



Present Scope for Practical Work in Improving Civic Conditions, 1916

By Thomas Adams

Conference of Civic Improvement League of Canada
Held in co-operation with the Commission of Conservation in the Railway Committee
Room, House of Commons, Ottawa, January 10, 1916.

To Field Marshal His Royal Highness Prince Arthur William Patrick Albert, Duke
of Connaught and of Strathearn, K.G., K.T., K.P., etc., Governor General of
Canada

May it please Your Royal Highness:

The undersigned has the honour to submit the attached report of the inaugural
Conference of the Civic Improvement League of Canada, held at Ottawa on
January 20, 1916, and at which Your Royal Highness was graciously pleased to
attend to address the delegates and open the meeting.

Respectfully submitted,
Clifford Sifton
Chairman
Commission of Conservation

Ottawa, April 6, 1916

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SIR JOHN WILLISON: I shall ask Mr. Adams to tell us just exactly why we are here and
what we have to do.

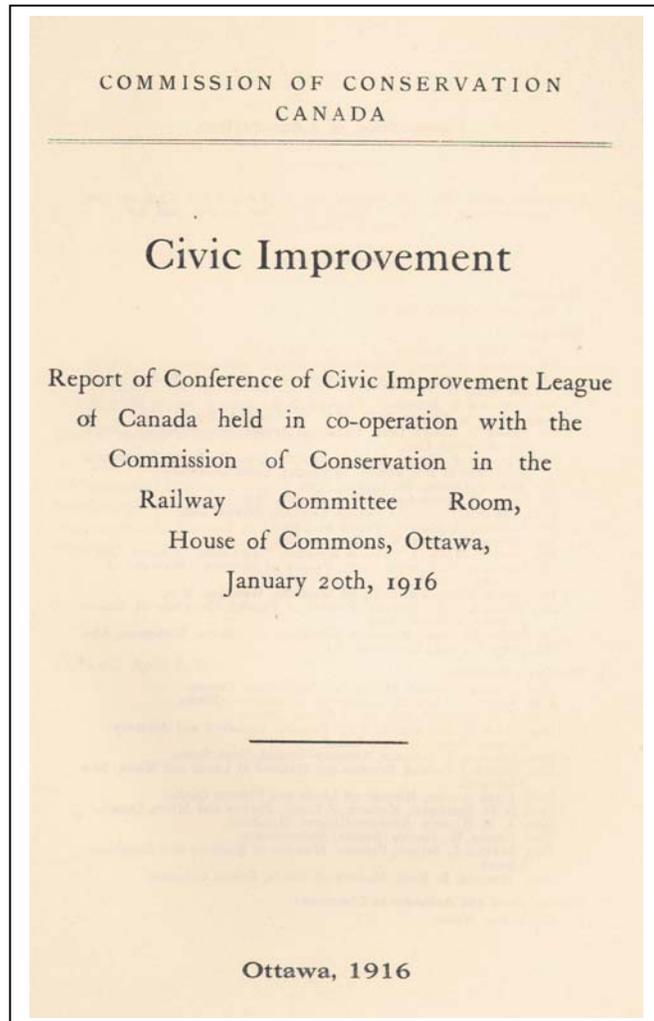
MR. THOMAS ADAMS: I have prepared a short paper which will help, I think, to bring
before our minds this morning, some of the reasons for our presence and some of the

subjects which might be very properly discussed. In the first place I have to convey to the meeting from Mr. J. Horace McFarland, Chairman of the American Civic Association, the greetings of that Association and best wishes for the success of this League. There are also a large number of apologies from those who have been unable to attend.

