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RESEARCH COMMITTEE ON MINIMUM STANDARDS OF
ACCOMMODATION.

Minutes of the Sixth (Special) Meeting of the Estate Planning Sub-Committee held in the Board Room of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research on Wednesday 21st April at 9.45 a.m.

Present:

Major J.C. Collings (Chairman) - Director of Housing.
 Mr. de Smidt - Chairman, Cape Townships Board.
 Mr. van Niekerk - Chairman, Natal Townships Board.
 Mr. B. Wedepohl - Chairman, O.F.S. Townships Board.
 Mr. C.S. Douglas - Chairman, Transvaal Townships Board.
 Mr. J.S.M. Guldenpfennig - Surveyor-General, Transvaal.
 Mr. J.E. Jennings - Director, National Building Research Institute.
 Mr. W.G. McIntosh - Institute of S.A. Architects.
 Mr. A.J. Cutten - Town Planner.
 Mr. N.T. Cooper - Town Planning Institute.
 Mr. M.J. Mitchell - National Housing and Planning Commission.
 Mr. P.H. Connell (Organising Secretary) - National Building Research Institute.

Minutes Secretary:

Miss S.M. de Beer.

Apology:

Dr. Hamlin.

1. The Chairman in declaring the meeting open, welcomed the four Chairmen of the Townships Boards and the Surveyor-General of the Transvaal and said how grateful he was that they had come such long distances to attend. He felt that this was a momentous meeting, possibly a unique one, and its deliberations should prove extremely valuable.

The Chairman then gave a brief account of the origins of the work of the Research Committee on Minimum Standards of Accommodation and its various Sub-Committees. Two and one half years ago, the National Housing and Planning Commission entered the building field to provide housing for certain classes of Europeans. At that time the housing position was bad; today it was worse, and rapidly approaching a stage of crisis.

At the start, the Commission's technical problems were not great, as the practice was to purchase erven and build houses in the ordinary way. Since then, however, it has had to adopt a new approach in order to reduce costs. The new situation has meant that the Commission has been faced with the necessity of creating new townships ranging from 500 to 2500 dwellings.

Today, the chief problem to be faced lies in the economic

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Factor; it amounts to a war on rising costs. It was found that local authorities, in order to reduce costs, were resorting to reductions in their structural standards, and what was worse, in their standards of accommodation. There arose, therefore, a real danger of the creation of new slums. On examination, it was found that no enforceable "minimum standards" existed; the Commission therefore resolved to impose certain minimum standards on all housing for which State funds were advanced. A conference of the technical staff of the Directorate of Housing and the Department of Health took place, and as an interim measure a schedule of Minimum Standards was issued, to be effective for a period of one year, i.e. until July 1948.

The National Housing and Planning Commission then approached the National Building Research Institute of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, and requested them to institute research on a scientific, and therefore authoritative basis, into the whole question which was considered to be one of national importance. The National Building Research Institute was not slow in accepting this duty and had since done everything possible to assist the Commission and through its efforts the Research Committee on Minimum Standards of Accommodation had been set up to direct and co-ordinate the work. This Committee, generally spoken of as the Main Committee, was a widely representative and powerful body, which was supported by nine working Sub-Committees investigating various aspects of the problem. The study covered the sociological aspects, the problems of house design, estate planning and the comfort factors in dwellings.

This particular Sub-Committee on Estate Planning was perhaps one of the most important, and it had now arrived at the stage where the necessity of conferring with the Townships Boards had been realised. The Boards would know from experience whether the Minimum Standards the Sub-Committee was considering were too low.

The Committee had realised the danger of minimum standards being taken in practice as maxima; the chairman quoted the case of the "Bye-law street" as an example of this. It was realised that the Townships Boards were a safeguard in South Africa against a repetition of this tendency, and it could be said that they had fulfilled this function well in the past, and that nothing but good had derived from their activities. The restrictions they had had to introduce to prevent the speculator from damaging the towns and prejudicing public interest were recognised as both necessary and valuable. Nevertheless, these restrictions generally apply only to the relatively wealthy section of the community, and little or no direct benefit accrues to the large middle income group (up to £50 per month), nor to the very extensive sub-economic section of the population, neither of which can afford to enjoy the benefits of ownership.

