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INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL RESEARCH

PRACTICAL PROBLEMS OF TOWNSHIP PLANNING

by

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Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen, in giving this paper let me stress right from the outset that I propose dealing with the subject from a Native Administration point of view and I will attempt to show the problems which a Native Administration Department must face in contributing its share in the creation of a new Native Township. I would also like to stress that I am dealing with the subject as it affects Durban although some of the problems may be common to other Local Authorities.

The first step which should be taken by any Local Authority contemplating a new Housing Scheme is to ascertain what its problem is, i.e. what is its housing shortage and what is the income of the people it must house. In order to obtain this information it is necessary to carry out a survey of the future residents. This in itself, in the case of Durban, is a major problem. As we all know, Durban is surrounded by several concentrations of shacks at present housing some 70,000 people. This large number of persons consists of single men, single women, married couples with their children and unmarried couples living under family conditions also with children. The married couples, from the point of view of a survey, cause little trouble as they usually reside in one place for some considerable time and the results of a survey usually remain static. Unfortunately the same cannot be said of the unmarried couples living under family conditions for these are normally unions of convenience set up by a male who intends working for a short while in Durban and a female who has tired of tribal life. When the male has completed his term of employment he usually returns to his kraal in the reserve and incidentally to his legal wife leaving his temporary wife and the illegitimate offspring to remain in a shack area, the woman to set up another union with some other male. This is a common practice in shack areas and is causing grave concern to the more far sighted of the Native community who foresee a complete breakdown in Native tribal life. Due to the above therefore, one can easily see that the results of a survey of families living under family conditions must become out of date in a short space of time. However, these difficulties must be overcome as it is essential to know the number of houses and hostel beds required before a Local Authority can contemplate purchasing land on which to build.

In Durban the results of a survey will in all probability reveal that approximately 18% of the residents of shack areas are earning over £15 per month and that the balance of 82% earn less than that figure. The site rental in the Cato Manor Emergency Camp is £1.0.0. per month and the building is usually owned and already paid for by the occupant. Outside the Emergency Camp the average rental for a room, which the occupant usually hires from a shack landlord, averages 30/- a month. Transport from Cato Manor is 16/- per month. It is for this reason that the average family can come out on this low income where rent and transport approximates 15/- of monthly income. A different proposition, however, exists where families must be housed in a permanent Native Township especially where it must be fully economic. An average site rental today is approximately 25/- and the repayment instalment in respect of a house is approximately the same based on a 30 year loan period. To this figure must be added the cost of transport, let me say approximately £1.10.0., i.e. considerably higher than the fare paid by Cato Manor residents today due to the fact that Cato Manor is only five miles from the centre of the city whereas any new

scheme in Durban cannot be nearer than 11 miles from the centre of the city. The Native from the shack areas is thereafter faced with a payment of approximately £4,0,0. per month as against his present commitment of £2,6,0., both figures being inclusive of transport. It will be apparent from the above that the Native cannot afford to pay this figure of £4,0,0. even though he will occupy a four-roomed brick house as against the tin shack he occupies at present.

This problem at present faces all Local Authorities and to my knowledge no answer has yet been found. By means of partitions certain Local Authorities have converted a four-roomed house to two half houses of two rooms each which has helped from a financial point of view but which must bring overcrowded conditions and which, if not carefully watched, can develop into a slum area from which the Natives have been removed. Another method which has been tried is the granting of rent remissions in respect of site rentals. Where a Native Revenue Account has large reserves this is possible, but can only last until such reserves have been depleted at which stage the Borough or City Fund will have to bear the cost involved by way of rent remission. In my opinion the only solution to sufficient Native housing, if the problem is to be solved, is either a general increase in Native wages or more assistance from the more affluent members of the community by means of a contribution from the Borough Funds.

We now come to the second stage, i.e. purchasing sufficient land on which to build the new Township. This is in all probability the most difficult problem to be faced in Durban surrounded as it is by so-called "monkey country" and further controlled by Government Legislation and City Council policy in overall Town Planning. Durban, as we know is a seaport town with a comparatively straight coastline and can therefore only expand on a semicircular basis. With expansion we get further and further away from the centre of the city, the port, and with the exception of the Mobeni industrial area, the other industrial areas. It is to the industrial areas that the Native must be transported and it is essential therefore to have your new Township as near as possible to such areas to ensure speedy travelling and low cost of transport. Although the above is desirable it cannot always be achieved particularly in Durban controlled as it is by semicircular expansion.

