

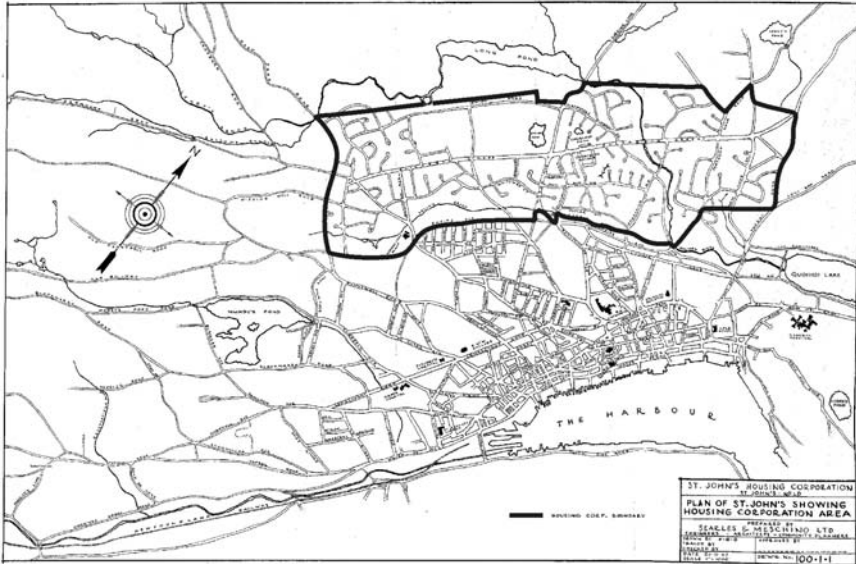
“a bold scheme for ... doubling the living space of the town”: The Origins of Churchill Park Garden Suburb, St. John’s, Newfoundland, 1943

C.A. SHARPE

BETWEEN 1944 AND 1949 a large suburban development took shape in the valley north of the city limits of St. John’s. Churchill Park was one of the earliest planned post-war suburban developments in Canada — begun before Confederation, but completed shortly afterwards. The iconic suburb in Canada is Don Mills, but Churchill Park predates it by more than a decade, and also foreshadows many of the design innovations generally attributed to Don Mills. The Newfoundland development was noteworthy in several ways. Perhaps most significant is that the developer was the St. John’s Housing Corporation (hereafter SJHC) which was essentially a Crown Corporation financed directly by the governments of Newfoundland and St. John’s.

In keeping with the philosophy of the Corporation’s first chairman, the private sector was deliberately excluded from participating in the development of this suburb during the early years. The suburb was built on 800 acres of land expropriated from private owners using a system of compensation outlined in a report to the British government but never adopted in that country because it was deemed too radical. It introduced “modern” house and neighbourhood design into the country, offering to its inhabitants a residential environment radically different from anything seen previously. The development doubled the area of the City, and its long-term impacts on the development of St. John’s can hardly be underestimated. This northern valley had not been previously developed for urban use. It was the site of many productive farms, but was unserved. The main trunk sewer which the SJHC built through the valley, the water lines they installed, and the main road they built opened the area for development, and during the next twenty years or so, a very significant amount of the City’s growth occurred here. This may be the most significant long-term legacy of the men who served on the first SJHC board. But there were

more immediate benefits. The Government was anxious to avoid serious shortages of housing in the post-war period. By 1949 the Corporation's own employees had built 242 houses and 92 apartment units, probably the first purpose-designed apartments in the country, and these went a long way toward achieving the Government's goal.



St. John's in 1947 and the area expropriated for Churchill Park. Reproduced with permission from The Canadian Geographer.

In 1942 the central area of St. John's still had many old, dilapidated houses, occupied by some of the City's poorest citizens. They were often remarked upon by visitors; one British Parliamentarian wrote that "even in St. John's there exist some of the worst housing conditions in the Empire, if not the world" (Ammon 1944: 15). The existence of what was commonly referred to as the slum had been of concern for many years. Possible solutions had been proposed by Canadian town planning experts in the 1920s (Dalzell 1926, Todd 1930) and in 1939 by municipal councillor John Thomas Meaney (Sharpe 2000), but the impoverished municipal and national (i.e., Newfoundland) governments had been unable to implement them. However the short-lived prosperity of the war years and the election of a new, reform-minded Municipal Council in December 1941 provided the opportunity to initiate a possible solution. The Government accepted the City's argument that the time was ripe to find an acceptable solution to this long-standing problem, and appointed the Commission of Enquiry into Housing and Town Planning in St. John's

(hereafter CEHTP) on 8 May 1942. Its terms of reference were to make an enquiry into the state of housing in the City and to consider ways of replanning the city.

The members of the Commission were carefully selected to represent the City's most prominent organizations and institutions. They included the Anglican, United, and Salvation Army churches, the Newfoundland Board of Trade, the Newfoundland Federation of Labour, the Newfoundland Law Society, the Longshoreman's Protective Union, the Rotary Club, the Railway Employees Welfare Association, the Benevolent Irish Society, and the Child Welfare Association. The only surprising omission was the Roman Catholic Church; it was invited to send a representative to the early planning meetings, but for some reason no representative was appointed to the Commission.