It is now the task of the National Housing and Planning Commission to:

- (a) Erect houses for letting to the middle income groups. The first houses had cost £2,500 (including land) and were rented at 11 and 12 guineas per month. It became necessary to reduce these figures considerably. Ideas in planning new to South Africa (e.g. flatted houses and other combined types of dwellings) have

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been tried out, with success. By such means it was now possible to provide family dwellings of adequate size for £6 per month. The houses were attractive, and were laid out in attractive estates. This new approach would demand a revision of estate planning methods and standards, as well as a revision of minimum standards for the dwellings themselves.

- (b) Erect houses in large numbers for letting to Natives in the sub-economic group. The experiments carried out in respect of (a) above, would have to be intensified and possibly carried further in Native Housing, where the economic difficulties were very much greater.

The Chairman went on to remark that one of the critical problems to be faced in low-cost housing was that of prescribing the minimum width of streets. This together was related to the economic problem of Services in general. It was a matter of concern that some local authorities had to pay as much as £400-£500 per erf for essential services, due almost entirely to excessive street widths and frontages. The Housing Commission felt that a new approach to the planning of low-cost housing estates was necessary in order to reduce the excessive costs of services. The Chairman suggested as a practical step in this direction, the prescribing of a maximum overall density for housing estates as a protection against overcrowding; this method would leave the planner free to develop the estate on functional lines, the minimum sizes of erven being related to the various classes of dwellings to be built. This method was proposed in relation to statutory low-cost housing schemes, i.e. the field with which the Government was particularly concerned.

The Chairman then summarised the points which should be discussed and if possible settled at this meeting, in particular:

- (1) The size of erven,
- (2) The width of streets,
- (3) The amenities to be provided.

The Sub-Committee's Terms of Reference covered the following subjects:-

1. Township development in relation to Town planning.
2. Building sites (Density
(Building lines
(Space about buildings
(Use of sites.
3. Streets and Access ways. (Functions, size, intersections, street furniture).
4. Services.
5. Open spaces. (Parks, Playing Fields, Childrens Playgrounds)
6. Non-residential buildings.
7. Architectural Aspects. (House planning in relation to site; external appearances).

Mr. Douglas enquired whether the Sub-Committee intended publishing its recommendations in the form of a handbook, pointing out that such a publication would be of enormous value to the Township Boards.

Mr. Jennings explained that while the Interim Report at present being compiled would consist mainly of comments on the existing minimum standards of the National Housing and Planning Commission, and would not be based on fundamental research, after

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the Interim Report had been sent to the Commission in July, the work of the Committee would take on a different and more fundamental character. A final report, possibly on the lines suggested by Mr. Douglas, setting out the Committee's recommendations and findings, would eventually be published.

The Chairman said that in the meantime he would make copies of the Interim Report available to the Townships Boards. Copies could be sent by the Commission to all local authorities. He stressed the need, however, for the eventual publication of a report which would be for the benefit of the public.

Discussion ensued on the question of Non-European Townships. Mr de Smidt pointed out that very often new townships were planned but no provision was made for the Non-Europeans who had to work in these townships, nor for their wives and families.

The Chairman stressed that the Sub-Committee must consider all races. He felt that, if possible, standards should be the same for everyone. In some cases it might not be necessary to provide immediately all the facilities for Natives which were considered necessary for Europeans; but in that case such facilities should be left out altogether rather than provided at sub-minimum standards. Where any facility was to be provided, however, the minimum standard should be the same for all races.

The Organising Secretary then read the relevant sections of the contributory papers.

2. DISCUSSION OF PAPERS.

I

Township Development in Relation to Town Planning.

A discussion took place on the remarks concerning the gridiron layout, and the succeeding curvilinear form. The arbitrary nature of both was discussed, and the point was made that in the modern approach to estate planning, which supersedes both, the street pattern and the layout of the various parts of the estate are related to function.

The Chairman said that he would propose further that the pattern of the town layout be planned with regard to the topography of the ground and with regard to economy.

These three fundamental principles were agreed to.

An error was pointed out in this paragraph where the numbers should read "300 - 400 residences per unit".

Discussion then took place on the size of the urban social unit. The Committee accepted, pending further research, the School as the basis for computing the optimum size of this unit of planning.

Mr. Douglas mentioned that the Union Education Department in the Transvaal based their provision of schools on an estimated average of 1.5 school-going children per family.

