a new airport can be supported presumably as a common venture by several municipalities, the new Pontiac field will serve Birmingham's local needs. For regular long-distance service air travel Detroit's fields are not unduly far away. Meanwhile it would appear wise to set aside the land for a local landing field before it is all subdivided. (Note: A landing field was dedicated in July, 1929, at approximately the above recommended location.)

Birmingham cannot afford to lose its attractive suburban character through the occupying of the landscape by numerous large advertising signs, whether billboards or not.

II. Park System

As Birmingham becomes more urban the need for parks and other public recreation areas will develop rapidly. During the same period the opportunities to establish such areas will practically disappear. It is therefore essential that Birmingham secure most of its park lands well in advance of building, which means at a very early date indeed, and that wherever acquisition is at the moment impracticable some means be found of preventing buildings and similar expensive improvements within the limits of future parks.

Recreation areas may for convenience be classified under four main types: state parks, landscape parks, local parks, and playgrounds.

STATE PARKS

No large wilderness areas—true state parks—can readily be located within the actual bounds of the Birmingham region, but should be provided by the state not far away and within easy access for the greater Detroit population.

ROUGE VALLEY PARKWAY

On the other hand, Birmingham has within its limits the first real landscape unit other than the flat plain that one meets in coming out from Detroit—the valley of the River Rouge, nearly 60 feet deep in spots, and now for the most part a delightful tangle of natural vegetation. This valley should be preserved and enhanced in attractiveness by being made a park for its entire length north of the present River Rouge Park in Detroit. Takings should be wide enough to have property on the upland as a rule facing the park across a boundary street, and there should be provision for a future scenic park drive which will form a really attractive entrance to Birmingham worthy to herald its charming character, and in itself perhaps the most beautiful feature of the village.

A branch of this park should connect with Quarton Lake and the stream to its north, perhaps only reserving a future park right here until such time as a more intensive development of dwellings supplants the present expensive estates, particularly in Bloomfield Hills. In this way the fine tree growth would be preserved without interfering with the present use of the land. Ultimately this park strip would meet near Long Lake Road the belt parkway designed as a part of the Pontiac plan.

EASTERN INTER-MUNICIPAL PARK

On the east no topographic features serve as a basis for large parks, except several scattered groves of fine trees. On the other hand, this district will stand in even greater need of such recreation facilities than that along the River Rouge, as a more intensive residential development is already beginning and likely to continue, particularly if the Grand Trunk rapid transit is inaugurated. However, the way is at present opened for acquiring a large tract, or a continuous series of tracts, which might be managed as a joint undertaking with other municipalities, this park serving as a separating buffer between them and Birmingham. Where gravel is at present being excavated this might be allowed to continue for a considerable period, as the holes thus produced in the plain will make interesting lakes with sloping shores in an otherwise flat country. The important thing is to get these tracts set aside before platting and sales render it

It is therefore essential that Birmingham secure most of its park lands well in advance of building, which means at a very early date indeed, and that wherever acquisition is at the moment impracticable some means be found of preventing buildings and similar expensive improvement within the limits of future parks.

difficult and expensive to acquire title. If this is not done the eastern part of Birmingham is likely to become as monotonous an unbroken waste of buildings as much of the city of Detroit already is. A possible parkway connection between this eastern park and the River Rouge both north and south of the village has already been mentioned.

GOLF COURSES

One element in the program for large parks deserves special mention. The numerous private golf courses of the region afford extensive areas of attractive open landscape besides providing recreation to a portion of the community. History elsewhere has proven, however, that they are apt to be temporary in duration and are likely to be cut up for house lots just when their open space value becomes greatest. Every golf ground now existing in the Birmingham Region should become a permanent part of the park system. This may probably be accomplished by an agreement remitting taxes while they are under private management or by taking an easement against subdividing or building.

LOCAL PARKS

Within the village there is need of providing additional local parks particularly in those sections where lots are small. Suitable locations for these are now available to serve every section not sufficiently near any of the proposed large parks. Unless they are taken quickly these sites, or any sites at all close by, are likely to be lost.

PLAYGROUNDS

Organized recreation requires playgrounds. The precise locations of these cannot be determined in advance of acquisition, as they usually have to be carved out of the subdivided areas suited for building. Fortunately the problem of school and play-



As outlying sections develop, new schools and playgrounds—with an area of five to ten acres each—must be located centrally to each district to be served.

ground is simplified in Birmingham by being under a single School District. All except one of the newer schools have sufficient space for playground adjoining, with corresponding effectiveness in service. The Adams School playground is small and separated from the school by a fairly important street, which is now closed to traffic when the ground is in use. A much larger site can at present be obtained to the northeast and might be connected with the school by pedestrian subways beneath Adams Avenue. One of these playgrounds, or a special site, should be large enough to accommodate a high school athletic field.