The Commission was chaired by Brian Dunfield, a prominent member of the Anglican establishment. Born the son of an Anglican canon in St. John's in 1888, he earned a First Class B.A. in Philosophy from the University of London in 1909 and then returned home to read law with Sir Edward Morris, later Prime Minister of Newfoundland. He was called to the Bar in 1911 and after an unspectacular career in private practice joined the Department of Justice in 1928. He was appointed to the Supreme Court of Newfoundland in 1939 where he put to good use "one of the finest legal minds Newfoundland has ever produced" (Winter 1999). He sat on the



Brian Dunfield (Archives and Manuscripts Division, Queen Elizabeth II Library, Memorial University).

bench until he was required to retire by virtue of his age, and over his violent protests, in 1963. In addition to serving as Chairman of the CEHTP he was also Chairman of the St. John's Housing Corporation (1944-1949) and of the St. John's Town Planning Commission (1945-1951). He served a three-year term as President of the Community Planning Association of Canada beginning in 1953 and, at the time of his death in 1968, was Chairman of the Cornerbrook Housing Commission. He was named to the Order of Knights Bachelor in 1949 in recognition of his outstanding public service. The influence he had on town planning in St. John's was profound.

The CEHTP did most of its work in private. It held no public hearings and took surprisingly little in the way of formal evidence (Lewis and Shrimpton 1984: 217). Yet it issued five reports, all written by Dunfield (CEHTP 1942, 1943a, 1943b, 1943c, 1944). His authorship is not identified in any of the reports, but was confirmed by Erik Cook, the Deputy Mayor of the City and one of the members of the Commission and later a Canadian Senator (Cook 1982), and also by Gordon Winter, the man who succeeded him as Chairman of the Commission and who was later appointed Lieutenant-Governor of Newfoundland. Winter said that from the outset "everyone knew the reports were going to be Dunfield's" (Winter 1998). One of the other members of the Commission was more blunt, saying "if, in addition to Dunfield there were ten Newfoundland dogs instead of people (on the Commission) there wouldn't have been much change" (Miller 1981). The clear and elegant writing style is also a giveaway. Dunfield believed that those affected by decisions should be made aware of them in advance in a way they could easily comprehend:

we have thought it best to cast this Report in the form of numbered chapters and paragraphs and to write it in a simpler and more colloquial style than is normal in official reports. The first essential is that it be understood by every citizen, down to the humblest. By this method the people should get more while the expert or official reader need not get less. (CEHTP 1943b: 9)

The duty of the CEHTP was "to get at the fundamentals which have made our City the dirty, congested, ill-built, planless and expensive thing which in great part it is" (CEHTP 1943b: 9). Dunfield's basic philosophy, outlined in the lengthy address he delivered to his colleagues at the first meeting of the Commission, was that slum clearance was a goal to be approached indirectly.

The central problem and the central difficulty of all housing schemes is the devising and financing of decent modern housing at cheaper rates for the lowest-income third or quarter of the population.... Some municipalities and governments in other countries have gone about (slum clearance) by the direct process of expropriating slum property, pulling it down and rebuilding on the site.... The main objection to this method is that unless landowners are ruthlessly expropriated, land costs too much. The housing erected on it has, therefore, to be skimped, and even so ends up costing too much. There is, therefore, difficulty in getting the people who occupied the land

before back into the same area ... What is done in many countries is to develop housing settlements on the outskirts where land is relatively cheap or even vacant. This avoids the necessity of attempting to shift the existing population out and, back, and brings about a sort of automatic improvement of congested areas in that, as population drains from them, municipalities are in a position to raise their standard of requirements and to carry out condemnations and thus thin out and improve the slum... One thing, however, is, I think, certain, and that is that by careful and thorough design and large-scale organization it is possible to provide people with better value in housing than they can obtain by themselves. (Dunfield 1942)

Since none of Dunfield's papers relating to the work of the Commission have survived, we cannot know whether he had borrowed some of his ideas from the 1933 report of the Royal Commission on Newfoundland (i.e., the Amulree Commission). But there is an interesting parallel. Paragraph 615 of this report read

a Town Planning Commission constituted in 1931 has been investigating schemes for removing some 1,000 families in the centre of the town and establishing them in specially planned settlements outside the City limits, thus enabling what is now a congested slum area to be rebuilt. (*Daily News* 1941)

During the summer of 1942 four students from Memorial University College distributed questionnaires to the households of St. John's, asking for details of their



Stephen Street, 1952 (Stanley Pickett).

current housing conditions. It was hoped that a response could be obtained from every one of the estimated 6,500 houses in the city. This proved to be impossible, but the response was still astounding — 5,700 questionnaires were returned from 4,613 houses. On the basis of external inspection of houses, and the questionnaire results, houses were classified into one of six categories:

Classification of Homes by the Commission of Enquiry

Category	Characteristics	Number
A	Excellent	260
B	Good	736
C	Fair	1867
D	Tolerable but poor, and better replaced	1000
E	Bad: ought to be condemned at an early date	525
F	Very Bad: ought to be condemned at once	225

A section of the report entitled “The Slaughter of the Innocents” pointed out that the five-year average infant mortality rate in the city, at 96 per 1,000 live births, was higher than that in Ireland, Canada, Germany, England, and New Zealand. Other observers also noted the deplorable state of public health in the City. Mona Wilson, the Canadian Red Cross Assistant Commissioner for Newfoundland between 1940 and 1945, noted that Newfoundland’s tuberculosis rate was triple that



Notre Dame Street, 1950s (City of St. John’s Archives).

of Canada, and the infant mortality rate double (Baldwin and Poulter 2005: 284). The cause, according to the Commission, was the poor state of the houses and neighbourhoods in which the poor lived: “In a large number of cases these people are living in condemned or condemnable houses, not because they cannot pay for or do not want something better, but because nothing better can be had. The breakdown of private enterprise, the stranglehold of closely-held land and the absence of local transportation facilities all play their part in this situation” (CEHTP 1943b: 15).