As an organization, the Civic Improvement League will have to justify its existence not by the excellence of its aims but by its success in securing their attainment. On a previous occasion we discussed the desirability of forming the League and the scope and objects for which it should stand. Having arrived at certain conclusions regarding these matters and put these conclusions on record, I hope we shall all regard it as irrelevant in to-day's proceedings to take up much time with words of commendation regarding the purposes we have in view and concentrate on the consideration of the work to which we can immediately set our hands. For my part I do not desire to occupy any time with suggesting the pressing need for reform of some of our civic conditions. I think we are agreed upon that as well as upon some of the directions in which reform is needed. One fact alone I may be allowed to mention as supplementing the figures given in the statement I presented to the previous conference, namely, that, in four of the provinces represented

here to-day, an average of over one hundred entirely new towns were created between 1901 and 1911 and, considering that the development of these provinces has only begun and that in the older eastern provinces new areas are being opened up, we see how great are our opportunities in starting this League while yet there is time to assist in laying the foundations for a healthy civic structure throughout the Dominion. I may also be permitted to emphasize the need of always bearing in mind that the problems of the country and the town are really twin problems and cannot be effectively dealt with independently of each other.

What then is the scope for immediate action in dealing with these problems, having regard to the evils of our present system, the tendencies at work, the extent and character of future growth and the peculiar conditions created by the war? Let us consider them under the three heads under which to-day's discussions will take place.



Municipal Government and Finance and Unemployment

The greatest need in connection with these matters is that a Department of Municipal Affairs or a Local Government Board should be created in each province. That need arises from the fact that we require more uniformity in regard to measures which are necessary to secure (1) real and effective economies in the general conduct of municipal business, (2) lower rates of interest on municipal borrowing, (3) great efficiency in carrying out public undertakings, (4) preparation of municipal budgets and accounts on a uniform plan and proper auditing of such accounts, (5) prevention of fire and a consequent reduction in the cost of fire insurance, (6) proper control of labour difficulties during periods of slackness in employment with the least harmful results to those citizens affected during such periods, (7) enforcement of sanitary provisions, (8) avoidance of recurring mistakes in administration due to isolated local action, (9) reduction in cost of local improvement without lowering of standards of construction, (10) unifying of the methods of valuing land for assessment, and other matters.

We cannot overcome the defects of human nature in the personnel of Councils, Commissions or other bodies by legislation, but we can reduce the opportunities for bad management by setting up the right kind of machinery. At present we have a system of municipal government which is inherently bad because it lacks uniformity on the one hand and elasticity on the other hand, and to go on tinkering with it is to waste time and effort. We need a constructive policy which has for its final aim the substitution of a new system for that now in force. We need not begin by destruction or radical reform of our existing local government institutions, but we should aim at ultimately securing a finer readjustment of our system so that it will attain even higher standards than those of the Mother Country, where democratic local government is comparatively successful. As a beginning, we should recognize the need for apportionment of responsibility between the province and the local government unit—be it city, town or rural municipality—and make the first step in reform the setting up of a provincial department, with a Cabinet Minister at its head to give exclusive attention to affairs of local government. There are the beginnings of such a department in Alberta and Saskatchewan, but even in these provinces the question of giving them enlarged powers and wider scope requires consideration, and the machinery is not as satisfactory as it might be.

One of the most serious causes of bad sanitation is the absence of effective control over new developments just outside the boundaries of cities, in rural municipalities, and until we have a uniform sanitary standard for all urban growth, whether within the city or just over its borders, we shall continue to have unhealthy conditions. With regard to the question of the fixing of values of land for purposes of assessment, we have a position at present in many cities which contains all the elements of ultimate financial disaster unless we make an early attempt to regulate it. Bondholders frequently apply to government departments for statistics to enable them to judge of the soundness of investments in city bonds and they show a nervousness and lack of confidence in making these investments which is caused by our careless methods and is not justified by any lack of real stability in our institutions. That there is need for some stock-taking and re-appraisal of values is indicated by the fact that in more than one province we have an average assessment value per capita of nearly \$1,800 as against about \$550 in other provinces. In the largest cities and towns of Scotland the capital value of the assessed valuation is only \$520 per capita, notwithstanding that every street along which buildings are erected has been constructed according to the best modern standards. An owner of land and improvements in a Scottish town can raise about three-fourths of this assessed

valuation on mortgage, and I leave it to you to compare that with the proportion that could be raised of the assessed valuation of land in some of our cities.

