

The Common Sense of Regional Planning

The Future of Camden-Philadelphia Metropolitan District.

By **HOWARD STRONG**, Director, Committee on Regional Planning
for the Metropolitan District.

Political subdivisions fall before economic and social advance. Camden, Wilmington and Philadelphia are in separate States, and are of course, independent communities, but they have many interests in common, and many of their problems can be solved only by common attack. Industrial and port development, traffic provision, housing facilities, the problem of land values, living conditions, all these and many more elements of community life are each day coming to be more and more inter-related. The Delaware River has, for more than a hundred years, been sort of a Chinese Wall between Philadelphia and Camden, a Wall having only a few⁷ gates through which communication was possible. Rapidly that wall is breaking down. A great new door is to be opened on July 4, 1926. Other gateways in the form of bridges, ferries and tubes will follow, and the unobstructed avenues of the air, will soon make possible communication between the two cities almost as simple as that between West Philadelphia and the Broad Street district.

Camden is making ready for this future. Magnificent approaches to the new bridge, a splendid system of highways, parks, waterways, playgrounds, and other facilities are under way. But if Camden will put herself in the place of other cities located near the center of a great population, and will watch the growth of those cities as communication with the population center has been developed, as for instance, Brooklyn, Jersey City or Newark, she may ask herself whether her planning measures up to the greatness which the future has in store for her.

Will downtown Camden be ready to serve as the throbbing center of a mighty region? Or when this growth comes, will Camden find her business district with the same congestion, the same lack of freedom in movement, the same inefficiency in business service, that are to be found in the center of Philadelphia, New York, Chicago Saint Louis, Boston and the other great cities of the country?

Are the outlying towns, which one day must become a social and economic, if not a political part of Camden itself, even as Merion, Upper Darby, Narberth and Overbrook have an economic identity with Philadelphia, are these towns being prepared for the development which is bound to come upon them? Will they be ready to meet and care for the great decentralization movement, the industrial and suburban development which is taking place around every great population center.

This movement of industry and population away from

the centers of our great cities is a most wholesome tendency, giving better living conditions and greater freedom for industrial activity, provided the territory for which it is destined, be adequately prepared for it, before it comes. If on the other hand, this development is allowed to flow upon these smaller centers unprepared, the great center of population, Philadelphia-Camden, will be handicapped by the same sort of unwholesome, inefficient, sordid and unlovely satellites that can be found about Pittsburgh and some other great cities, whose growth has come upon them un-awares.

The writer of this article, Mr. Howard Strong has had many years of Chamber of Commerce experience. For years he was Executive Secretary of the Chamber at Minneapolis, Minnesota and more recently at Rochester, New York. He is a past president of the National Association of Commercial Secretaries and an authority on Chamber of Commerce psychology and practice. He has addressed meetings in Camden—Rotary, Kiwanis etc. and is booked as one of the Chamber of Commerce fall forum speakers. The article printed herewith is the result of an urgent request by the Editor of "Camden First."

Every great population center holds a definite responsibility towards the surrounding region, not to super-impose upon that region a definite plan for the future, but to help the region to visualize its own future, to co-operate in making ready for this future, and to develop a common planning program which shall meet the needs of the future as they shall arise. Such a movement does not contemplate annexation, the gradual absorption of the lesser by the great, but the recognition of each lesser community as a separate economic unit, having at the same time an integral part in and interdependence with the interests of a larger economic unit. It is only as the whole region shall combine in a study of its common interests, of the movements of its population, of the highway and transportation provisions which are to be made

for the future, of the park and playground, and recreation facilities, of its future housing and industrial needs, and only as it shall seek to solve these problems, by a single program, with a common purpose, that it shall be prepared for the great demands of the future when they shall come.

The Camden Bridge will be the greatest factor in increasing and spreading the population in South Jersey. With this movement will come a centralization of business with its attending traffic problem and public transportation problem. Look about you at the cities of Philadelphia, Newark, and New York and one can envision the future problems of Camden. Before it is too late definite steps should be taken on a program of regional planning not alone by the city of Camden but by and with the cooperation of the adjoining suburban communities.

If the people of Camden and Philadelphia, and the region round about, are to be worthy citizens of a great metropolitan area, they must learn to think in metropolitan terms. They must envision themselves not only as citizens of today, but as carrying a responsibility for, and having a part in molding that greater city of the future.