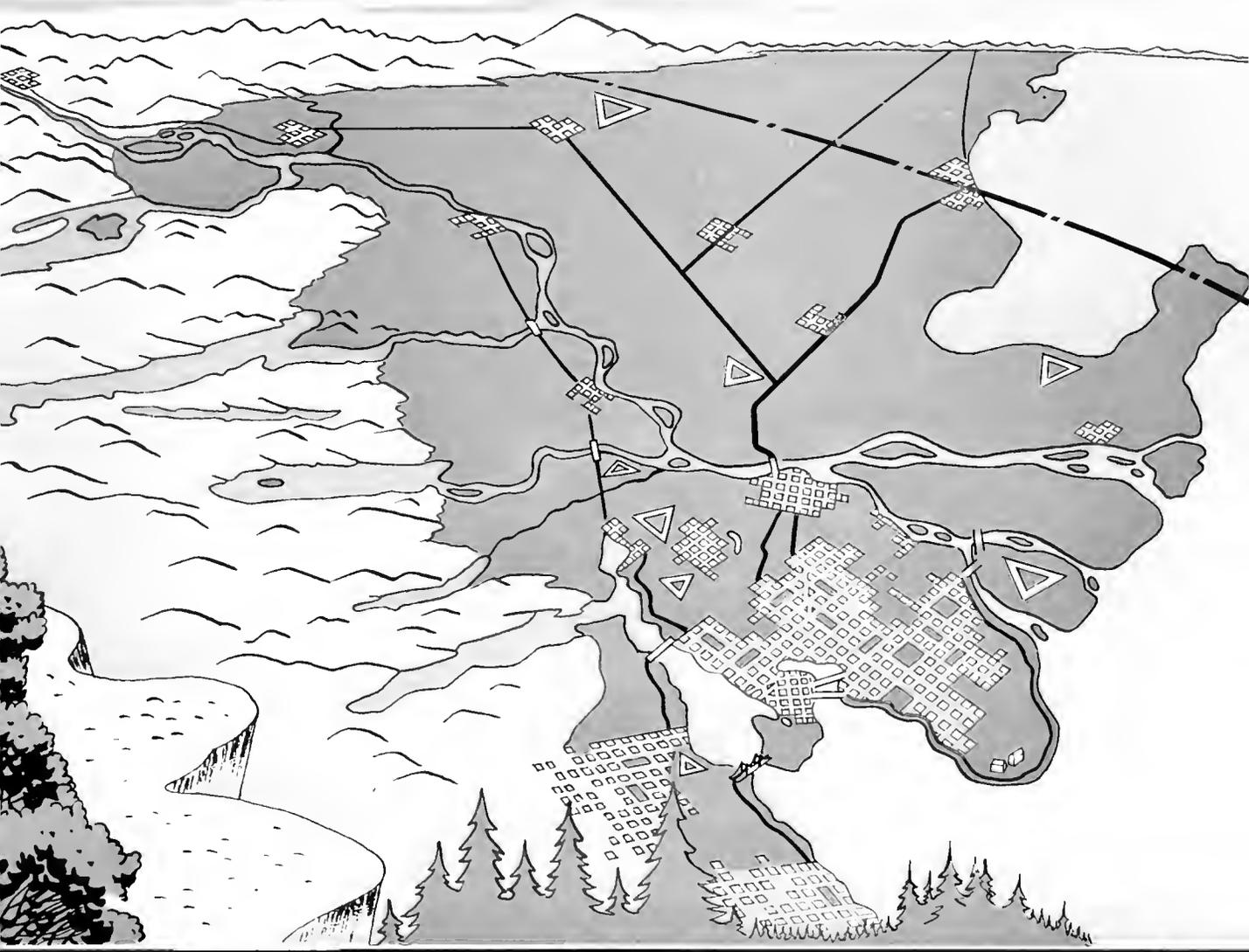


# DECENTRALIZATION *and* REGIONAL PLANNING



**VANCOUVER TOWN PLANNING COMMISSION**  
**DECEMBER, 1946**



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A PRELIMINARY REPORT  
UPON  
DECENTRALIZATION  
AND  
REGIONAL PLANNING.

VANCOUVER  
TOWN PLANNING  
COMMISSION  
VANCOUVER, BRITISH COLUMBIA



HARLAND BARTHOLOMEW AND ASSOCIATES  
TOWN PLANNING CONSULTANTS  
SAINT LOUIS, MISSOURI

OCTOBER, 1946

Price: \$0.25





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September, 1946.

