

Club President
Round Table, June 16, 1930,

Kansas City's Regional Plan
Association and Jackson County's
Road System.

In January 1923 I became a member of the Jackson County Court as associate Judge from the Eastern District, which consists of that part of the County outside the city limits of Kansas City.

We found the County's finances muddled, its roads in a deplorable condition, and its government unworkable. The finances we endeavored to straighten out, and its road system we are working out to a satisfactory conclusion. The civic bodies interested in the necessary government reform are working on that, too. Last October I told this organization my ideas on County Government.

In 1924 I was defeated for reelection, and the succeeding Court spent its two years in doing what Judge McElroy and myself had done the previous two years -- finding out what it was all about. In 1926 they were defeated for reelection and I was elected Presiding Judge, Major Robert W. Barr was elected Judge from the Eastern District, and Howard J. Vrooman was elected Judge from the Western District. Both these gentlemen were very much interested in the public welfare, and after several meetings previous to our taking office January 1st, 1927, we outlined a program for a road system for Jackson County which was the greatest problem then confronting us. We agreed that the public welfare demanded that a system of roads be outlined that would be for the use of traffic and the public, and not for any real estate venture or for the improvement of any special privilege roads.

It was decided that I should see the political powers of both parties, and see what the reaction would be to a bond issue along proper lines. I called on the Democratic leaders, Mr. Pendergast, Mr. Shannon, and Mr. Alyward who were enthusiastically for it, but doubted our ability to put it over.

I then called on Mr. Beach who was Mayor of Kansas City, and on Conrad Mann, Mr. Holland, Mr. Herman Langworthy, Mr. Louis Oppenstein and other Republican leaders who said they were for the proposition but doubted our ability to put it over. I suggested to all these people that we appoint a bi-partisan commission of engineers to outline a plan and if the law could be construed to allow it, that these men be made consulting engineers to carry out the job. This plan was agreeable to every one, so we asked Col. E. M. Stayton who had been a County Highway Engineer and who was nationally known and a Democrat, and N. E. Veatch, Jr. also a nationally known engineer of the highest standing and a Republican, to make the preliminary report. These two gentlemen acting for Kansas City had just successfully built a very large sewer system to the satisfaction of all concerned, both the public and the politicians on both sides. They were appointed by the Court in February, 1927 and spent three or four months making a survey and report along with an estimate, which was presented to the Court May 14, 1927. Copies were given to all the newspapers in the county as well as to all civic organizations, and a complete study was made by the Court and the County Highway Engineer.

In 1923 Judge McElroy and I had asked Col. Stayton and L. R. Ash to make some recommendations to the Court on roads, which they did, and which we carried out. In 1925 Mr. Koehler, the Highway Engineer for the County suggested, in his annual report, that the Court then made up of Judge Dan Stewart, Judge Henry Rummell and Judge E. W. Hayes, Presiding Judge, appoint a bi-partisan board of engineers to make a complete survey. I got a copy of this report and asked Mr. Koehler if he still felt as he did when he made it, and he said he did. He has co-operated with us fully in carrying out the plan.

After all these preliminaries in regard to roads, it was decided by the city to offer a large bond issue for a number of needed city improvements, and the county was urged to go in with the city and ask for a court house and jail and county hospital.

hospital for the indigent aged, as well as for the road bonds. On May 8, 1928 about a year after the road report was made by Stayton and Veatch, the bond issues were voted on. The road bond and county hospital projects were carried, but the Court Houses and Jail were defeated. The City's program was also defeated except for some Swope Park bonds and some hospital bonds.

As soon as the bonds were carried, the Court proceeded to carry out the program as outlined and to date all contracts have been let and by the end of the year will be completed. We engaged Stayton and Veatch after much legal skirmishing around and they have successfully seen to the construction. The Hospital is nearly completed and will be built under the estimate without a single extra to increase the cost. Some people are saying that this is a remarkable record and ought to be bragged about and made a campaign issue. Gentlemen, it is my opinion that it ought to be a customary record for public officials to do their job well, and that if a public official hasn't a future constructive program to run on, his past record (unless it's bad) should not be considered.

I have brought you a map showing the County system and its relation to Kansas City and the adjoining counties. While we were doing all these things I have been telling you about, we found that Kansas City is the center of a fast growing metropolitan area in two states, and the people in this area have common interests that can be served by the co-operation of the governing body of six counties. We began studying Regional Planning and we found that every large city in the Country is having the same problems as we are.

In December, 1928 the County Court of Jackson County asked the County Courts of Clay and Platte Counties and the County Commissioners of Johnson, Wyandotte and Leavenworth Counties, together with the Mayors and Presidents of Civic Bodies in the towns of all these counties to meet with us at the Hotel Baltimore and discuss the idea of a Regional Planning

" 2-6-30

HIGHWAYS

The Major Street System must be planned, not alone to relieve traffic congestion in the city itself, but to furnish highways leading into and out of the city and forming connections with the county and state highway system in sufficient number and of adequate widths and design to care for the ever-increasing traffic brought about by growth of population, commercial activity and industrial progress. The regional plan of highways, as planned for Los Angeles County by the Regional Planning Commission has been followed in so far as major and secondary highways leading to or passing through Long Beach are concerned, and the local traffic streets either extended into or connected with these regional highways.