Moore Street, 1951 (City of St. John's Archives).

Press reaction to the third report of the Commission was immediate and particularly in the case of the *Daily News*, very supportive. The first editorial to comment on the report said:

What kind of town is St. John's? The third interim report of the Housing Commission leaves us no illusions. Dealing exhaustively and frankly with a deplorable situation which would be more disturbing if most of us did not already know in a general way how bad things are. But this is a constructive report and the Dunfield Commission has accompanied its humiliating catalogue of facts with a bold and imaginative plan which deserves the fullest consideration.... The fact remains that for the safeguarding of public health, overcrowding and insanitary conditions must be abolished.... The Housing Commission proposes certain remedies which involve the creation of a northern residential suburb of detached houses of varying grades but

all adequately provided with modern conveniences and available on the hire-purchase scheme.... The Housing Commission merits the grateful acknowledgment of its painstaking efforts and courageous and constructive report. (*Daily News* 1943a)



Duggan Street, 1952 (Stanley Pickett).

Two days later a second editorial continued its praise of the report:

The report of the Housing Commission should be read by every citizen.... It presents facts that should shock us out of our complacency and into a determination to strive our utmost for the reconstruction of our city.... We may dislike but we cannot ignore the stark revelation of the slum characteristics of St. John's. On a site that lends itself to healthful and artistic planning we have allowed to grow up a dreary, insanitary and depressing jumble of congested buildings overlooking narrow and dirty streets.... For this, make no mistake about it, is everybody's business. Let no one imagine that because he lives in a modern home with all conveniences, clean surroundings and a garden, that he has no responsibility for how others live. If he wants to be purely selfish, he must still realize that the dirt and disease which are bred in the slums are never more than a few hundred yards away at their source, and are omnipresent in the air that he breathes.... This report is a challenge. Let us take it up and do all that is within our power to support the movement which the Housing Corporation has initiated, and which will lead in time not only to a modern town but more important still to a wholly comfortable, healthy, moral and happy community. (*Daily News* 1943b)

It was no secret that living conditions in the heart of the downtown were very poor, but this publication of this report made it easier to visualize the extent of the misery that was endured by so many. The sense one gets from the press reaction is one of embarrassment, and a desire to get on with the job of eradicating the slum — if not to improve the lot of those forced to live in it, then at least to improve the image of the City. The language was far more blunt than we are accustomed to reading today.

We must accept the indictment that we have tolerated in our midst conditions that are a disgrace to our personal and civic pride and to our humanitarian instincts.... This report and all the effort that has gone into the drafting of it can be an historic document or a waste of time. If it should prove to be the latter we shall condemn ourselves as a selfish, apathetic community deserving of all the ills that may befall us. (Wayfarer 1943)



Bottom of Carter's Hill, 1952 (Stanley Pickett)

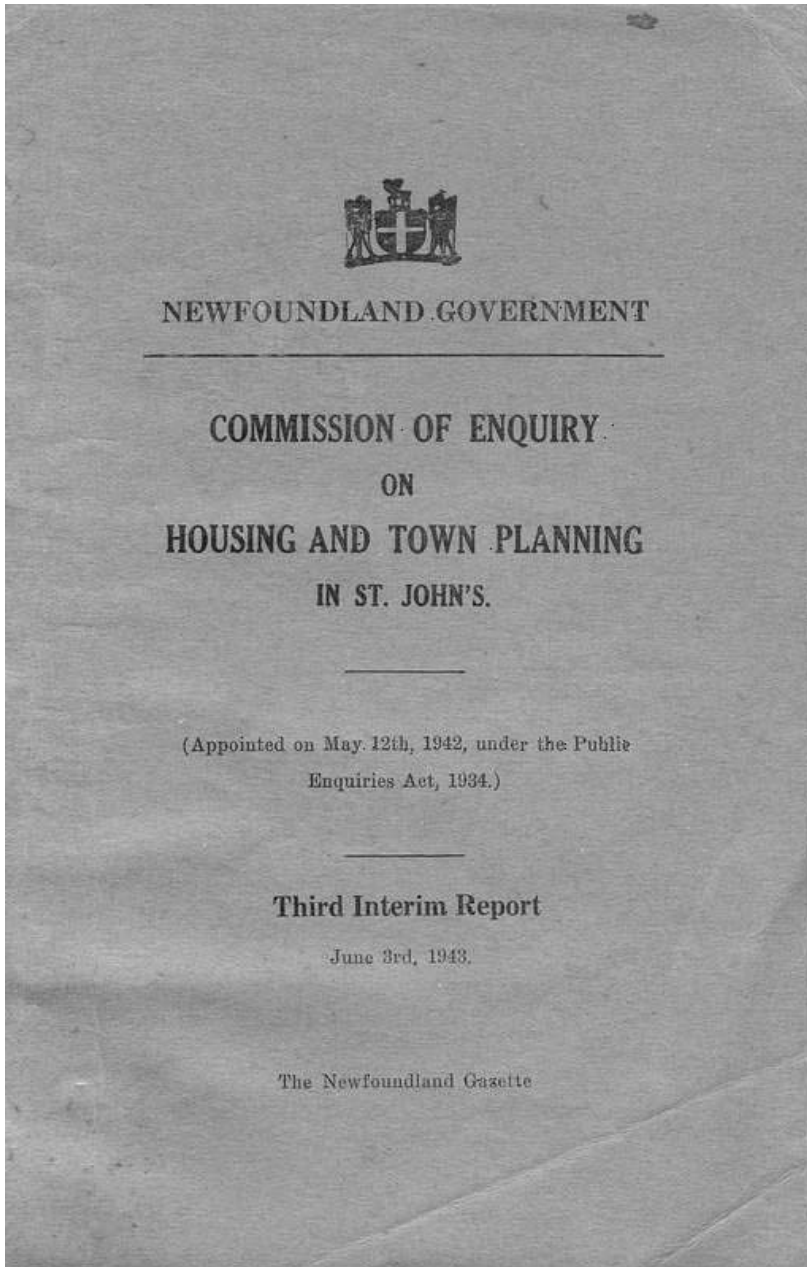
Dunfield wrote that “the remedy for our present condition is more and cheaper land for building, better and more extensive local transportation to render this land available, proper planning to make the most of our land, and cheap long-term loans” (CEHTP 1943b: 9). He was adamant that the land be acquired as cheaply as possible, notwithstanding the fact that much of it was being actively farmed, because “excessive prices for land are the first and worst obstacle to good housing”