Before negotiations in regard to the purchase of land are entered into, certain procedures and approvals in terms of relevant legislation must be complied with and obtained. The first step is to ensure that such land falls within the area zoned for Native occupation in terms of the Group Areas Act, the Act designed to ensure effective segregation of races by the application of buffer strips and so cited to provide a hinterland for future expansion. The buffer strips can have an all important bearing on the ultimate selection of a site in that these buffer zones are virtually a no mans land on which no development of any form can take place. Legislation requires a buffer of 500 yards between all races, 500 yards from a National road, 300 yards from a provincial road and 200 yards elsewhere. All buffer zones must be within the proclaimed Native Township. In a big housing scheme it is obvious therefore that the cost of this idle land is enormous but it must be borne by Native Revenue account generally or by the Natives living in the township through their rentals.

In Durban it is most unfortunate that the only land which can be utilised for Native Housing is situated at the northern and southern extremities of the city. Whilst there is one advantage common to these two areas, in that both adjoin Native Reserves which is ideal for future development, there is one big disadvantage. This disadvantage is that the lowest income group is housed the furthest away from the centre of the city and its place of employment. This means a considerable amount of time spent on travelling and fairly high travelling costs.

The type of land to be acquired is also extremely important - unfortunately we in Durban have had little choice as indicated above. Generally speaking in select-

ing a site for development in low cost housing, cost is an important factor. Cheap land with a steep topography can well prove to be the most expensive in the long run due to the high cost of development works. In this connection in so far as Durban is concerned, whilst the land it purchased for its Kwa Mashu Housing Scheme was expensive due to the fact that it was practically all under sugar can, this initial high cost will be offset by the fact that the land is reasonably level and the cost of development will not prove to be particularly high for Durban.

A factor which has materially helped bring down the cost of Native Housing is the Native Services Levy Fund which assists materially in paying for access services to Native Housing Schemes. This fund is financed by all employers who do not house their Natives, to the extent of 2/6d per employee per week. Unfortunately legislation does not permit these funds being utilised for the direct construction of houses but nevertheless obviates the necessity to charge the cost of access services to the capital cost of the scheme.

With the site then in view, the all important approach is made to the Minister of Native Affairs after reference to the Administrator in terms of Section 2 of the Natives (Urban Areas) Consolidation Act of 1945, and providing these approvals are obtained, the Local Authority may proceed to acquire the land. This at the best is a long and arduous procedure if, as they invariably do, negotiations break down, in which event the Local Authority can expropriate in terms of the Housing Act, the Slums Act or the Native (Urban Areas) Consolidation Act.

It is usual for Local Authorities to obtain financial assistance by way of a loan from Government funds to purchase the land required for a Native Housing Scheme. This loan is of course repaid by the Native residents in the case of an economic housing scheme.

Having acquired a site the engagement of highly qualified Town Planners is of course essential for the preparation of the ultimate layout plans. It would seem at this stage that with the commencement of professional activities the Native Administration Department would fade from the picture but this is indeed not so as it is the function of that Department to advise the Town Planners on a large number of factors which play a most important part in the success or otherwise of a Native Housing Scheme. As a matter of fact a city such as Durban are closely integrated in the stage by stage development of any housing scheme until the happy day is reached when the scheme is complete.

I will deal, however, only with the part that the Native Administration Department plays in providing the Town Planners with information which is vital to the success or otherwise of the Housing Scheme.

The Department acts as intermediary between various outside bodies and the Town Planner and must advise the Town Planner of the requirements of such outside bodies, bearing in mind always that these requirements must be adequate but not lavish.

The following are some of the organisations with which the Department must deal:-

- Church Bodies
- Child Welfare
- Boy Scouts
- Girl Guides
- Bantu Blind
- Clinics
- Creches

and various others.

In addition to these bodies, Government requirements must also be dealt with, e.g.:

Post Office  
Police Station  
Law Courts  
Native Commissioner Courts

Apart from this liaison, through experience and its knowledge of the Native, the Department must advise on the type of recreation facilities to be provided, bearing in mind that until recently the Native was chiefly interested in soccer only, but today this interest is changing and many Natives are taking to tennis, cricket, hockey, golf and bowls.