My second suggestion under the head of municipal government is that we should ask the Census Department of the Government to take up the question of municipal statistics. We have no satisfactory system of collecting statistics regarding municipal undertakings and finance. We collect many statistics without any apparent object in view, some of little real value because they are incomplete, and others useless because the reason for collecting them has ceased to exist. With our growing towns and steadily increasing municipal expenditure we urgently need a collection of municipal and vital statistics prepared with certain definite objects in view and we should draw the attention of the Dominion Government to this need and appoint a committee of expert municipal men to confer and make recommendations to the department concerned. Here the need for co-operation is between (1) the Federal Government, (2) the province and (3) the city or town.

Town Planning, Housing and Public Health

In regard to town planning we have the excellent example of Nova Scotia which has created a precedent for effective legislation dealing with this subject. The Commission of Conservation has issued a draft Act which has been circulated among members of this conference. This draft slightly enlarges on the Nova Scotia Act but does not differ from it in any material sense. Its purpose is to secure the proper regulation and control of the use and development of land for all kinds of building purposes; the term "town planning" very imperfectly indicates the comprehensive character and real significance of the measure. Its main provisions may be summarized as follows:

Town Planning Act—Part I

It is considered desirable for the working of the Act that there should be a Department of Municipal Affairs in each province, but this is not essential, as the duties may be assigned to another department. Under the Department there should be a Comptroller or Director of town planning for each province, devoting himself specially to town planning. He should keep a plan of the whole province showing the main arterial thoroughfares which, in the opinion of the Highway Commissioners or Minister of Highways, are desirable for purposes of main road communication. In each locality there has to be a Local Town Planning Board consisting of three members of the Council and two outside rate-payers, but, if desired, the work can be done by the local authority itself, and the draft altered accordingly to secure this. The Local Board would have the engineering officer or other qualified person as its executive officer. The appointment of such a board is desirable, though not essential, for the working of the Act. If it is considered best to delegate the duties to be performed under the Act to the local authority itself, this can be done by verbal alterations in the draft.

Town Planning Act—Part II

This gives certain powers and duties to the Local Board to approve all new development and to require plans and particulars of all subdivisions and laying out of streets to be submitted in accordance with certain procedure. The Board may require that main thoroughfares shall be 100 feet wide. Agreements may be entered into with owners permitting streets to be of less width than 66 feet where land is given by such owners for streets wider than 66 feet. Arrangements may be made for adjusting and altering

boundaries and effecting changes of land already sub-divided, and the co-operation of Local Boards in adjoining areas is required in regard to sub-divisions affecting land near to their boundaries.

Town Planning Act—Part III

Town Planning Schemes or Town Planning By-laws may be prepared for the general object of securing proper sanitary and hygienic conditions, amenity and convenience in connection with the lay-out of land. What is meant here by a set of by-laws is practically a partial town-planning scheme. Such partial schemes are compulsory and are adaptable for rural areas and small towns. The more comprehensive scheme is most suitable for large cities and is optional. In other respects this part of the Act follows in general principle the successful British Act of 1909. Schemes and by-laws would deal with building lines, width of streets, limiting the number of separate family dwelling houses to the acre, prescribing the area of any lot which can be built upon, directing the setting aside of areas for residential, manufacturing and other purposes, prohibiting noxious trades and structures injurious to amenity, etc.

The power of individuals to defeat the work of a Board or to indulge in speculation in expectation of improvements being carried out will be reduced to a minimum. The provincial Department may prepare a scheme or by-laws if the Local Board fails to do so and there is strong enough local representation in favour of it being done. The local authority must provide enough money to meet the reasonable requirements of a Local Board to *prepare* a scheme or by-laws, but has the option to refuse funds to carry out the provisions of either. It is necessary to give the local authority power to approve or disapprove large expenditures in executing the scheme, but it is equally necessary for the effective working of the Act that the Local Board should be provided with the limited amount to prepare its scheme or set of by-laws.

This is the briefest possible summary of the draft Act which will require careful study to master its details. The need for such an Act is apparent; our present method of developing land is discredited; we are creating new slum conditions in our suburban areas which are as bad as those in old centres, although they are less necessary because they are capable of being controlled by regulation; unhealthy and feverish speculation in land is the result of unbridled license in carrying out its development. Therefore I urge that this conference should consider the desirability of recommending the provincial governments to pass, at the earliest moment, legislation along the lines of the Act framed by the Commission of Conservation.