As outlying sections develop, new schools and playgrounds—with an area of five to ten acres each—must be located centrally to each district to be served. Elsewhere the tendency is developing to consider section and quarter-section highways as the boundaries of neighborhoods, with a school near the center of each quarter-section. Whether this distribution will meet school requirements in Birmingham depends somewhat on the type of school plant. It would make an ideal system of distribution for playgrounds. Seven such playground sites are proposed and the general locations indicated on the plan.

III. Zoning *

DESIRABILITY

Birmingham is a residential community. To keep it so, zoning is essential. It is a high class residential community. Zoning is even more vitally needed for it to retain and enhance this superior quality. Industry in general has no place within the village limits. If an industrial belt is eventually due to arise joining the industrial areas of Detroit with those of Pontiac, it should be entirely to the east of Birmingham.

INDUSTRIAL NEEDS

On the other hand, small local industries, serving chiefly Birmingham's needs itself, must be given space, as in every community of similar size. A commercial district along the new Grand Trunk Railway and a smaller area near the present Grand Trunk south of E. Maple Road will provide ample room for all such industries, warehousing, coal, lumber and building material storage, and the like. Any industry employing more than, say, five operatives or using more than a small specified number of horsepower should be required by the zoning ordinance to seek from the Board of Review a special permit after a public hearing relative to its effect on the welfare of the village.

BUSINESS NEEDS

All business should be highly localized, with the principal area along Woodward Avenue and the new Grand Trunk Superhighway, and including enough side streets to make ample provision for the needs for a number of years ahead. Outside this main business center only such small local business centers should be provided as may, with the expected lot development, stand a fair chance of sufficient patronage to be successful. Six such centers are proposed on the tentative zoning plan submitted.

Should intensive development later indicate the feasibility and desirability of additional local business areas they should be created at that future time.

*NOTE: A preliminary zoning study map is on file in the Municipal Hall and may be consulted at any time.

One part of the general scheme, the zoning plan, may and should be adopted at an early date, so that private activity may not be out of harmony with the needs of the community as a whole.

RESIDENTIAL NEEDS

The remainder of the village should be permanently residential. When a substantial portion of all the building lots in the village are taken up there will be a demand for a considerable number of apartments. Ample open spaces around such suburban apartments as these should be made the rule. They should be localized chiefly near the village center, where high grade apartments may be successful. In most outlying sections they should be permitted in local business areas only, where an attractive type of rambling terrace with a few stores will be a distinct addition to the neighborhood.

TWO FAMILY APARTMENTS

In Birmingham two-family or duplex houses need not be specially provided for. New two-family houses have no place in the extensive recent subdivisions nor in the earlier cottage developments, except perhaps in the same area as is proposed to be thrown open to apartments of all types. The conversion of single-family dwelling to accommodate two-families should likewise be restricted to these apartment house areas.

OPEN DEVELOPMENT PRESERVATION

The major portion of the village will be for single-family detached dwellings and the usual accompanying buildings such as churches and schools. Fairly large yards on all sides of each building and a somewhat generous minimum lot area and lot width may be insisted upon; but for much of the village private restrictions will still be very important to establish and maintain the degree of openness of development which recent plats



Much of the Village is now laid out in a charming manner designed to give each block and in lesser degree each lot some individuality of its own.

anticipate. It is recommended that Birmingham should not at first try any radical departure in zoning practice from those already proven effective and legal elsewhere. At some future time, after zoning is longer established in Michigan, one or more municipalities including perhaps Detroit itself, provided it is then zoned, may well test out the extent to which zoning may go in replacing and backing up private restrictions with the police power so-called of the community.

IMMEDIATE NEED

No time should be lost in putting zoning into effect, now that its general scheme has been related to the comprehensive village plan. On the basis of the present or a similar tentative plan an ordinance should be drawn up and hearings held prior to the adoption of a "final" plan and ordinance. Such plan itself, it should be remembered, is in no sense crystallized, but by the state law may be changed after suitable procedure to meet new requirements.



IV. Public Functions

CIVIC CENTER

Birmingham has just completed an excellent civic center, with administrative offices, central police and fire departments under one roof. Beyond a block destined for park treatment lies the new library and the central High School. The proposed development of Merrill Street for a cross-town thoroughfare, as outlined elsewhere in this report, will materially enhance the accessibility and prominence of this group. Likewise the closing of Martin Street west of Chester Street and the rounding out of the school tract by acquiring all land west to Southfield Avenue as a part of this improvement will greatly increase the effective area and serviceability of this site.

The present attractiveness and dignity of the new village center may be materially enhanced if future private building on each side facing it is in keeping. While no absolute control may be practical much may be done in the way of assistance and persuasion in getting harmonious buildings as they are built from time to time. Moreover, it is the natural location for various quasi-public edifices, such as churches, clubs and other community buildings, which may more readily be brought into harmony with the municipal buildings than might be the case with a row of small stores for example. Ultimately the village itself will require more floor space for its offices, but it can scarcely be expected to acquire any more land now for such relatively remote needs.

