

*Miserable and disreputable housing conditions may do more than spread disease and crime and immorality. They may also suffocate the spirit by reducing the people who live there to the status of cattle. They may indeed make living an almost insufferable burden. They may also be an ugly sore, a blight on the community which robs it of charm, which makes it a place from which men turn. The misery of housing may despoil a community as an open sewer may ruin a river.*

—U. S. Supreme Court

Urban renewal is one of the most powerful tools available for carrying out the General Plan recommendations, especially in the older sections of the urban area. It is a comprehensive program stressing prevention of urban blight as well as rehabilitation and rebuilding. Federal financing is available to defray as much as two-thirds of project costs.

Following a Maryland amendment in 1960, the State Legislature gave urban renewal authority to Montgomery County and the cities of Rockville and Takoma Park. The 1962 session of the General Assembly granted the same authority to Prince George's County and to the cities of College Park, Hyattsville, Mt. Rainier, Laurel and Glen Arden.

Several parts of the Regional District are now in need of rebuilding. Some of the deteriorated areas, close to commercial centers, have attracted private investors who are replacing the old buildings with apartment houses and commercial and industrial developments. Other blighted spots, which either cannot be acquired without the public power of eminent domain or which

are unsuitably located for profitable private redevelopment, will require public renewal programs. Public urban renewal may also be required to make proper adjustments around new rapid transit stations and freeways in the already built-up areas.

In addition, the broader problems of preventing deterioration and blight, in the Regional District as a whole, will need community-wide attention by public agencies. Typical concerns should be for:

- Bringing deficient public facilities up to standard.
- Solving isolated land use problems, especially on land inflated in value and by-passed by developers, or on land along transitions between zoning districts.
- Removing non-conforming uses and correcting past zoning mistakes.
- Strengthening the enforcement of building, housing, health, and zoning ordinances.

In order to carry out these public responsibilities intelligently and efficiently, it will be necessary to keep a running inventory of neighborhood and community characteristics which can be used to identify areas needing urgent attention. By this method, a comprehensive program of renewal can be prepared and dovetailed with the various capital improvement and related programs of government. The Planning Commission's established experience with land use, zoning, and similar information for the Regional District will be made available for urban renewal studies. The coordination of urban renewal programs with the General Plan and detailed master plans for local areas, and coordination with the review of public capital improvement programs, will also be provided by the Commission.

To assure that the Commission's recognized planning authority and unique experience is used to assist urban renewal programs, the Commission should be specifically designated in State enabling legislation as the official planning agency for all urban renewal projects undertaken by public agencies in the Regional District. The General Plan will have substantially greater chances of being realized if this is done.

**ACTION:** Enact State legislation making the Park and Planning Commission the official planning authority for all public urban renewal projects undertaken in the Regional District.