Town Planning Commission,  
Vancouver, British Columbia.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

In accordance with our agreement we are pleased to submit the following report upon "Decentralization" and "Regional Planning", a part of your revised Town-Plan.

Because of their interrelation these two subjects are included in a single report. With the more common use of the automobile our cities, which were originally small and compact settlements, are spreading out further and further into the country. Urban development has now gone far beyond the municipal limits. However, from the standpoint of physical development the entire urban area still possesses considerable unity. The various parts are interdependent and interrelated. To be properly done planning of any part must carefully consider the whole and planning of the entire metropolitan area would bring many advantages to each part.

We wish to gratefully acknowledge the cooperation and assistance we have received from many officials and citizens in the preparation of this report.

Respectfully submitted,

HARLAND BARTHOLOMEW AND ASSOCIATES

*By* HARLAND BARTHOLOMEW.

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## DECENTRALIZATION

In the horse and buggy era, transportation methods were capable of dispersing urban population radially for a distance of about two miles. The introduction of the electric street car increased this distance to approximately five miles and the theoretical area of urbanization from 12.56 square miles to 78.5 square miles. With the introduction of rapid transit and the high-speed low-cost automobile, however, the potential area of urbanization was increased 900 per cent to more than 700 square miles, the area within a fifteen mile radius. About one-half of the area within fifteen miles of the Vancouver business district is water area or is so mountainous as to be useless for the usual urban purposes. The corporate area of Vancouver is 44 square miles, about one-eighth of the total area susceptible to urbanization.

### POPULATION

Past trends in population growth in the greater Vancouver area are shown in the following Table:

<i>Year</i>	<i>Population Greater Vancouver</i>	<i>Population City of Vancouver</i>	<i>Per Cent in Vancouver</i>
1901.....	36,296	29,432	81.1
1911.....	152,242	130,847	85.9
1921.....	213,641	163,220	76.4
1931.....	324,581	246,588	76.0
1941.....	373,413	275,353	73.7

While a large percentage of the population of Greater Vancouver resides within the City of Vancouver the percentage is becoming smaller each decade, having decreased from 85.9 per cent in 1911 to 73.7 per cent in 1941. However, a more significant picture is shown in the following Table:

<i>Period</i>	<i>Population Increase Greater Vancouver</i>	<i>Population Increase Vancouver</i>	<i>Per Cent Increase in Vancouver</i>
1901-1911.....	115,946	101,415	87.5
1911-1921.....	61,399	32,373	52.6
1921-1931.....	110,940	83,368	75.1
1931-1941.....	48,832	28,765	58.9

While three-fourths of the new population growth of Greater Vancouver located within the city between 1921 and 1931, this percentage dropped to 58.9 per cent in the period 1931-1941.

In the Population Report, the probable population of Greater Vancouver in 1971 was estimated to be 650,000, a growth of 277,000. In order to permit economic provision of public services and facilities throughout its area of 44 square miles, the City of Vancouver should contain a population of approximately 445,000, an average density of 15 persons per acre. In order to attain this population the city would have to attract 65 per cent of the new growth of the metropolitan area during the next twenty-five years—a larger percentage than was attracted in the period 1931-1941. The attainment of this objective is of dominant importance to the future economic well-being of Vancouver. It should not be sacrificed by careless failure to control sporadic land subdivision. Emphasis of this broader phase of planning should take precedence over all other planning actions.

In comparison with American cities, there is a relatively low ratio of automobiles to population in Vancouver. As economic conditions improve the number of cars per unit of population can be expected to materially increase, thus enhancing the potentialities for widespread dispersal of the population.

## INDUSTRY

A large part of the major industrial development of the Greater Vancouver area is located adjacent to navigable waters—along Burrard Inlet and the Fraser River. It is probable that large industries in the future will seek similar sites. In addition to the land so situated in the City of Vancouver, sites are, or can be, made available in North Vancouver, Richmond, and in the New Westminster area, the latter city having prepared extensive plans for such industrial expansion.

The City of Vancouver has many available sites for the smaller industries, particularly those of a service nature, and because of the superior distribution facilities, and because of the concentration of population, it is probable that Vancouver will continue to be the site for most of the smaller industries. The larger industries, however, can be expected to find various locations throughout the metropolitan area. This may well be the cause of the development of outlying residential areas, and even of small satellite towns and settlements.