ADDITIONAL CIVIC BUILDINGS

In addition to the civic center certain public administrative buildings will need to be placed so as to meet more local needs or to be near other special facilities. Thus, with the development of Woodward Superhighway and of a larger population to the east, another fire station will eventually be needed near E. Maple Road. The village will also require a modern warehouse and storage yard for construction supplies and the

There should be provision for a future scenic park drive which will form a really attractive entrance to Birmingham worthy to herald its charming character, and in itself perhaps the most beautiful feature of the Village.

like, undoubtedly to be located with spur track facilities from the new Grand Trunk Railway. The precise sites for such buildings cannot advantageously be fixed long in advance of their acquisition.

SCHOOL SITES

The present school system serves the village well and is keeping abreast of its needs. New sites of adequate size are already being acquired in advance of the time of building. This policy should be continued and developed. Whether the school district will eventually approximate the standard of one school to each quarter-section or not it is now too early in its history to state. The advantages in accessibility, safety and community spirit engendered by such a plan are obvious, yet these may be offset by undue operating costs in given instances. The plan presented indicates the general locations of playgrounds, normally as adjuncts of schools, as already discussed. It is none too soon to determine which of these, if not all, are likely eventually to carry a school, and to secure them adequate in size for such combined use.

Whether the School District should continue an independent governmental body with an area larger than that of the village or not is an administrative governmental problem which this plan cannot determine.

PUBLIC UTILITIES

The plan must pay due regard to the inter-relation of various public utilities with its other components. As these are all virtually special forms of circulation systems it is natural that they should be closely bound up with the plan of the highway system. Their capacities, however, will depend chiefly on the zoning and the expected densities of population.

SEWERAGE

The sewerage system—now proposed to be hereafter of the combined storm water drainage and sanitary sewage type—requires larger and larger outlets as the village grows, with interceptors along the few shallow valleys and storm relief through the natural channels. It is therefore a factor of considerable economy to link its planning up with the park system plan for preserving these open valley courses in public ownership. A sewerage plan is already contemplated for caring for the several drainage areas of the village and its vicinity.

WATER SUPPLY

The water supply is at present adequate and planned to accommodate a considerably larger population. Should it eventually prove incapable of being increased enough to meet the needs of a large community, Detroit's own ample supply from Lake St. Clair may then be tapped, so that this problem appears to be settled.

OTHER UTILITIES

Other Utilities such as gas and electricity may readily be expanded as the village grows. Location for supply lines for all these utilities will almost invariably be in the street or alleys or on back yard easements, so that they do not constitute a special problem.

Such signs as are frequently found on business streets projecting five or even ten feet out over the sidewalk soon defeat their own end by obscuring one another, besides destroying whatever beauty the business facade may have and constituting a potential danger to pedestrians.

V. Private Property

In any community, equally important with the proper provision of means of circulation and public services is the use of the remaining property in private hands. Birmingham particularly should safeguard this use to assure the high quality and general attractiveness of the village in the future. This may be done both by direct regulation and by indirect means.

BUILDING CODE

The negative control of zoning on the nature of use and the location and bulk of building has already been dealt with in this report. Similar in method, the building code controls the type of construction, factors of fire safety, sanitation and the like. The code enacted six years ago should soon be revamped or replaced by a code more effective to control building in communities of ten to twenty thousand on the border of a great metropolis.

HOUSING CODE

The housing code, which pays special attention to conditions around multiple and other rented dwellings, is in Michigan a state-wide law binding upon every portion of it. This code should be treated as a part of the building code in enforcing its provisions, which fortunately now require reasonably high standards of construction and maintenance. To secure the adequate enforcement of the three codes—building, housing and zoning—the new full time building inspector is a long step ahead.

ARCHITECTURAL CONTROL

Fully as great benefits to Birmingham will, however, arise entirely outside the present exercise of the police power so-called, through education and moral suasion as to proper architectural treatment of all structures. Today on most of the better grade subdivisions able architects are engaged to design dwellings, churches, clubs and other buildings, though sometimes their sense of fitness of the scheme with the neighborhood has to be sub-ordinated to the owner's wishes. In business buildings particularly, on the other hand, there is the greatest range between the well designed building fitting its site and either the ugly strictly utilitarian or the blatant type so often erected. Taste in these things is rising gradually. It may be stimulated indirectly by education and more directly by example. One well-designed building goes far to raise the standard of an entire neighborhood.

A further step should be taken in a progressive community such as Birmingham. Whenever a building is proposed to be erected unsuited to its site it will be worth while to sit down with the designer and owner and suggest how to improve the design. Elsewhere this is successfully done by committees of architects, by fine arts commissions, or by the planning commission themselves. The total number of new buildings or extensive alterations involving the outside appearance is not so great for any one period but that some group can examine every design and thus sort out those where improvement needs to be sought. In the large city of Washington, D. C., three architects sit once a week, one retiring each week and a new one coming in, thus assuring continuity of effort without unduly burdening any individual citizen with this civic duty.

CO-ORDINATION

All work of a public character should, of course, be zealously studied to see that it fits in with the general scheme of the village plan. By such methods the tone of the village may be kept up and the plan justify itself to its fullest capacity.