(CEHTP 1943b: 95). This concern is reflected several times in the document reproduced below.

The specific proposal that the slum problem could be solved by building houses for owner occupancy beyond the northern limits of the city was based on a number of assumptions:

The house in a range is an undesirable survival of the past.... The trend of the public desires is unmistakable ... even a man of small means wants a house he can walk round, with a bit of garden, and a place for the garage he hopes to have some day.... We believe that we must not be afraid to envisage a bold expansion of the city in the course of the next generation, with the individual family house and garden the general rule.... We can no longer tolerate conditions which make it difficult for the enterprising small man to get out into better surroundings; and we can no longer tell the slum-dweller to wait until he can, if he ever can, buy himself out of the slums; he must be helped to get out of them, and they must be abolished by public action. (CEHTP 1943b: 40-44)

The *Third Interim Report* laid the groundwork for the eventual development of Churchill Park. The most significant portions have been reproduced below. Of necessity most of the original Report's 129 pages have had to be omitted. But it is hoped that by omitting sections which are more rhetorical than fundamental to the principal argument, it will be possible to get a sense of the enthusiasm, *noblesse oblige*, and endearing naivete which characterized the operations of the Commission of Enquiry and then of the St. John's Housing Corporation which was established in 1944 in keeping with one of the report's principal recommendations.



The cover of the Third Interim Report of the Commission of Enquiry into Housing and Town Planning in St. John's.

Commission of Enquiry on Housing and Town Planning in
St. John's
Appointed on May 12th, 1942 under the Public Enquiries Act,
1934
Third Interim Report
June 3rd, 1943

Outline of Proposals For Remedies

Chapter IV¹
The Finance of Housing

NECESSITY FOR A STATUTORY HOUSING CORPORATION

We have not here, however, many, if any, institutions which make a business of lending a large scale on real estate. Canadian Banks are forbidden to do so. In view of local circumstances we conclude that we shall have to recommend the formation of a Statutory Housing Corporation, divorced entirely from politics and purely a business.... This would have the additional advantage of giving somewhat more control. The Canadian system simply facilitates the low-income citizen in availing of finance facilities; it injects easy capital into the open building market. This is good, but it might be better that a public corporation be the general builder and landlord, in that the homes produced by it, which will be above the common average, may then be kept out of the speculative market, where they might appreciate sharply in price, and directed more fully towards the classes whom it is desired to assist.

Chapter VII
The St. John's Housing Corporation

CORPORATION TO BE FORMED BY STATUTE

We therefore, recommend the formation by Statue of a non-profit corporation to be called the St. John's Housing Corporation. This body should be governed by a board of from seven to ten directors of "trustees." These persons should be appointed by the Governor-in-Commission, but nominated by a list of bodies

somewhat as follows:

The Commission of Government (The Chairman), The Judges of the Supreme Court, The St. John's Municipal Council, The Newfoundland Board of Trade, The Newfoundland Federation of Labour, The St. John's Longshoremen's Union, The Masonic Order, The Benevolent Irish Society, The Rotary Club, The Civil Service Association and so forth.

POWER AND DUTIES

The power and duty of the corporation shall be: to acquire hold and develop property; to build, sell and rent houses for the poor and low-income classes; to borrow money on debentures; and to do all things accessory thereto.

ADVANTAGES

(One) advantage of this organisation is ... that to put the handling of an extensive housing enterprise in the hands of the Municipal Council would expose the Mayor and Councillors to undesirable political and personal pressures; the purpose is to avoid these.

Chapter X

Land For Housing and The Modern Attitude Thereto

HIGH COST OF LAND PREJUDICIAL TO HOUSING

It is quite apparent, indeed axiomatic, that for every additional dollar the small-home builder has to pay out for land he has a dollar less to spend on the house. Thus where land is costly houses will not be as good as they might have been, and a good many houses which might have been built will not be built because the extra costs just tips the scale against the prospective home-builder.