## COMMERCE

As the population growth of the metropolitan area spreads outwardly, many of the commercial uses, (stores, shops, garages, etc.) which serve this population can be expected to move outward also. More and more secondary shopping centres will be developed.

A comparison between the value of commercial building permits in the central business district of Vancouver and in the remainder of the city area over the past ten years is shown in the following Tables:

<i>Year</i>	<i>Total Commercial Construction in Vancouver</i>	<i>Commercial Construction in Central Business District</i>	<i>Per Cent in Central Business District</i>
1936.....	\$ 664,400	\$ 347,779	40.2
1937.....	714,705	399,415	55.9
1938.....	862,125	455,600	52.8
1939.....	977,563	509,575	52.1
1940.....	1,296,425	381,350	29.4
1941.....	1,285,970	263,050	20.5
1942.....	997,170	297,505	29.8
1943.....	987,104	458,754	46.5
1944.....	1,422,560	593,225	41.7
1945.....	2,408,525	721,905	30.0
Total	\$11,616,547	\$4,347,779	37.4

(NOTE: Does not include repairs and alterations under \$1,000).

Thus, considering the City of Vancouver alone, somewhat less than two-fifths of commercial construction is taking place within the central business district. Unfortunately, similar figures are not available for the entire metropolitan area. It is probable, however, that only about one-fifth of the new commercial building in the metropolitan area is taking place in the central business district of Vancouver. Nor are data available showing the comparative volumes of retail trade as between the Vancouver business district and other retail outlets in the metropolitan area. As time goes on and more and more of the new residential growth takes place further and further from the business district, it is probable that a decreasing proportion of the total retail trade of the metropolitan area will take place in the central business district of Vancouver.

## MEASURES TO CONTROL DECENTRALIZATION

The trend toward decentralization that will affect the metropolitan area of Vancouver more and more over the next twenty-five years can be absorbed without disruption or it can result in substantial harm depending upon whether or not there is proper control of the process. If the best results are to be realized, five measures are required, as follows:

1. GOOD LIVING CONDITIONS MUST BE MAINTAINED IN THE OLDER AREAS. In many older cities, there has been considerable loss of population in the older residential areas adjacent to the business district. To permit such areas to deteriorate into blighted districts and slums by merely replacing them with the new residential areas on the outskirts is not common sense. This increases unnecessarily

the total residential area, requires additional public facilities and services such as sewers, streets, and schools, with only limited abandonment of facilities already installed and largely or wholly paid for in the older districts.

One is too prone to forget that a city is predominately a residential area. Other uses such as commerce and industry occupy only a minor part of the land area. Probably between 60 and 75 per cent of the tax dollar is spent in the residential area. At the same time a large proportion of attention is paid to the commercial and industrial rather than to the residential development of the community. Requests for changes in the Zoning By-law are usually for more intensive and widespread commercial and industrial development, and seldom to provide better protection for the residential areas, thus the largest, most expensive, and most important part of the city, the residential part, gradually becomes the most neglected.

Fortunately, Vancouver does not now possess extensive slums and blighted areas. There are a few areas (slums) that should be rebuilt, and some larger areas that need rehabilitation to which the city should give early attention. The Dominion Government is developing programmes that will be of great assistance in connection with these undertakings.

Of more importance, however, is the maintenance of good living conditions in the residential areas that are now in good condition. This will require (1) formation of local neighborhood organizations throughout the city, (2) strict and impartial enforcement of the Zoning By-law, (3) a thorough programme for the planting and care of street trees, (4) continued efficient collection of garbage and trash, (5) planning and good maintenance of streets and lanes, and (6) continued development and maintenance of good local park and school areas.

2. THERE MUST BE STRICT CONTROL OVER ALL NEW SUBDIVISIONS IN THE METROPOLITAN AREA. A far greater area has been subdivided in the Vancouver metropolitan district than is needed for residential purposes. Square miles of plotted territory vacant except for a solitary house or two can be found in the southwestern portions of the city, in North Vancouver and in Burnaby. These consist of poorly designed plats unrelated to topography and often unimproved except for a substandard surfacing on the street. The cost of providing even the minimum public services and facilities in these areas is far more than the area can ever pay—even if developed to ten times the present density. In fact, it is doubtful if the future population growth will be sufficient to utilize more than a small part of these areas. They are a good example of the harm that can result from uncontrolled decentralization.