The housing question requires consideration but it is difficult to deal with it in the form of a general recommendation. The Commission of Conservation is undertaking a special study with a view to making recommendations for new legislation to the provincial governments. My view is that it is desirable to suspend judgment on the housing question until this report is complete, but that the Dominion Council of the League, when formed, should be asked to appoint a special committee to collect statistics and information regarding housing conditions in the different provinces.

Public health, so far as corrective measures dealing with existing evils are concerned, is a matter which is being well taken care of in most of the provinces. Our machinery to deal with that is fairly up-to-date. I will not attempt to indicate what scope there is for action in regard to this matter in view of the presence of Drs. McCullough, Hastings, Bryce and others at this conference. I think, however, there is need for more accurate and

more comprehensive statistics on public health matters; and something might be done to-day to indicate the strength of this need.

Immigration and Development After the War

With regard to immigration we have a question on which experience is the best guide and therefore I am not competent to deal with it. It is intimately connected with our civic problems and requires consideration from the point of view of the municipality as well as that of the Dominion and Province. Whether or not we should pass a resolution suggesting methods and principles which should be adopted in making a more careful selection of immigrants, and whether or not it is possible to devise a method which will encourage a greater amount of settlement in agricultural areas is a matter we should discuss. If we cannot arrive at any conclusion to-day, we should appoint a special committee to go into the question and draft suggestions for consideration of the Council.

If you decide to support the passing of town planning legislation and the setting up of Departments of Municipal Affairs I consider you will have taken one of the most effective steps to secure safeguards for civic development after the war. There is need, however, for a constructive policy in regard to future settlement of agricultural land, particularly in connection with the return of soldiers and possible immigration of the future. We want to urge a policy which will enable us to have (1) less length of roads in rural areas but better and more conveniently planned roads, (2) more accessibility between good areas of land and means of transportation, (3) co-operation and facilities for education and social intercourse, (4) facilities and assistance in creating rural industries in small towns and villages and the other things which are necessary in combination to secure the successful settlement of land. These things are not beyond our reach, but they require us to pay the price demanded *ab initio*, in nearly every successful enterprise. Painstaking investigation must be made and carefully prepared schemes thought out; then when our studies are completed and sound schemes prepared, it will probably be found essential for government support to be given to start the schemes, both in the form of some financial credit and in the form of administrative energy. Some definite recommendation might be made by this conference which may influence the provincial governments to deal with the problem, and be a help to the Commission of Conservation and the Economic and Development Commission in studying and recommending action in the future.

Miscellaneous Questions

There are other matters of importance to be considered. For instance, I agree with Mr. Nelles, of the Geodetic Survey, that we must have better maps of our Canadian towns and cities before we can get the best results in planning and improving our cities and towns, also that if these maps are to be economically prepared we must look for help in their preparation to the federal and provincial governments. Let us urge the importance of this matter on the attention of the authorities concerned.

There are the questions connected with child welfare, more scientific methods of distributing public charity, the question of dealing with the feeble-minded, of promoting the right kind of technical education to suit our needs and others of a cognate kind.

We must be careful not to dissipate our energies over too wide a field, although we can do much by organization so to arrange and allot our work that we can include every civic activity within the scope of our organization by delegating the work to special committees.

This meeting is representative of nearly every province, each of those present is able to address the others authoritatively on some particular problem connected with our objects. The time at our disposal is short and I hope we shall not fail to keep our discussions along practical lines and conclude our deliberations with definite recommendations on which action can be taken.

My last suggestion is one that came to me the other day when discussing agriculture with the Canadian Commissioner of the International Agricultural Institute. My idea is that one day we shall be able to suggest the means of creating an International Civic Institute on the line of the great International Agricultural Institute with its headquarters at Rome. That great institute is subsidized by governments in various parts of the world, including the Government at Ottawa. It collects data regarding agriculture in every civilized country and redistributes that information. What a splendid thing it would be if we could induce one of the great bodies in the United States, like the Russell Sage Foundation, to use a large sum of money to create an international institute from which we could obtain information about the cities in any other country in the world and compare them with our own. I do not bring that forward as a suggestion, but only to indicate that that is the star to which I hitch my waggon in connection with the Civic Improvement League.