WASTE OF SPACE AND RIBBON DEVELOPMENT

The cycle of events in suburban building under conditions of unrestricted land speculation is somewhat as follows. The suburban landowner may be a man who has inherited what was once a farm from his ancestors ... or he may be a man who

has bought such land, hoping to make a speculative profit. He is in a sense a monopolist; a city can only grow on the lands adjoining it and these are limited in extent. With the urge of the city to expand he finds himself by chance in a very lucky situation; and he can and does work that situation for "all that the traffic will stand." His desire is to get the most possible out of his land; therefore he will first sell that which fronts on an existing highway and will cut it into lots as small as the buyers will accept. If they would accept it he would sell lots so small that we would have ranges of attached houses, as in the older town. Thus we get what is called "ribbon development": close lines of houses along existing roads, with empty areas behind. This is a most uneconomical way of using the land from a public point of view, and produces a town with a series of long, straggling tentacles, so that the homebuilder may be forced much further away from his work than need be, and the setting up of say, bus services may be much less economical than it might have been. We see examples of this all around St. John's, on our main roads.

NEED OF A MASTER PLAN

One of the incidental results of this is that if at a later date a public authority desires to make roads entering into the vacant areas between those tentacles it might find its way blocked by houses which have to be expropriated at serious cost. And this is why every city should have a Master Plan of its suburbs, showing where streets and public places are to be twenty, thirty or fifty years hence. Then when the time comes to make these streets there will be no costly obstacles in the way, because the building of houses in the way of, or over, future roads has been prevented.

THE HOME BUILDER PAYS TWICE

As the city spreads another situation comes about. If the city brings, at great cost to the taxpayer, sewers, water pipes and roads near to a piece of unoccupied land, the owner immediately raises his price. The homebuilder is forced to buy at that price. Then the city assesses him, when he has built his house, for the branch sewers, water services, roads, curb and gutters which gradually become necessary; and thus eventually the tenant has, as it were, paid for his advantage twice, once to the land owner in the raised price, once to the city direct. The landowner has received a heavy unearned increment at the community's expense, and housing has received another load of deadweight.

THE LAND MONOPOLY

We have therefore to set off the interests of a limited number of landowners, their old-fashioned right to gather in, because of their lucky position, unearned increment from the community, against the interests of the poorer classes, their health and comfort and that of their children. Logically, whether on the basis of broad human values or on the basis of getting the greatest good for the greatest number, there can be only one answer. The few should give way. It is not right that they should be deprived of that which they now have; but inescapably, there is no argument for letting them gather in unearned increment at the expense of the health and welfare of the population.

NEW VIEWS NOW COMING IN

In view of the strong movement to the political left now apparent in larger countries, as evidence by such things as the dicta of the Archbishop of Canterbury and the English Roman Catholic Hierarchy, Vice-President Wallace, the Beveridge Report, the Uthwatt Report and the speeches of so many social and political leaders, it seems possible that the principle above laid down, novel as it seems now, may become much more familiar to us all in the post-war future; and indeed it may be possible for us in a small and relatively unorganised community to apply such principles more easily than can be done in the more advanced and complex civilisations.

CONTROL OF EXPANSION

In our opinion, therefore, the question must now be considered how soon, how far and by what means the city may take control over the areas needed for its own expansion. In this connection we must consider the attitude taken in more advanced countries than our own....

One possible solution would be the expropriation by the city of all the undeveloped areas around the city likely to be needed in the next couple of generations.... There is an objection to this method, namely that it would be relatively costly ... and that it would involve laying out money a long way in advance of the need. This problem has been considered in England by a Committee of Experts under the Chairmanship of Mr. Justice Uthwatt,² set up by the Ministry of Reconstruction.... It is not too easy to compress their report of 180 pages into a paragraph or two, but we may set out a couple of their central ideas. Anyone who is further interested should get the report and read it.

THE PURCHASE OF DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS

They propose that the rights to land be divided by law into two parts (a) the development rights and (b) the owner's, which are all the remaining rights. The development rights are those of putting streets through, building houses, letting for building and so forth. They propose that public authorities should be authorized to buy out forthwith, at prices fixed by arbitration, the development rights of all the land they may need, **and pay for them now** [original emphasis]. The owner will remain owner; he can farm, pasture, build a barn or a hen-house, but he has no right to develop. The Community owns that. When the time comes for the land to be used for building, the community expropriates the owner's remaining rights and pays for them at whatever may be the value of them at the time. In brief, the development rights are bought now; the land is then taken at agricultural value at some future time.

THE UTHWATT IDEA

The Uthwatt Committee proposes a scheme which we can adapt thus: all the land is valued; a sum is put up equal to the current value, not on all the sites, but on as much land as appears likely to be used in twenty years; and is then discounted to allow for the time which will elapse before some of it is used; and the resulting sum is then divided among all the landowners in proportion to their valuations.³

THESE SUGGESTIONS PRELIMINARY ONLY

We throw out these ideas for the preliminary consideration of our legislators, national and municipal, and of the public. We hope to go into them in more detail at a later date. We mention them now, however, to discourage anything in the nature of a boom in land values in suburbs affected by our proposals. We feel that the day when the speculator can be allowed to hang the dead weight of high land values around the neck of housing has gone by; and he ought to be warned that we think he should be prevented from so doing.