In the future no new subdivision should be permitted unless adequate facilities for water supply and sewage disposal and a minimum standard street paving is first installed. Such a practice is followed in suburban areas of many American cities. It stops subdividing for speculative purposes only, insures a satisfactory location for new subdivisions, and a proper standard for new subdivision development.

Many of the poorly platted subdivisions which are presently vacant should be redeveloped under "Replotting", Part II, of the Town Planning Act. This might well be made the subject of a special study.

3. INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT SHOULD BE STUDIED AND PROMOTED ON A METROPOLITAN BASIS. Much of the future growth of the Vancouver metropolitan area will be dependent upon industrial development. The different parts of the area should not compete for new industries. Rather, there should be a strong citizens' organization to promote new industries for the entire area. Such an organization could encourage use of those industrial sites that are best related to highway and transit facilities, to existing utilities, and to the existing residential areas.

4. THE CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT MUST BE ACCESSIBLE, CONVENIENT, ATTRACTIVE, AND INVITING. This subject is discussed at greater length in previous reports. The metropolitan area must have a centre and the only logical centre is the present Vancouver business district. It is important to the metropolitan area, and particularly because of the tourist trade, that this centre not be allowed to disintegrate into a number of scattered subcentres, no one of which could possibly contain the centralized institutions that should be found in one location.

Measures to improve accessibility by means of highway and transit improvements have been outlined in previous parts of the Town Plan, as have proposals to increase convenience by means of the improvement in facilities for parking of cars. The downtown area should be the location for the great majority of new centralized institutions both public and private. Auditoriums, main libraries, museums—all uses of interest to the entire metropolitan area—should have a downtown location. The commercial sub-centres can then perform their normal function of service to their tributary areas, and the business district will continue to contain the high property values so essential to the welfare of the city.

5. THE ENTIRE METROPOLITAN AREA SHOULD HAVE A PLANNED DEVELOPMENT. The metropolitan area (frequently referred to as Greater Vancouver) is gradually becoming one great community with contiguous development. Transportation, the larger recreational areas, water supply, sewage disposal, and certain other services are problems of a nature requiring a unified effort. It is essential that these be planned on a metropolitan or unified basis as the area continues to grow in total population and in commercial and industrial significance.