Perhaps the most difficult aspect on which to advise is the question of trading facilities. It is generally accepted that most Natives are poor traders and have great difficulty in competing with other races. This is primarily due to a lack of capital and the failure to keep proper books of account. Bearing this in mind one must build shops which are not too large and for which the rental is not too high. This, however, has certain disadvantages as the size of the shop limits the quantity of goods which can be displayed. Whilst it is current Government policy that only Native Traders can trade in Native areas, the fact remains that practically all the residents spend some time in town and are attracted to the more lavish shops in town which due to increased turnover are able to offer goods at reduced prices. In Durban the problems of the trader have been overcome by granting a rent remission until such time as he builds up a trade sufficient to give him a reasonable profit.

Another interesting feature in the planning of large Native Townships is the provision of facilities for Building Societies and banking. Commercial banks and Building Societies are showing more and more interest in providing facilities for Natives due to the fact that the Native today has realised that he can earn interest on his money by investing it rather than leave it at his kraal or purchase livestock with it as he did in the old days.

In Benoni banks have opened branches in Daveyton and have staffed these branches with Native clerks. This is in the nature of an experiment and if it proves successful, will in all probability be extended to other Native Townships throughout the country.

The Native Administration Department must ensure that the habits of the people are taken into account. A good example of this is that a Town Planner is often keen to build semi-detached houses which naturally reduce the costs, both of the house and the services and allows for an increased density. The Native, however, is not keen to purchase a semi-detached house due to a number of reasons. Firstly, he does not know who his neighbour will be and whilst he may be a Zulu, his neighbour may be a Pondo - both members of the Nguni group, but both having different customs. Possibly, however, the most important reason for not wishing to purchase a semi-detached house is the fact that the Native still believes in witchcraft and is afraid that his next door neighbour might put "muti" on the common wall which will penetrate through to his section of the house, possibly with fatal results.

Even though the Town Planner is an expert in his field and he has been advised of the requirements of the Native, he unfortunately has not got a free hand to proceed and design a Township which he considers ideal.

In 1951 the National Housing and Planning Commission in consultation with the Department of Native Affairs and the National Building Research Institute published a booklet called "A Guide to the Planning of Non-European Townships". This booklet was introduced for the purpose of obviating over lavish planning on the one hand and ensuring on the other the creation of an environment which would not deteriorate into a slum through over density or the lack of land for public amenities.

It will be appreciated, however, that any endeavour to apply set minimum standards to so vast a country as ours bristles with so many difficulties that it is doomed to failure. Different Local Authorities all have their problems and in all probability there are no two alike. Take for example the flat lands of the Free State and the broken country on the coast of Natal from a building point of view or the easy position of Durban as compared with Johannesburg where it comes to ethnic grouping.

To elaborate on the point of uniformity of Housing Schemes the Government requires a minimum gross density of 5.88 dwellings per acre and where hostels for single men are erected a minimum of 100 beds per acre. This is a figure easily achieved on gently undulating land, but can indeed present a problem to the Town Planners where as much as 25% of your land is completely unbuildable as is the case in Durban.

A centrally situated Government Office sees to the implementation of these standards and it will be appreciated that any Local Authority encountering topographical difficulties will find itself in a position of finding its layout plans totally rejected or having to arrange for several delegations either to or from Pretoria in an endeavour to obtain some relaxation to the set standards.

A practical example of this was experienced at the Kwa Mashu Scheme where the planners considered that a density of 80 beds per acre was the maximum they could obtain. A scheme on this basis was submitted for approval but was returned with a request that the density be increased to 100 beds per acre. This is a position which is not only frustrating but presents a problem of either redesigning the Scheme in a manner not in the best interests of the Local Authority or despatching a team of officials to Pretoria to argue the merits of the case.

It will be obvious that such arbitrary methods can be most harassing to a Local Authority where the topography of the land is most unsympathetic towards a high density of development and also where steep sites can only lead to high building costs and high administrative costs in the way of refuse removal, soil conservation, etc.

Whilst the Native Administration Department must at all times work in close co-operation with the Town Planners, it must also exert a controlling influence over them. There is usually a tendency on the part of the Engineer who is so vitally affected by topography which can materially effect his ultimate costs to retain all buildable land for the erection of houses and siting land for public purposes such as recreation fields, civic centre, schools, etc. on land not really suited for that purpose.

The Native Administration Official must ensure that within reason the layout plan, even though it complies with all accepted standards, is practicable from his point of view and that when he allocates a church site to a religious body, he is not confronting that body with an engineering problem when it commences to erect its church.

In conclusion, Ladies and Gentlemen, the Native Administration Department must ensure that what is planned is indeed in the best interests of those who must eventually occupy the Township, as the Town Planners and the engineers will eventually fade from the scene whilst the Native Administration Department will always be present and must bear the brunt of any criticism from the residents.



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