Chapter XV Conclusion

WE PROPOSE A BOLD APPROACH

What we have put before the public in this report is a bold scheme for, in effect, doubling the living space of the town. If matters are left as they are, the tendency is for the town to develop into a long, narrow strip from Signal Hill to Bowring Park, with a loose, unplanned scattering to the North and North-West. We propose by a few miles of well placed road, a new and already urgently needed sewer system, and a new bus, or better still, tramway line, to double the main body of the town, the part near the Harbour, by making a new planned garden suburb in the nearest and most spacious lands, the valley north of the town. To attempt to solve our problem by some niggling method of rearranging the crowded living space we have is of little use. The elements of the situation are, that most of the houses in the older parts of the town need twice the land they have that a large part of the population needs twice the room-space it has, and that a great part of our houses are of very low grade. Let us as a community look a generation ahead now, make a bold, united effort and lay our plans for more space and better houses once and for all.

CAPACITY OF PROPOSED NEW SUBURB

The new main road and tramline system in the Northern Suburbs which we contemplate should open up and make available a gross area of about 1500 acres, which will be at least as convenient for living in and working from as, let us say, Craigmillar Avenue, all parts of it being within five or six minutes' walk of transportation. What portion of it is unoccupied and open for building we cannot tell until a proper map has been made on a scale sufficient to show property boundaries, but from its appearance we may guess that at least 1000 acres may be found. We gather that modern suburban or garden-suburb planing goes on the basis of about six houses to the acre, allowing for streets and open spaces. We should thus have found room for 6000 houses. But a town of 6500 houses within present boundaries is hardly likely under the best of circumstances to throw out a wing of more than 2000 houses, or 2500 at most; we have only to provide for expansion for health and comfort, and can hardly expect any great growth of population. Therefore it should be possible to develop housing for at least twenty years without unduly upsetting such genuine agriculture as there is in the area. An intelligent public authority will naturally seek to use first for building those areas which have been lying more or less unused awaiting the builder, and to spare until the last those areas which are used in

genuine production. This may not always be possible; a working farm may lie across the path of a necessary road, needed at once; but a general policy of minimum interference should as a matter of commonsense be followed.

NECESSITY OF LAND CONTROL

It goes without saying that the development of the northern suburb by means of roads, sewers and a tramway line is useless without measures to control prices of land in the new area and to provide for its planning as a whole. To omit these would merely be to offer unlimited opportunities for land speculation, to present landowners with a large unearned increment at the expense of the community, and to put the land out of the reach of those who cannot pay a stiff price, thus defeating the whole purpose of the development. In England Lord Reith, appointing the Uthwatt Committee, observed that the Government did not intend that reconstruction after the war should be hampered or prejudiced in any way by speculative transactions, or any other such individual operations, carried out in advance. The same line of thought should apply here.

THE GOVERNMENT'S PART

We hold that in this effort to increase its living space the City should have the full backing of the Government. We may be confronted with the attitude that Government money and credit belong to the whole country, and cannot be used for the sectional benefit of one town.... [But] our present Government is entrusted with reconstruction. It cannot divorce itself from responsibility for slum conditions, overcrowding and high death rates in its capital city, nor overlook the fact that if the morale of the St. John's population is low, owing to bad living conditions, that will have its effect on the morale of the Island generally.... It is not to be forgotten that St. John's, with its immediate and dependent environs contains over one-sixth of the total population of the country. Setting aside the question of relative tax-paying capacity, it remains true that on a mere population basis over one-sixth of the money and credit of the Treasury belongs to St. John's in any case.⁴ Decent housing is an essential human need. Practically every civilized country has done something about the problem. Newfoundland can no longer avoid it or push it into the background. A beginning must be made somewhere; and what more logical place than that where conditions are worst and the need greatest. That action may also be required elsewhere in the Island is no ground for a refusal to do anything anywhere.

THE LANDOWNER'S PART

Proposals which call for a drastic shake-up of existing conditions generally meet with some opposition from classes who are doing very well out of present conditions and dislike disturbance. It is very possible that a fundamental shift of the population balance of the town may work to the temporary disadvantage of some landowners. But it must be so. If the people at large can obtain healthier and more attractive living conditions, they are not going to forego them in order that a few may continue to make good money out of existing conditions. Even the few would hardly expect it!

THE CITIZEN'S PART

A drastic municipal improvement can go ahead only if and when the citizens put themselves entirely behind it; it cannot be successfully put through by a few while the people sit by indifferent, waiting for something to be put in their laps. They must be active minded. They must be willing to pay such taxes as are necessary to carry out local improvements.... Too many today would look on this as a golden opportunity to screw as much as possible out of the public purse. We shall not improve with that attitude....

THE ESSENTIALS OF A GOOD CITY

Finally, there will always be those who, whether because of the ordinary human dislike to change, or because it suits them to keep things as they are, will go about whispering "These are a lot of high-faluting expensive schemes concocted by a bunch of theoretical high-brows who want to push us into things we can't afford and don't need." People should be on the alert against this kind of argument, which is seldom sincere and never true. We propose things that are urgently necessary. The suburban sewerage situation is a scandal and a danger now. The City death-rate, for what could be a beautiful city-site in a small, clean country, is a disgrace. And a large part of our population is living in conditions which are not civilized.... At the moment we propose only an effort to give the poor and low-income classes one room per person and decent, modern sanitation in every home. These are bare essentials and until we get them we are not a civilized town.... In twenty or thirty years we could get a city here which would be a model of its kind, without spending very much more money than we are going to spend anyhow. Whether we get it or not depends, not on money, but on whether the City and its people put brains and effort into their municipal affairs.