# LOWER FRASER RIVER VALLEY

## LEGEND

- CITIES
- INCORPORATED VILLAGES
- SMALL COMMUNITIES

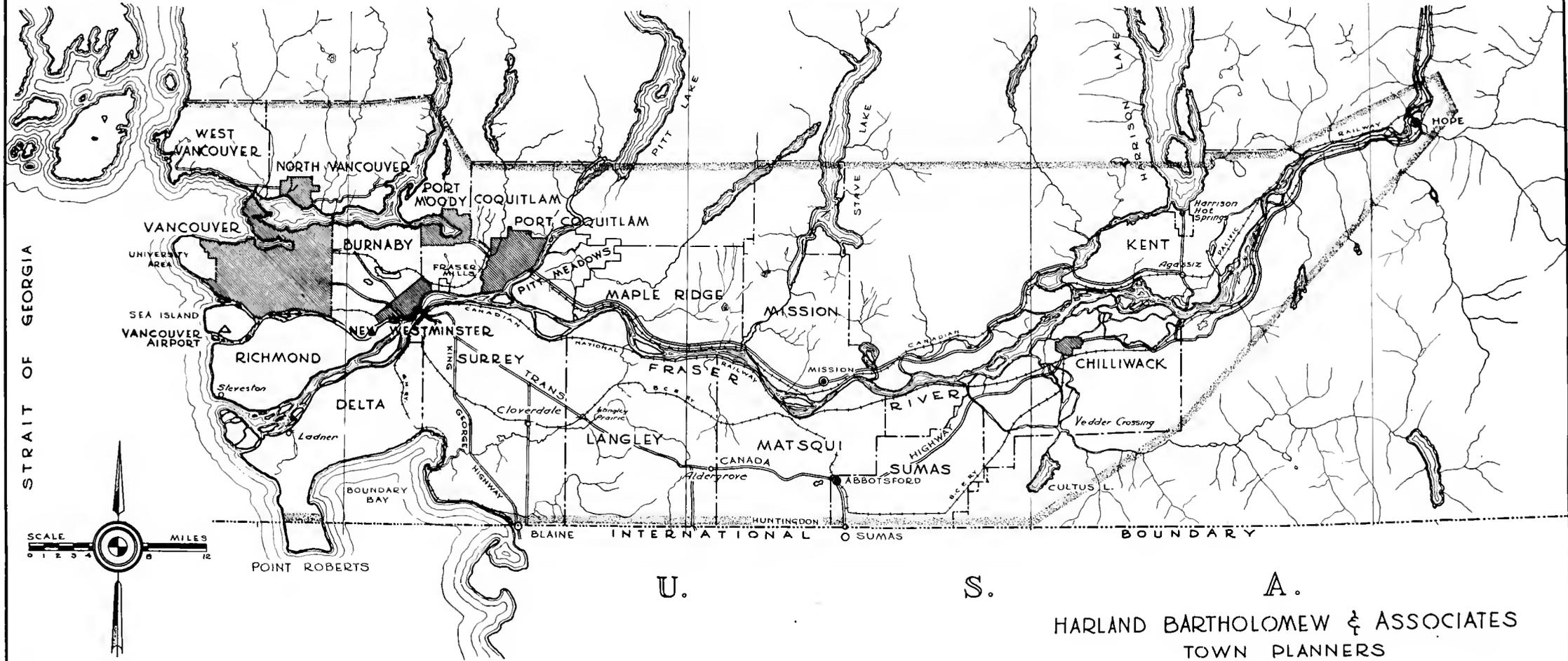


## REGION

PROPOSED BOUNDARY  
OF REGION

## LEGEND

- RAILWAY
- HIGHWAY
- MUNICIPAL DISTRICT BOUNDARY



STRAIT OF GEORGIA



1946

HARLAND BARTHOLOMEW & ASSOCIATES  
TOWN PLANNERS

## REGIONAL PLANNING

The previous part of this report has indicated some of the reasons why regional planning is necessary in the Vancouver area. Under our present process of city building the urban growth of Vancouver has gone far beyond the corporate limits of the City of Vancouver. Nevertheless it is still a unified development. The natural unity of the metropolitan area is in great contrast with the complexity of local government, the natural area being split up by the arbitrary limits of many individual cities, villages and districts. Each of these municipalities, however, must recognize and accept the essential unity of the region in which they are located. It seems almost obvious that in order to do good planning in any of these individual communities, such planning must be related to the entire region and further that only as we plan the entire area as a unit can the community attain its highest economic and social usefulness and value.

### WHAT AREA SHOULD BE PLANNED?

A "region" is generally considered to be an area that is inherently unified in one or more certain important aspects. It is, of course, difficult to place an exact boundary for a metropolitan region. The boundaries should, however, conform wherever possible with those natural topographical features that are the real limits to the activities of the metropolitan area. In Vancouver, it is apparent that the boundaries of the regional area are related to the valley of the Lower Fraser River. (*See accompanying Plate*).

For the purpose of this report it is suggested that the lower mainland of British Columbia, that is, the entire Fraser River Valley, from the Strait of Georgia to as far east as Hope, should be planned as a regional unit. The Plate shows a map of this regional area and indicates the various cities, districts and villages which it contains. The international boundary line would, of course, be the south boundary of the region. The western boundary would extend along the shore line from Point Roberts to the north boundary of West Vancouver. From this point to a point opposite Hope the boundary would follow the height of the land—the mountain ridge—along the north side of the Fraser River. Similarly the mountain ridge south of Chilliwack from the international boundary to a point opposite Hope would form the easterly portion of the south boundary.

This area covers approximately 1,800 square miles, about one-third of which is mountainous. It contains some 23 separate municipalities and approximately one-half of the population of British Columbia. As can be seen on the Plate the eastern part of this region is a considerable distance from Vancouver. While it is probable that the great part of the urban development of the region will be concentrated within twenty or twenty-five miles of the Vancouver business district, the remain-

ing part of the region up-stream is such an integral part of the area from the topographic standpoint that it seems only logical to include the entire lower river valley.

This great natural river basin containing Canada's largest city on the Pacific Coast should have a unified, sound and planned development.

## WHAT COULD A PLANNING AGENCY DO?

Before considering the composition or the organization of a planning agency for this region it is well to briefly analyse what a planning agency could do.

