

Chapter 2

THE SIZE OF THE FUTURE CITY

A HOME is planned with the knowledge of the number of people who are likely to live in it, and the space they will need for their comfort and convenience. A factory is planned to accommodate the staff, plant and equipment necessary for it to function as an efficient unit. In both cases, a wise architect will envisage how the structure may be enlarged should additional accommodation ever be needed.

The same applies to the planning of a city. There people live and work, and if they are to be properly accommodated it is necessary to obtain some conception of how large the city may grow. How important this is will be appreciated when it is realised that a planning scheme, such as that now under discussion, fixes the purposes for which every piece of land in the planning area may be used, and allocates between the various community activities the land which is available.

If this allocation is to be proportioned to the respective needs, there must be some basis on which these needs can be assessed. The only reasonable basis is the number of people who will live and work in the area, for it is the people who create and determine the needs. Thus, at the outset of our planning, it is necessary to decide on the number of people who are likely, in the future, to live in the metropolitan area of Melbourne.

There are some persons who believe that cities should not grow beyond a certain size, and that Melbourne has already greatly exceeded this size. Whether they are right or wrong is not a matter to be discussed here; but it is pertinent to consider whether it is practicable or even desirable to attempt to impose limitations on the growth of the city. No one has yet found a way to prevent more and more people congregating in the large cities of the world, and so long as those cities can provide remunerative employment, suitable homes, opportunities for social contacts and the enjoyment of amenities not obtainable elsewhere, they will continue to attract people. Even if it were practicable to prevent a flourishing city from growing, who is to decide what is the best size and when its growth should cease. It certainly is not the province of the town planner, for this question involves such major issues of social, economic, and national policy as to lie entirely within the sphere of the Government of the country.

It is not necessary for the town planner to attempt to decide these issues. It is his province to take things as they are and to endeavour to find a solution for the problems that now exist, to guide future growth so that the mistakes of the past will not be repeated, and above all to encourage an orderly development so that gradually and progressively the city will be made more attractive, more efficient and more comfortable for the community to live in.

In Melbourne we have a city of 1,408,000 people⁽¹⁾, still rapidly growing and showing no signs that it will cease to grow. The national policy of Australia is to encourage immigration and to foster a relatively rapid increase in population. A survey of the Australian scene, both past and present, suggests that unless steps are taken that are far more drastic than those taken in the past, the capital cities will receive a large proportion of any national increase in population despite official encouragement for people to spread themselves throughout the country. So, barring national catastrophe, and unless future economic or social events create unforeseen conditions, we must anticipate that Melbourne will continue to grow.

Our problem concerns more the rate of growth than the ultimate size which the city may attain. The future is unknown and planning for a future too far distant is unprofitable. All that is required is that a prediction should be made of the probable population at such time in the future as is necessary for the economic planning of public and private works. What is a reasonable period to look ahead will vary with the subject under consideration. For some purposes twenty-five to thirty years may be sufficient, for some perhaps less, while for others it may be necessary to look even further ahead; but a period of fifty years will compass all that can be reasonably expected.

As cities grow and occupy more and more space, new problems are created and old ones accentuated. Thus, not only is it important to decide on the number of people for whom the city should be planned, but it is equally important to decide the area over which they should be permitted to spread themselves. Unless some attempt is thus made to regulate the outward expansion of the city, the demand for the amenities of everyday life, to which the citizen considers

(1) As at December 31st, 1951.

himself entitled, may grow beyond the capacity of the many public authorities whose duty it is to supply them.

The uncontrolled growth of Melbourne has led to a sprawling development which is tending to bring about just these conditions. The factors which have influenced the character of its urban development and the size of the urban area are important and various, and the reasons for them not entirely illogical. They are related to past and present trends, and their discussion is necessary so that we may assess their influence on the problem before us.