OUTSIDE VIEWS ON ST. JOHN'S CHALLENGE US

We all know the sort of comment which foreigners are inclined to make upon our city. To take the latest, a not unkindly writer in *Maclean's Magazine*, in March, 1943, observes "in many ways Newfoundland sanitation, schools, communications, roads, seem to be almost a generation behind what we have come to expect as a matter of course in most North American communities." ... But we have long been accustomed to snarl at and discredit the observations of visitors from the neighbouring continent....

OUR OWN DUTY

Such is the impression which our City produces on the intelligent observer from outside. We should do well, instead of snarling at such criticism, which in our hearts we know to be justified, to take steps to remove its cause.

AFTERMATH

The Commission's proposal for a new suburb was characterized as "bold and imaginative ... sound, and unquestionably both necessary and progressive" (*Daily News* 1943a), and "the first concrete and apparently sound proposal ... for the total replanning of St. John's. It is not a visionary report, but rather the preliminary blueprint for a design for better living for the people of St. John's" (*Daily News* 1943b). The Governor wrote to Dunfield to say "you are doing a splendid job with your committee" (Walwyn 1943). Lord Ammon, leader of a British Parliamentary Mission to Newfoundland in the summer of 1943 wrote that "the Commission of Enquiry into housing conditions ... [has] issued an illuminating and outspoken report ... which will revolutionise standards of both housing and health" (Ammon 1944: 15).

There was some opposition from prominent members of the local community to the proposed scheme, as it necessarily involved expropriation of some of their land, but their complaints were disregarded by the Government which firmly supported the proposals (Sharpe 2005). Governor Walwyn reported to the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs that the proposals have "evoked strong support from several organized bodies representing labourers, shop assistants, clerks and the like. We have reason to believe they are also warmly approved by bulk of citizens who give consent mainly by silence.... There would be widespread dissatisfaction if scheme were abandoned" (Walwyn 1944).

The Municipal Council approved the *Third Report* in principle on 9 October 1943 and wrote to the Government asking that “immediate steps be taken with a view to carrying out the recommendations” in particular the one advocating the creation of an independent Housing Corporation to oversee the implementation of the Commission’s reports (City of St. John’s 1943). The *Fifth Interim Report* of the CEHTP, entitled “Detailed Proposals and Provisional Estimates for Suburban Extension and Housing” was released on 13 January 1944. It began by saying:

The Housing Commission feels that the present easy financial situation and the present wave of enthusiasm regarding housing should be availed of, and that we must at all costs get the essential framework of the new suburb in 1944. Once this is established the future of the City is secure. (CEHTP 1944: 1)

This final report was approved by the Government on 21 January, and by the City three days later. The St. John’s Housing Corporation was created in the morning of 20 July 1944 with Brian Dunfield as its first chairman. The Corporation had unusually broad authority. It was empowered to construct streets, sewers, drains, swimming pools, monuments, bridges, parks, and playgrounds; to plant trees, flowers, and grass; and to procure the installation of tramway and trolley bus lines, and power, light, gas, and telephone systems. In his history of Canadian housing policy Albert Rose comments that “the reader may be forgiven for wondering whether the new corporation is much more like an urban development corporation than a housing corporation, and why the new corporation should be able to enter the field of public transportation and public utilities” (1969: 116). He missed the point. The St. John’s Housing Corporation *was* an urban development corporation masquerading under another name.

Dunfield and his colleagues set to work during the afternoon of the day the Corporation was created to begin implementation of the bold plan to “increase the area of the city.... Then, having obtained more land, we want to see that it is laid out in modern style so that every future street will be broad and lined with grass, as in American and Canadian cities” (Dunfield 1943). This they succeeded in doing. However, the new suburb created by the SJHC did not solve the problem of the inner city slums. It took Confederation and the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation to do that — but that is another story.

Notes

¹The Report contained the following chapters:

- I Introductory
- II Housing Conditions as we find them
- III Health Conditions as we find them
- IV Will the City expand and why?
- V The Necessity for a Long View in Town Planning

- VI The Finance of Housing
- VII The St. John's Housing Corporation
- VIII Sewerage and Housing Policy
- IX New Road Connections
- X The Relation of Land Costs to Housing
- XI Zoning
- XII New City Organization needed
- XIII Suggestions to Government and Council for a Joint Scheme of Improvement
- XIV Summary
- XV Conclusion

²A discussion of the Uthwatt Report and the political context in which it was prepared can be found in Cullingworth and Nadin (1994), 105-108.

Dunfield's desire to use the Uthwatt recommendations as the basis for the expropriation of land in the Northern Valley caused consternation in Whitehall, since it had not yet been decided whether they were to be used in the UK. On 15 May 1944 the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs wrote to the Governor, who had obviously been keeping him informed of developments relating to the CEHTP:

I appreciate the importance of proceeding as rapidly as possible with arrangements for establishment of Housing Corporation but I feel some difficulty in expressing at this state view with regard to that part of the proposal relating to expropriation of land in so far as these are based upon principle suggested in Uthwatt Report. As you know Government here have not yet announced their decision in regard to this report.... In all the circumstances I should be glad if enactment of proposed legislation could be deferred until I can consider the position further in light both of your report as to the nature of the local criticism, and of final decision reached here as to the adoption of the Uthwatt proposals. (Telegram No. 282, 15 May 1944. PANL GN 1/3/A)

The 1947 Town and Country Planning Act included a modified version of the Uthwatt proposals, and a fund was set aside to compensate owners whose development rights were nationalized by the decision of local planning authorities. However, this fund was abolished after the 1951 Conservative election victory (Lewis and Shrimpton 1984: 226).