The activities of such an agency should largely be concentrated on the following nine items:

1. **FACTUAL STUDIES.** A planning agency should make factual studies of economic conditions and of population growth and location within the entire region. Studies should be made of local development of agricultural, commercial and industrial enterprises and the available natural resources that might attract new enterprises. This data should be collected, compiled and published in such form that it can be distributed within and beyond the region.

Much of our difficulty in the development of all communities has been the lack of information about them to use as a guide for both public and private enterprises. Factual data about topography, soil, land use and population in the entire area would, for example, be of great importance to persons desiring to locate new commercial and industrial concerns. This information would also be of vital interest to industries considering the region as a possible location, to prospective residents, home seekers and to tourists. While certain of this type of work is done at the present time by private individuals and organizations, such collection and compilation of data has not hitherto been done on a regional basis, nor does it have the continuity that is essential if significant trends are to be ascertained and sound planning programmes developed and enforced. However, an excellent report with this object in view entitled, "Proposed Lower Mainland Regional Plan", was recently prepared by the Regional Planning Division of the Provincial Bureau of Reconstruction.

2. **TRANSPORTATION STUDIES.** Transportation is one of the most vital factors in the development of Vancouver. Plans for the improvement of railways, harbour facilities and airports should be made on a regional basis. A previous report\* has clearly indicated the necessity for the planning of airports on a regional scale. A regional planning agency could make studies and plans looking toward proper Dominion and Provincial, as well as local action for the improvement of all forms of transportation.

3. **HIGHWAYS.** The major through highways in the regional area must also be planned on a regional basis. The location of the proposed superhighway through

\*Metropolitan Airport Plan.

New Westminster for example, may well affect the location of this route in Vancouver or in Surrey. A regional agency with intimate knowledge of local conditions would be of great assistance to the Provincial and Dominion Governments in the planning of these highways.

4. REGIONAL PARKS. Plans should be made for the development of a complete system of regional parks, not only to serve the local population but to serve the great number of tourists coming into Vancouver. Certainly no other area possesses comparable potential park sites. Proper location of the regional parks and of the roads leading to them requires regional planning. This is one of the objectives of the Metropolitan Park Planning Committee, which has done some excellent work in its field.

5. NAVIGATION, FLOOD PROTECTION AND POWER. A regional planning agency could be of great assistance in correlating public and private plans for navigation, flood protection, and power generation and distribution.

6. MISCELLANEOUS PUBLIC SERVICES AND FACILITIES. A regional planning agency could be of great benefit in making region-wide studies of other public services and facilities such as police and fire protection, water supply, sewage disposal and schools. Such studies might indicate the possibility for cooperative provision of certain facilities between two or more municipalities.

7. ZONING AND SUBDIVISION CONTROL IN UNORGANIZED AREAS. In recent years the sporadic and often haphazard development of unorganized lands in the area has been a matter of serious concern to the Provincial Government. A regional planning agency should be given the power to make zoning regulations and control land subdivision in this region. Such areas could then have a planned development coordinated with the region as a whole.

8. ENCOURAGEMENT OF LOCAL PLANNING AND ZONING. One of the most important tasks that a regional planning agency would have would be to encourage proper local planning and zoning in all the many municipalities as well as in the unorganized territory. Many of the plans that would be made by the regional agency would have to be carried out by the local municipalities. The regional agency would have to work very closely with each and every one of these and assist them in their local planning and in maintaining good standards of zoning and subdivision control. The regional agency could be of great value to these municipalities by the dissemination of information relating to modern techniques and practices in planning and zoning.

9. LEGISLATION. A regional planning agency would be a good "clearing house" for all proposed Dominion and Provincial legislation affecting the physical development of the area.

## WHO SHOULD BE INTERESTED IN A REGIONAL PLANNING AGENCY?

All persons residing or having business interests in the region should certainly be interested in seeing that it has a unified and planned development. Only by good planning can there be assurance of a better place in which to live and work and in which costs of construction and of annual maintenance charges can be kept to a minimum. Secondly, all the political subdivisions of the area should be interested in the development of a regional planning agency. They should be interested in such an agency whether each municipality has a Town Plan at present or not. All of the different parts of this region are so very closely interrelated that one municipality could undertake a course of action that might not coordinate fully with the plans of others. Each should consider the actions and the plans of all. Local plans alone are not entirely sufficient. The comparatively small cost of a regional plan to any one political subdivision would be a small price to pay for insurance that the plan it has developed is the right plan from the regional standpoint and furthermore, that it would not be up-set by some action in another part of the region. Thirdly, both the Provincial and Dominion Governments should be most interested in the development of a regional planning agency. Both construct a considerable number of public works in the region. They should be interested in seeing that these are coordinated with the planned development of the region and that they do not build at great expense, improvements that may be soon found to be outmoded, inadequate or inappropriately located.