The existing urban areas of Melbourne are exceedingly widespread, occupying about 146,000 acres (230 square miles) or approximately one-third of the whole metropolitan area as defined by the planning legislation. The density, or number of persons living on each acre, is extremely low compared with that of most large cities in Europe and America. Even in the central suburbs, where it could be expected that high densities would occur, the figure is still relatively low.

In general, this phenomenon may be attributed mainly to the popularity throughout Australia, and especially exemplified in Melbourne, of the single family house placed in its own garden. Most of these house lots have relatively wide street frontages, usually about 50 feet, a type of development encouraged by the regulations of the various local municipal councils. Another factor is the uniformly broad streets, even in districts which are primarily residential. Rarely does one find a street less than 50 feet wide. Frequently they are 66 feet, and in some of the inner suburbs the streets are so broad that their total acreage is akin to that of the fully developed land to which they give access.

These two physical aspects, the large individual house lot and the generous street pattern, are the primary cause of the widespread low density development characteristic of Melbourne. It is not the intention of the planning scheme to attempt to revolutionise this accepted type of development so characteristic of the Australian outlook. Indeed, except in limited areas, it is now too late to influence the trend substantially, for what has been done cannot readily be altered, and the additional areas required to accommodate a much greater population are relatively limited. It is, however, an obligation to point out these aspects of our city structure, because by adding to the cost of providing essential community services they have placed an increased financial burden on the municipal, public utility and transport authorities, and through them on the ratepayers.

As the boundaries of the urban area are approached, the development becomes even less dense because of the continual opening up of new land while previously subdivided areas still remain only partly developed. So much is this so, that more than one-quarter of the present urban area is less than twenty-five per cent. developed. In other words, over an extensive area only one in every four subdivided lots, on the average, is built on.

This sporadic growth on the outskirts of the city adds to

the burden of those bodies responsible for providing services to the area. As an example of what this means, within the present urban limits there were on 1st March, 1953, nearly 40,000 vacant lots which were provided with water, and of these nearly 13,500 also had sewerage available. Past most of these blocks run the electricity supply mains, past many gas mains and telephone cables, while the majority front on to made roads. The cost of providing equivalent services to 40,000 new lots in an extended urban area is conservatively estimated at £10,000,000.

Unless some control is exercised on the present unrestricted spread of the metropolis, the time will come when the cost of providing water, electricity and gas, of extending sewerage and telephone services, of removing garbage, of delivering mail, in short, of providing all those amenities which have become an essential part of our community life, will impose an intolerable burden on ratepayers, and many families in outer urban areas will have to do without them.

It is therefore imperative that Melbourne's sprawling development should be brought under control and that a limit should be placed, at least for the time being, on the extension of the urban area. How big then should be the urban area?

The legal boundary of the metropolitan planning area prescribed by the legislation is a purely arbitrary boundary providing a reasonable administrative area for the immediate purposes of the Act, but it is not intended to define the future extent of the city.

In finding an answer to this question, it must be realised that after allowing adequately for all the non-residential uses appropriate to a city such as Melbourne, the present urban area, when fully built up in accordance with present trends and to-day's density standards, would be capable of containing 2,000,000 people. As discussed in the report on the surveys, this population could reasonably be reached in from 25 to 30 years. Many people will therefore claim that the city should be halted at its present urban boundaries. They will argue that a city of 2,000,000 people is large enough; that the present boundaries provide sufficient room for reasonable expansion, and that 25 to 30 years is a reasonable period for which to plan.

On the surface this may not appear unreasonable, but while, for some purposes such a period is adequate, for other purposes it is necessary to look further ahead. Furthermore, the detailed study which has been given to this question has shown the virtual impossibility of trying to contain the urban area within its present limits. But a line must be drawn somewhere, or the city will continue sprawling over a wider and wider area, increasing the disabilities inherent in this type of growth and putting out of production more and more food producing areas.

After careful study, therefore, bounds have been set to the extent of urban land, and an area of about 170,000 acres allocated for urban type development. At present day density standards, this area, when fully developed, could provide living accommodation for a population of 2,500,000 and at