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It was pointed out that the actual figure would vary in the different areas; where there were a great many flats, the number of school-going children would be lower; in the poorer areas the number would be higher than in the wealthier areas.

Mr. Cooper considered that 300 - 500 was a safer estimate than 300 - 400. In the Native locations for instance, the number of school-going children was very high; at Atteridgeville schools which had been thought sufficient to cater for the location when built (on the basis of the normal ratio), were now holding double sessions. Mr. van Niekerk said that in Durban in the Indian quarters there was an average of 4 to 5 school-going children to each family.

Considerable discussion followed on the situation in the different Provinces. It was agreed that for short-term requirements it would be necessary to consider the present ideas of the education authorities in the different Provinces, which should be consulted. Mr. de Smidt suggested that the Census Department could probably give assistance on this problem.

The Chairman suggested that it might also be possible to sub-divide the suggested figure of 1.5 into high schools, junior high schools and primary schools. Mr. Douglas said that the Transvaal makes separate provision for high schools, and Mr. Cooper said that the policy in the Transvaal was to provide 1 High School to every 4 or 5 primary schools.

After further discussion it was agreed to accept as a convenient size of residential unit a figure of 300-500 residences per unit, and to work to this, but to insert a rider in the recommendations to the effect that the figure 1.5 might have to be raised in certain areas and that the authorities in the areas concerned should be consulted on the question of the provision of schools.

Discussion then took place on the definition of the terms Residential Unit and Neighbourhood Unit, as there appeared to be some confusion as to the usage of these terms in the papers under consideration.

It was agreed that the term "Residential Unit" should be taken to mean the unit of a size sufficient to support one primary school. This would be regarded as the basic social unit in the housing estate. The "Neighbourhood Unit" would consist of not more than five Residential Units and would include the Neighbourhood shopping and business centre, and a Community Centre.

The use of the term "Greenbelt", to describe a type of estate planning, was felt to be confusing, since the same term was commonly used by planners in a more restricted sense. It was agreed to use the term only in its more restricted sense, and to substitute a term such as "open forms of development" in describing the newer type of estate layout.

A brief discussion was held on the mixing of combined dwellings such as flats &c., with other types of buildings. Mr. de Smidt said that in Cape Town there were seven sets of restrictions for the different zones.

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The importance of new ideas in Estate Planning in relation to mass housing was stressed. The Chairman asked how these developments affected private townships. No comments were made on this point.

The Section referring to Regional Planning would be difficult to put into practice, in view of the general lack of co-ordinated development in the regions surrounding urban areas. The great need for proper regional planning was noted by the Committee.

II

The next paper to be discussed was that on Building Sites.

GENERAL (p.1):

With reference to the size of neighbourhood unit to be prescribed for Native townships, Mr. Cutten asked whether the proposals above were to include Non-European townships. The Chairman in reply said that according to the Native Affairs Department, the size of units in Native townships was dependent on the size of the economic administrative unit. He felt, therefore, that the figures given above should not be taken to include Native townships. Figures for the size of the administrative unit in Native townships were being obtained from the Native Affairs Department.

BUILDING SITES (I (p.2)

The Chairman emphasised that density restriction was the most important aspect here.

A long discussion ensued on the question of control of densities. The Chairman felt that it would be better not to attempt to standardise the sizes and shapes of plots, but to rely on a maximum overall density. On the other hand Mr. Cooper pointed out that the instructions covering the drawing up of this particular paper had required a statement on the size and shape of plots.

Mr. Douglas suggested that housing might be divided into two groups for the purpose of density restriction.

1. Statutory housing schemes, which could be controlled from the outset.
2. Speculative developments which it was almost impossible to control.

The Chairman made clear that he was speaking in terms of gross density, suggested that for (1) a minimum of five dwellings to the acre might be laid down, but flexibility must be allowed. For (2) there would have to be, in addition, some control of the plot sizes and frontages. With flatted houses, for example, the Chairman suggested that a block of buildings could be put up on four erven, allowing 30,000 sq. ft. per block of four.

In the ensuing discussion, Mr. Jennings, referring to the original Terms of Reference for the Committee, said that he did not feel that the Sub-Committee could divorce the

Native/.....

