

PARADE OF HOMES

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If urban growth continues at the pace that has marked the last century as Canada changed from an agrarian to an industrial country, by the year 2000 only 5 per cent of the population will be rural dwellers. At present 30 per cent of the population falls into that category the remaining 70 per cent are city dwellers.

Despite its almost 4 million square miles of territory, unlike the United States, Canada is not a nation of several large cities. In fact, if present trends continue, of the 95 per cent of the population who would be living in cities by the year 2000 most of them would be concentrated in three or four large centres like Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver and to a lesser degree in expanding cities like Calgary.

This trend has had a marked effect on the price of houses in the large cities affected by influx of people from rural areas and smaller centres. As the population of the urban giants increases, so does the price of houses. The reason is not difficult to find. As land surrounding these centres becomes scarcer, its price increases and it is not uncommon for the price of the lot on which a house stands to represent 50 per cent or more of the house-lot package price. It is an elementary economic law that scarcity exerts upward pressure on the price of commodities.

Therefore, it is easy to see why the price of houses in Vancouver is much higher than the national average. It is sandwiched between the ocean and the Rocky Mountains, making whatever land that is available an extremely valuable commodity.

Toronto likewise is waterlocked on its southern border, making land inside the city and on its northern border more valuable as vacant land within the city becomes rapidly depleted.

Calgary is also experiencing growing pains and this city with Toronto and Vancouver have the highest average house prices in Canada.

"The now familiar problems associated with urban living are going to multiply - especially if Canadian cities follow the pattern of many large U.S. cities," Marcel Lessard, federal minister of regional economic expansion, predicted in a recent speech.

Jobs and more house construction follow the concentration of plant locations and so the big cities get bigger and, Lessard said, the problems of congestion, pollution, personal alienation, serviced land shortages, housing problems and social unrest are inevitable.

Meanwhile, the population of many small communities across Canada has been falling as industry locates elsewhere. Some face the threat of virtual extinction. Property values fall as people move away and though there may be bargains they are not matched up with employment opportunities. But they may be bargains for retired couples or families prepared to commute.

In an attempt to turn the tide so that the present projections for the year 2000 won't become a reality the federal government has for some time intervened to try to better balance economic growth.

"There has been a concentration of plant locations in large urban centres to the point where Southern Ontario, for example, accounts for almost half of all Canadian employment and output in manufacturing industries," said Lessard. "These activities are expanding in that area at rates greater than those prevailing in the country as a whole."

Many examples of government intervention to encourage development of different parts of the country are a part of history. But

recent intervention, according to Lessard, has been designed "to promote greater freedom of choice for individuals and to increase the opportunities available to Canadians to work in different regions at different jobs offering long-term security and income stability."

In short the aim of the federal government is to encourage small communities to grow and prosper if they have the potential to do so.

Of course, taxpayers' money is spent to accomplish the government's objective in constructing roads, sewers, piers and other necessities for industrial growth.

But Lessard argues that it may be more costly for society to have plants locate near an existing large centre because new schools, community centres and other necessities and amenities must be put in place to accommodate the expanded population created by the new job opportunities. Coupled with this are increased land costs - not just for the newcomers but for everybody. The land costs and zoning regulations often make it more expensive to build the facilities in large urban centres.

Meanwhile, schools, community centres and other facilities in slow growth centres are underutilized.

He gave as examples of government intervention a federal-provincial project to develop a steel complex in Regina, a joint provincial-federal venture to develop a new industrial park in Cornwall, Ont.; a plywood plant in McAdam, New Brunswick, and another joint project to establish a bleached kraft pulp mill at St. Felicien, Quebec.

Lessard's department has spent more than \$1 billion to have roads, sewers, schools and industrial parks put in place in slow-growth areas to attract industry. Whether history will show that the demographic projections for the year 2000 will in fact become a reality only time will tell.

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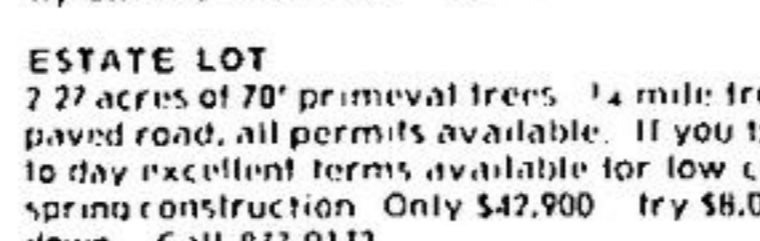
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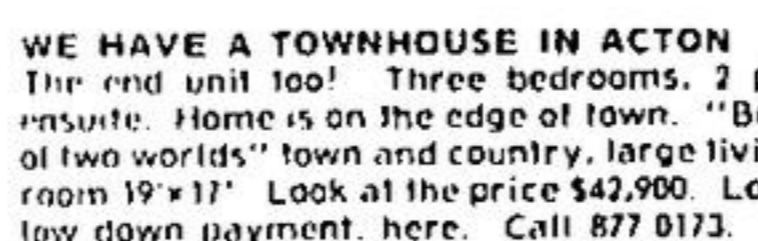
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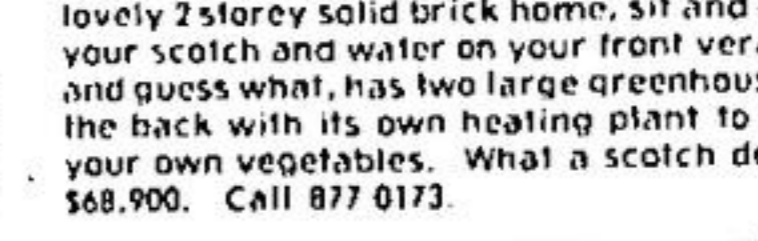
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