

Text of Loomis Letter To City Commissioners

The following is the text of the letter which Mrs. P. B. Loomis, plan commission chairman, set this week to the city commission:

Major Ritchie's cheery statement in The Birmingham Eccentric of June 14, that he is "extremely pleased at the wonderful manner in which the plan commission members have listened to, considered, and finally accepted these changes" in the plan commission ordinance, indicates a new conception of the attitude of plan commission members which is very serious to let pass.

Our willingness to cooperate patiently, trying to salvage whatever was possible from the wreckage of the good planning setup this community has had, must not be construed as approval of the wrecking. Obviously, we, like everyone else in Birmingham,

must accept your decisions—you are the city commission.

WE AGREED WITH you on two points—that the Plan commission ordinance should be revised to eliminate filing of a Master plan with the County Register of Deeds, and that there ought to be more frequent joint meetings of city and plan commissions, to build up better mutual understanding.

You scrapped the entire planning ordinance. We are in firm disagreement with your action because—

1. In a period of growth, when change is occurring appallingly fast, and our crying need for good planning (see Mayor Ritchie's statement in the new booklet "Your City in 1951") you have timidly and regressively set aside a good ordinance and substituted a weak one.

We had a wisely balanced, rather strong planning setup. Your Plan commission had been given responsibility and enough autonomy to hold the interest of capable members. The Plan commission could only recommend to you—you could override its recommendations in every case—but there was a well defined and publicly understood responsibility to study and try to bring recommendations. Your new, purely advisory Plan board can be ignored and wither up if future commissions do choose.

2. **THE COMPLETE change in the ordinance is likely to mean that such of our three year "hard work" will be lost**—a wicked civic waste, we think, and one Birmingham cannot afford.

3. While excellent work could be done by a Plan board even under a weak setup, with the capable and wise and forward-looking city commission, your action requiring that every Plan board member must live in Birmingham is a discouraging indication that the dominating group (I do not believe it is even a ma-

jority) in the present City commission is short-sighted and playing petty politics.

The first two points are so inter-related I'd like to discuss them together. Birmingham used to have a merely advisory Plan commission, conscientious but limited in effectiveness by its set-up.

In 1948 an alert City commission employed a firm of efficiency engineers to study our city's whole administration and make recommendations. One of the actions which came out of informal conversations with those engineers was the replacement of the Advisory Plan commission by one established under the State Enabling act.

THE COMMUNITY was seen to be on the point of unavoidably rapid growth. The best and most effective guidance that could possibly be given that growth might still be insufficient to maintain some of the pleasant characteristics of the town we love.

Certainly it made sense to get the soundest appraisal of future tendencies which could be secured, and to listen to the recommendations of thoughtful appraisers.

The nine-member Plan commission was carefully appointed. Among other assignments it was asked to develop a Master Land Use plan for the community and to recommend an off-street parking plan. These are major pieces of work.

We have secured good professional advice and have spent hours each week in earnest study and discussion over much of the past three years.

Last year's City commission rejected the off-street parking plan. The parking snarl grows worse daily, as we know it would, if

you are still struggling with the problem.

AFTER MONTHS of work with our planning consultant, Mr. Charles Barr, we brought before the citizens of Birmingham his Master plan proposal. It was held informational meetings and hearings, to get citizen viewpoint. We were in the appreciative attitude of our own conclusions in the light of citizen reaction, and of admiration for the quality of Mr. Barr's recommendations, when you asked us to stop all action while you reconsidered the Plan commission ordinance. This you have now rescinded.

Gentlemen, why do you encourage Birmingham to stick its head in the sand?

GOOD PLANNING IS difficult, often controversial. It is difficult with the use of land, which is always owned by somebody, who had his own plans for its use. Our splendid Civic center was not secured without opposition, as the files of The Eccentric and the memories of earlier residents will tell you.

You have given up a balwerk you needed! A moderately strong Plan commission such as you have had has stood up to the front to necessary changes, to face some unpopularity while public thinking caught up to the point where you could proceed with action.

Your new Plan board, more or less in the background, can't do this. If a progressive action is being considered, and it proves controversial, the unpopularity is yours, and you equal to facing it, with all the other loads you carry!

WHICH BRINGS ME to point three—the dominating group in the present City commission, which you had determined, before any meeting with us, to scrap the earlier ordinance, we made the best suggestions we could on that in submitting first of your new ordinance.

I was very proud of the tact of Mr. Seaborn and Mr. Klein in these discussions. The question of qualifications for membership on your new board was to us a test as to your breadth of view. At first we were encouraged.

Mr. Rising and Mr. Heier showed keen understanding of what is important in planning and what is not. Mr. Mallender, of course, was major, when the recent City commission was established; he has always had an exceptional grasp of the problems and values of planning.

MR. PATTERSON seemed open-minded and certainly of good will. Mr. Main, who had been sharply critical of the Plan commission at the time of our election, made some of the most helpful suggestions that were offered by our joint representatives.

We, of your recent Plan commission, believed that you should give your consultants free to do the ablest and most forward-looking persons you can find in the Birmingham area as your advisors on the Plan board, and said so.

With the board completely severed from the State Enabling act, we could see no possible legal complications or disadvantages. We admire and value our very fine members, Harold Klein and Dr. Robert Mason, residents respectively of Troy township and of Bloomfield Hills, but whose professional offices are in Birmingham, and who pay Birmingham tax.

WE KNOW FROM our experience with them that men whose working days are spent here can be quite as civic-spirited as those who sleep within our soundings and work elsewhere. Many of Birmingham's problems are a real problem; understanding of the attitudes of residents of contiguous sections is very important to good solutions.

You saw how helpful such understanding could be, in Mr. Klein's comments, on what our neighbors would think of a sentence in your new ordinance concerning planning for adjacent areas, and you wisely altered that paragraph in accordance with Mr. Klein's suggestions.

At our second joint meeting with you, Mr. Ritchie and Mr. Minor took the limited view that the Plan ordinance should require every single member to be a Birmingham resident and freeholder. Mr. Patterson sided with them. Mr. Mallender and Mr. Main, and later by phone Mr. Heier and Mr. Rising held that a residence qualification for all members was immaterial. Nevertheless, the decision has been taken in accord with Mr. Ritchie's and Mr. Minor's wishes, Mr. Main having been per-

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with the statements in her letter. Mrs. Loomis also asked that citizens come forward to back strongly "the constructive members of the city commission and the new plan board."

One thing they could do, she suggested, was see that "a wise, capable person" is appointed "to the vacancy... expected to occur presently on the city commission."

It has been publicly known for some months that Mayor Ritchie intends to move into his new Bloomfield township home around the first of August.

After Ritchie finished reading Mrs. Loomis' letter, he read the following telegram from W.A.P. John, 556 Tooting Lane:

"Personally and on behalf of the Tooting land property owners association, I want to commend you and your fellow commissioners for the ordinance you have passed reviving authority of the city planning commission.

"DOUBTLESS you will be criticized by certain daydreamers and self-appointed experts, but you will have the approval of the vast majority of your fellow citizens. "If you hadn't stepped in as you did, we might have ended up with a double-decked suspension bridge over the River Rouse."

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