Native housing problem when considering this aspect. He did not feel that a higher maximum density should be prescribed for Natives.

Mr. van Niekerk emphasised that to do this, would be to create slums.

The Chairman said that his Commission could not yet speak authoritatively regarding Native housing as they were only just entering the field, and he would not care to lay down density figures for Native housing without further study.

Mr. Cutten felt that a minimum frontage must also be laid down.

The meeting adjourned for lunch at 12.50 p.m. and resumed its sitting at 2.15 p.m.

After further discussion on the question of densities, it was agreed to accept a suggestion by Mr. Cooper that the Sub-Committee make a recommendation of five dwellings to the gross acre, provided this was acceptable to the local Townships Boards.

As an indication of the workability of this figure, the following densities of various new estates being planned by the Directorate of Housing were quoted:-

| <u>Gross Density.</u> | <u>Nett Density.</u> |
|-----------------------|----------------------|
| 2.4 | 7.1 |
| 1.9 | 3.04 |
| 2.98 | 6.6 |
| 3.74 | 5.5 |
| 3.5 | 7 |
| 3.02 | 6.72 |
| 3.99 | 6.79 |
| 2.04 | 3.66 |

The Australian figure for gross density was 5 dwellings per acre. At Danville, Pretoria (European Sub-economic) gross density was 4.4 per acre, and at Atteridgeville (Native sub-economic) 8.7, excluding the large parks. If the latter were included, the figure would be reduced to 6-7.

FRONTAGES:

After a long discussion, it was agreed that the following minimum frontages be adopted:-

- (a) In the case of estate plans in which the type of buildings to be erected on the plots is not known, the minimum street frontage to be 60 ft. A minimum side space of 16' 0" to be provided with a minimum of 6' 0" on one side for single storey dwellings, and 20' 0" with a minimum of 10 ft. on one side for double storey dwellings. Exceptions to the above to be provided for in the case of corner lots, steep sites &c.

(b) In/.....

- (b) In the case of Statutory Schemes, in which the types of buildings to be provided for are known, no minimum street frontage or side space requirements will be laid down.

Building Lines.

After discussion, a minimum General Building Line of 25' was agreed upon, except in cases such as steep sites, where this might be found impracticable. In corner treatment the shape and size of plots should be adjusted to contain 25 ft. building lines.

Shape of Plots.

A recommendation was adopted to the effect that the words "from an economic point of view it will be found advantageous for the site to have a depth greater than the frontage in a ratio of from $1\frac{1}{2}$:1 to 2:1 or more, in order to reduce cost of services", be included.

III

The third paper to be discussed was Streets and Access ways.

CAPACITY OF FOOTWAYS was fully discussed, and the figures suggested viz: 15 ft. for roads in general and 20 ft. for main shopping streets were agreed upon. It was further agreed that for normal sites, trees should be provided in the streets wherever possible.

It was agreed to insert the following proviso:

"Where the contours are such that the absolute minimum width must be planned for, it is permissible for the width of footways to be reduced to the minimum necessary to carry the pedestrian traffic".

Main Shopping Streets.

After discussion, Paragraphs (a) and (b) were accepted as they stood.

- (a) It was agreed to change the title to Main Estate Roads, and 100 ft. was adopted as a minimum where islands were provided, and 60 ft. where no island was provided.
- (b) It was agreed to call these Feeder Roads instead of Main Residential Roads, and to adopt a minimum width of 54 ft.
- (c) Residential Roads.
The Cape and Natal Townships Boards were prepared to accept a minimum of 40 ft. here, but the O.F.S. Townships Board wanted 60 ft. After discussion, it was agreed to adopt the suggested figure of 48 ft.
- (d) A minimum width of 48 ft. was adopted for culs-de-sac &c. i.e. 15 ft. footway, 18 ft. carriageway, 15 ft. footway.
- (e) A minimum of 35 ft. for single frontage streets, including Service Roads, was agreed upon.

Gradients/.....

Gradients.

After discussion, this paragraph was agreed to as it stood.

3. GENERAL.

The Chairman once more thanked the four Chairmen of the Townships Boards and Mr. Guldenpfennig for their valued presence and assistance, and invited them to act as Corresponding Members of this Sub-Committee. The invitation was accepted and the meeting ended at 5.5 p.m.

Confirmed:

CHAIRMAN.

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