

Chapter 4

HOUSING, REDEVELOPMENT AND LAND SUBDIVISION

HOUSING AND THE PLANNING SCHEME

OF all questions of public interest, that of housing causes most concern to the average citizen. This is not surprising, for the home forms the basis of family life. But the building of structurally sound houses alone is not sufficient to create suitable living conditions. They must be designed and located for health, convenience and amenity, and with due consideration for social life. If the homes are well designed and soundly built, with plenty of light and air about them, on healthy sites, provided with good transport facilities, sanitation and other utilities, in a pleasant environment and within reasonable distance of work and daily needs, many of the physical requirements of town planning will have been satisfied. Town planning centres around the provision of proper living conditions for the people.

Throughout Australia, the absence of home building during the last war, and the big increase in population in the post-war years, have caused a serious shortage of housing. To this must be added the problem of the ageing house, particularly those which were built in a time of different social outlook and which, by contemporary measures, are considered sub-standard.

Although the housing question in Australia is a formidable one, the country, fortunately, was untouched by hostilities, and the problem is small compared with that existing in countries where the ravages of war destroyed hundreds of thousands of houses. There the building of new houses and the rehabilitation of sub-standard areas dwarf everything else, and are intimately woven into the town planning problem. Many overseas planning authorities are themselves either actively engaged in the erection of new housing and the re-building of slum areas, or have some interest in the financial aspects of the work.

That is not so with the Board, as in Victoria slum abolition and the building of community-owned homes are the responsibility of the State Housing Commission. For this reason, the Board's responsibility does not extend to the detailed planning of housing estates or of slum reclamation areas. Its duty is merely to reserve in the most suitable

locations sufficient area to house, under proper conditions, the increased population for which the planning scheme is formulated, and to frame conditions which will encourage the type of development most appropriate to the respective locations.

The area which should be set aside for homes depends not only on the number of people to be provided for, but also on how closely together the people will be prepared to live. This in turn will depend on the conditions under which people wish to live, the type of homes they want and can afford, and the manner in which the land is subdivided.

In selecting new areas for future homes, not only must the environment be taken into consideration so that the most pleasing areas are reserved for this purpose, but the cost to the community of servicing the new homes must also be watched. Advantage must be taken of existing public utility and transport services and regard paid to the cost of extending them. The location of these homes should also be chosen with a view to minimising the disadvantages of the present wide dispersal of population and separation of places of residence and work. But besides taking all these matters into consideration, it is important also to give due regard to the relative popularity of various areas which has been so strongly shown by the housing trend of decades.

THE TYPE OF HOME

As the Board is not a housing as well as a planning authority, a detailed discussion of the type and design of new homes would not be relevant in this report. However, it is necessary to consider the general types of dwelling that form the basis of residential areas, and their different plot requirements, for these will influence the subdivision of land, the problems of re-development, and eventually the closeness with which people will live together.

In Melbourne the predominant type of dwelling is the detached single family home, either of one or two storeys, in its own plot of land, generally about one-sixth of an acre or less according to the municipality in which it is located. Whether owned or rented, this is the most favoured type, for

it is ideal for most families. With its generous block of land, it produces the low density of population characteristic of Australian cities.

Next there is what is known as semi-detached housing, which merely means two houses joined together. Instead of space all around, access passages linking front and back gardens are only at the outer sides of the house. This type is not very common in Melbourne, although some interesting examples are to be found. The villa flat and the maisonette are modern adaptations of this type of building, which provide pleasing and satisfactory homes.

More dwellings per acre can be provided by row housing, that is, three or more dwellings joined together. In the older suburbs of Melbourne there are many examples of this type of development, characterised by a congestion and inconvenience due to lack of proper regulations at the time of their erection. These should not be allowed to prejudice this type of building when it is carried out under proper regulations and in accordance with contemporary design. Pleasing examples of this form of housing in other countries show that it need not have the slightest semblance of overcrowding, and that it is suitable as part of the development in the inner suburbs where higher densities are desirable.

Finally, there are multi-unit dwellings of two general types — walk-up flats, preferably limited to three storeys with access to the upper floors by means of stairways, and the elevator type of several floors serviced by lifts. This type of higher density development has no private gardens, but in their place contemporary design provides for spacious, well laid out, and well tended community surroundings, with emphasis on sun, light and air. In this type of housing the trend is upwards rather than outwards, and a considerable number of people can be housed under good conditions in a relatively small area.

Including half the width of surrounding streets, the approximate maximum number of persons which could be accommodated on each acre of residential development (i.e., the residential density)⁽¹⁾ with each of these types of housing built in accordance with the Uniform Building Regulations, is given in Table 1.

Whatever type of housing is provided, whether by private individuals or by public housing authorities, whether for new settlements or re-development schemes, it is important that it should appeal to the public taste. If it does not, it will ultimately become unpopular, its value, and the rental which it can command will fall, its maintenance will tend to be neglected, the type of occupant will become less desirable, and, as the properties become older, the area will decline to slum conditions.

Therefore, having described briefly the main types of housing, it is advisable to discuss the extent to which they will satisfy the needs and desires of the citizens. The question resolves itself primarily into one of preference for single

Table 1
RESIDENTIAL DENSITIES FOR DIFFERENT
TYPES OF HOUSING

<i>Type of Housing</i>	<i>Approximate Maximum Residential density in persons per acre⁽¹⁾</i>
<i>Detached houses</i>	
Allotments of 6,000 sq. ft.	20
Allotments of 4,800 sq. ft.	25
Allotments of 3,300 sq. ft.	35
<i>Semi-detached houses</i>	
Allotments of 3,600 sq. ft. (for each house)	35
Allotments of 3,000 sq. ft. (for each house)	40
<i>Row houses</i> (not exceeding six connected houses)	50
<i>Flats and Maisonettes</i> — two storey in small groups	50
<i>Flats</i> — walk-up type	70
<i>Flats</i> — elevator type	120

(1) Based on 3.75 persons in each house and 2.5 persons in each flat.

family dwellings or for flats forming units of larger groups. It must be approached from two angles — the general tendencies and desires of the people and the best and most economic use of the land. This question has been discussed at some length in the volume, "Surveys and Analysis," and need not be further dealt with here.

It is obvious, however, that with 90 per cent. of families now living in single family dwellings, and with 50 per cent. of these dwellings being owned by the occupants, the general pattern of housing in Melbourne has been set for many years. With this trend already so firmly established in Melbourne, it must be accepted that this is the general desire here. Any attempt to impose some other form of living on the people, however good the intentions and however sound the reasons, will certainly meet with failure. It is certain that, over the period for which this planning scheme has been designed, the predominant housing will be the single family type.

This does not mean that the proportion of multiple housing may not increase. The percentage of people in Melbourne already living in flats is extraordinarily low, and undoubtedly many more than the number represented by the 6 per cent. of the population who now live in flats, would do so if more were available. The shortage of this type of accommodation is probably greater than for any other type. A balanced housing programme must provide for all sections of the community, and there are many people for whom flats are convenient and congenial — young married couples, particularly when both work, older couples whose children have established their own homes, and people living alone.

For our present consideration, which is the extent of the residential areas which should be provided in the planning scheme, it is necessary to estimate how many people are

(1) For the definitions of terms used in this report in relation to population density, see Appendix 1.