About seven or eight years ago a few municipal leaders from this region who were interested in its welfare, formed an informal group, known as the "Lower Mainland Regional Planning Committee", for the purpose of discussing regional planning and advancing the premise that only by the coordinated effort upon the part of all the municipalities could the region be efficiently and logically planned. The need for regional planning was evidenced by the keen interest in the meetings. As it became apparent that Provincial Government leadership was essential, certain recommendations to this effect were made. The Government evidently had the problem in hand as it had already issued a report, to which previous reference has been made, presenting factual data.

## HOW SHOULD THE REGIONAL PLANNING AGENCY BE ORGANIZED?

There are two alternatives for the organization of a regional planning agency. First, an unofficial corporation could be established, financed by both public or private subscription. This method has been followed in Chicago and in New York with notable success. A private agency would carry on all the activities listed in the previous section with the exception, of course, of the zoning and subdivision control in the unorganized areas. It would have no real power, however, except that of persuasion, and it would have to work very closely with the various governmental agencies in order to encourage them to undertake certain plans that they do not have a part in formulating.

The second, and infinitely preferable, alternative would be to establish an official regional planning agency. This would, of course, require a Provincial Regional Planning Act. Such an agency could very properly be given power to undertake all the activities previously outlined and could probably also adopt the plan as the official plan for the region with the requirement that the plan be considered before public works are undertaken.

How to organize such an official planning agency is a considerable problem. It could be composed of a representative from each city, village and district and a representative from the Provincial Government. Perhaps certain parts of the region should be given representation on more of a population basis. This would create quite an unwieldy agency composed of probably 25 or 30 persons. This difficulty could, however, be eliminated to a certain extent by having an executive committee or board of directors carrying on most of the activities and then to have the entire planning agency meet only once or twice a year. The executive committee might be composed of the Provincial representative, the City of Vancouver representative, and three others elected by the entire agency. Any regional planning agency should, however, have an advisory board composed of the Dominion and Provincial legislative representatives. This advisory board should meet at least four times a year for the purpose of reviewing the activities of the regional commission and its executive, and making appropriate criticisms and suggestions.

The problem of the precise composition, organization and powers of a regional planning agency is a complicated one, but it is not incapable of solution. The above is offered only as a suggestion and as a basis for discussion. An official agency is recommended, however. With an official agency each political subdivision would feel that it had a part in the regional plan and it is believed that a better continuity of planning and of planned development would ensue.

#### HOW SHOULD A REGIONAL PLANNING AGENCY BE FINANCED?

If an unofficial agency is established it could be financed by private or public subscription or by both. The person or agency subscribing would then be given a part in the direction of the agency the same as in a corporation.

The method of financing an official agency is also somewhat complicated and difficult to determine. It will require a free and frank roundtable discussion among the representatives of all the interested municipalities and the Provincial Government. The latter, on account of its interest in the contiguous unorganized territory and due to the fact that a regional plan would benefit it in a very large measure, should be prepared to contribute to the extent of a substantial share of the cost. With respect to the balance of the cost, the municipalities which would benefit the most from the plan should be prepared to pay in proportion to the benefits received, the factors of population and extent (area) of each municipality also being kept in mind.

The cost could be estimated by the engineers of the Government and municipalities, due regard being taken of the extent of the work involved which would include engineering and clerical staff and publication of reports, etc. The Regional Planning Division of the Provincial Bureau of Reconstruction, as already mentioned, has made a compilation of factual data. In order to adequately and properly utilize this data and to implement this Bureau's work, it will be essential that some type of organization will have to be set up under the sponsorship of the Provincial Government which will have representation from the Government and all the interested municipalities.

In addition to the initial cost, the organization should also keep in mind that regional planning would be a continuing effort and after the Regional Plan and Report have been prepared, the organization should be maintained upon an annual budget arrangement.