-- Major Street Plan & Report, Long Beach City Planning Commission, 11-30-28

" 6-13-29

COOPERATION

Not a single community in this great metropolitan district can live as that community alone. Each thrives on the prosperity of the whole region. We now see, if we open our eyes to see it, that the great arterial highways we are building and are yet to build - tunnels, bridges, railroads, parkways - the great transportation facilities we use, rail, motor bus, motor truck, watercraft and airplane, are every one of the part and parcel of the machinery for our local service, making it possible the more easily to live and do business within this great region. Self-interest, then, makes it imperative that we look beyond the confines of our home town or city, look beyond the confines even of our own state and, in so doing, open our eyes to the interest of our neighbors.

-- George McAneny, President, Regional Plan Association, in New York Herald Tribune, 5-28-29

" 5-2-29

KANSAS CITY

By 1960, with normal growth, Kansas City will have a population of a million. There is no magic in the million figure. It is merely a convenient point toward which to plan. With new conditions and the increase in population, what must the city provide? Public buildings will be inadequate. The plan must provide not only for a city hall and a court house, but for other buildings. Hospitals will be required, and new elementary and high schools, special schools, colleges, schools of fine arts, a university must be in the plan. The planning for the future is not the work of a day. It requires long study of all factors. The City Plan Commission, The Ten-Year Program Commission, the Regional Planning Association, civic organizations all can take part and have something to offer. If the work is done thoroughly and competently, Kansas City will be a finer, better, more enjoyable place in which to live. Financially, such planning will, of course, save large amounts which are always wasted when developments is haphazard and unplanned.

Public Service Institute of Kansas City, Mo., quoted in "The Public Dollar" published by the Finance Dept., United States Chamber of Commerce, April, 1929

"4-11-29

AVIATION

The automobile has created the suburbs. The airplane will create the countryside. People who used to live in the city now live ten miles out in the suburbs. People who now live in the suburbs will live fifty miles out in the countryside. It isn't the miles we count, but the minutes. The present generation has seen the growth of suburban stores, highways, theaters, schools and churches. In this upbuilding of the suburbs, the automobile has been the prime mover. Just as great developments will be witnessed by the coming generation, when the airplane builds up the countryside. The resort and recreation industries will gain fresh

impetus. Hundreds of attractive regions will become accessible. We have already passed the point where it is enough to have city planning. The problems ~~of~~ and necessities introduced by aircraft will bring the need ~~of~~ for state planning. Great areas must be zoned instead of mere city blocks. We must adopt units of square miles. Aircraft will increase rather than reduce roadbuildings. Similarly, it will eventually be seen that the airplane has increased rather than decreased the utility of automobiles.

--Roger W. Babson, in the
Forum, March, 1929

8-8-29

PARKS

The acquisition of land for parks does not necessarily mean that large sums should be spent on their development and much money that is being devoted to artificial improvement of park areas and construction of travel through them would be better spent in buying land. Natural beauty may be destroyed by extravagant schemes to substitute artificial for natural beauty.

The American City, July, 1929

4-4-29

PARKS-VALUE OF

In several of the town parks of Europe, formed from one to three hundred years ago, no material modification of general design, or enlargement of scope, has from the beginning of them, been made. The population using them has increased several fold; it has changed its forms of government, its forms of society, in some cases its forms of religion; it has changed its forms of building; it has widened and lengthened, and sewerred, and paved, and lighted most of its streets; it has demolished its most solid constructions, in walls and fortresses. In nothing else has so little change of general design occurred as in its parks; in nothing else so little has been done, beyond the unnoticeable removal and repair of the results of decay, and

wear and tear. WHILE MOST OTHER COSTLY CONSTRUCTIONS HAVE BEEN LOSING IN FITNESS AND VALUE FOR PRESENT USE? THE PARKS ARE RECOGNIZED BY ALL TO HAVE BEEN, ON THE WHOLE, GAINING. IN NOTHING ELSE, THEN, THAT THE PEOPLE OF ONE GENERATION CAN LEAVE BEHIND THEM FOR OTHERS, IS THE ECONOMY OF A STEADY PURSUIT OF WELL-CONSIDERED ENDS BETTER ESTABLISHED THAN IT IS BY LONG EXPERIENCE IN PARKS.
-F. L. Olmsted, Sr., 1882

7-25-29

ROADSIDE IMPROVEMENT

Roadside attractiveness is gaining favor as a public roads policy. By formal action a year ago Congress recognized roadside improvement as a proper use for federal-aid money. Nine state highway departments are now carrying on landscape work. All states are exercising their power to keep highway rights-of-way neat by eradicating advertising signs. Such work should go on; at the same time its proper place in road development should be understood clearly. The highway beyond all other things is a practical tool of transportation, but attractiveness is an essential contribution to its efficiency. Good appearance is a business asset. In summary, beautification is one of ~~may~~ many roadside services being demanded by modern highway travel. It is contributory rather than primary; as is the case with all other roadside services; it is supplementary to roadway service. If these facts are held in mind, landscape work may well go as far as sane taste and available funds can take it."

Engineering News-Record,
6-27-29

Now I have an object in view in telling all this. Kansas City is trying to give birth to a ten year development plan. We are ~~mak~~ working for exactly the same thing and we want your support and we want to support you.

Because I was active in corresponding with the various counties in the organization of the Regional Association, they elected me President. I tried to resign last March because I am in politics and this organization ought not to be in politics. I want my successor to be as enthusiastic a supporter of this great idea as I am and I don't want it to be personal. I want you gentlemen to support it because you are vitally and financially interested in the proper growth and welfare of this town. Please read those pamphlets and if you think we are doing anything, help us by becoming one of us. Let's put Kansas City's Plan and a Plan for this great Region on paper and then carry them to a conclusion.