³Applying this idea to the survey of all the land in the part of the Northern Valley which would eventually be expropriated for the development allowed Dunfield to calculate the cost of compensation. He was then able to promise the government that the total bill would not exceed \$297,883. This guarantee, which was honoured, may have played a significant role in convincing the Commissioner of Finance of the merits of the scheme. The Commissioner, naturally, wanted to know the probable limits of the Government's financial exposure, and this could not have been determined in advance if the normal process of expropriation had been carried out (Winter 1999).

⁴Dunfield may have borrowed this idea from the Newfoundland Royal Commission Report of 1933 (the Amulree Report). Paragraph 615 says: "as can be imagined, the City, with its long history as a seaport and its slow growth during the centuries, has never been the subject of a comprehensive town-planning scheme.... We can only recommend that ... a general plan of development should be prepared covering not only the city itself but the neighbouring area.... It would, in our view, be reasonable, in view of the special importance of St. John's as the Capital of the Island, that the Council should not be called upon to bear the entire cost of such a town-planning scheme ..."

References

- Ammon, Lord (1944). *Newfoundland: The Forgotten Island*. London: Fabian Research Series No. 86.
- Baldwin, D. and G. Poulter (2005). "Mona Wilson and the Canadian Red Cross in Newfoundland, 1940-1945." *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies* 20: 281-312.
- City of St. John's (1943). Letter, City Clerk to Secretary of the Commission of Government, 9 October. PANL GN38 S3-1-1 Box 1. HAE 31(a)-'43.
- Commission of Enquiry on Housing and Town Planning in St. John's (1942). *First Interim Report: City Architect, Building Regulations, etc.*
- Commission of Enquiry on Housing and Town Planning in St. John's (1943a). *Second Interim Report: King's Bridge Road Junction*. February 1943.
- Commission of Enquiry on Housing and Town Planning in St. John's (1943b). *Third Interim Report: General Review of Housing Conditions; Outline of Proposals for Remedies*. 3 June 1943.
- Commission of Enquiry on Housing and Town Planning in St. John's (1943c). *Fourth Interim Report: Temporary Regulations to secure width of future streets, etc.* October 1943.
- Commission of Enquiry on Housing and Town Planning in St. John's (1944). *Fifth Interim Report: Detailed Proposals and Provisional Estimates for Suburban Extension and Housing*. 13 January 1944.
- Cook, E. (1982). Interview with Senator Eric Cook, 3 September 1982, conducted by Mark Shrimpton.
- Cullingworth, J.B. and V. Nadin (1994). *Town and Country Planning in Britain*. 11th ed. London: Routledge.
- Daily News* (1941). "Lost Or Strayed." Editorial. 8 March: 4.
- Daily News* (1943a). "Out Town." Editorial. 12 June: 6.
- Daily News* (1943b). "Everybody's Business." Editorial. 14 June: 4.
- Dunfield, B.D. (1942). "The re-planning of St. John's: Address of Hon. Mr. Justice Dunfield at the first meeting of the Commission of Enquiry into housing conditions in St. John's." *Evening Telegram* 21 May: 5.
- Dunfield, B.D. (1943). "Address by Hon. Justice Dunfield at conference." *Daily News*, 8 September: 8.
- Lewis, J. and M. Shrimpton (1984). "Policymaking in Newfoundland during the 1940s: The case of the St. John's Housing Corporation." *Canadian Historical Review* 45: 209-239.
- Miller, L. (1981). Interview with Dr. Leonard Miller, 30 October 1981, conducted by Mark Shrimpton.
- Rose, A. (1969). "Canadian Housing Policies." In M. Wheeler (ed.), *The Right To Housing*. Montreal: Harvest House, 63-139.
- Sharpe, C.A. (2000). "To arouse our city from its deathlike apathy, from its reproachable lethargy, from its slumber of industrial and social death ...: The 1939 St. John's Municipal Housing Scheme." *Newfoundland Studies* 16: 47-66.
- Sharpe, C.A. (2005). "Mr. Dunfield's Folly: The Development of Churchill Park Garden Suburb in St. John's, Newfoundland." In A.G. Macpherson (ed.), *Four Centuries and*

- the City: Perspectives on the Historical Geography of St. John's*. St. John's: Department of Geography, Memorial University of Newfoundland. 83-122.
- Walwyn, His Excellency Sir H.T. (1943). Letter, Governor Walwyn to B.E. Dunfield, 23 August 1943. PANL GN1/3/A 1943 Box 253 Despatch No's 52-288.
- Walwyn, His Excellency Sir H.T. (1944). Governor to Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs. Telegram 218. 19 May 1944. PANL BN38 S5-2-1 Box 1 File 2.
- Wayfarer (1943). "In The News: Up To Us." *Daily News*, 15 June.
- Winter, G. (1998). Interview with the Hon. Gordon Winter, 17 April 1998, conducted by C.A. Sharpe.
- Winter, G. (1999). Interview with the Hon. Gordon Winter, 15 March 1999, conducted by C.A. Sharpe and A.J. Shawyer.

casharpe@mun.ca