Cities are the handiwork of man. Whether our cities are physically bad or physically good is our responsibility.

We cannot assume to be a profession and simply serve as a medium for the buying and selling of property. We are not merely commission agents drifting into the business because of failure in other lines, as is so frequently charged, but we are ‘realtor scientists.’

Even the farmer constantly strives to grow better corn and improve the grade of his livestock; the toiler in the factory ever strives to improve the quality of the product of his hand; and the true citizen cannot dodge the issue in the making and remaking of our cities – but must devote his energies to the study of stabilizing property values – the betterment of living conditions and the making of our cities more efficient for commerce and industry.

Any scientific diagnosis of the physiology of our cities should spur into immediate action every man interested in his own “home town or city.”

Every large American city carries an appalling burden in abandoned formerly good residence sections where homes are offered for a mere fraction of their original cost, and in its immense percentage of unproductive, vacant land, with carrying charges far greater than the average increase in value.

Its shifting and declining down-town business centers entail gigantic loss in property values and render speculative and unstable the highest land values.

The criminal waste of land and criminal waste in improvement of unnecessarily wide residence streets, the fearful and growing tax paid by pedestrian, vehicular and street railway traffic over narrow and congested traffic streets, with few radial or circumferential lines of commercial highways, are common to every city.

The usual suburban property just beyond the city limits is almost universally uncontrolled, and almost impossible of later conversion into a unified, efficient part of a city. Capital refuses to lend more than 50% on the value of improved city property, while it lends 80% to 90% on good stocks. We all admit the slowness of real estate in times of stress. There is a general lack of civic order, civic individuality and civic beauty, and a deplorable lack of public spirit in the making of private gifts to our American cities.

This continuous shifting of the uses and values of large sections of city property, and the inadequacy of every large city to perform its functions and serve its people in a convenient and efficient manner create insecurity in real estate values.
All these conditions arising largely from the private and selfish use of land under practically no municipal control for the interest of the community as a whole, have indeed created a crying need for an affective city planning in every city of 10,000 population and in every town which ever hopes to number 10,000 citizens.

With our country’s population crowding into cities at an alarmingly increasing rate; with every city expanding staggering sums in the almost hopeless endeavor to correct only a few of the past evils of city making, and with striking evidence on every hand that the haphazard, piecemeal, shortsighted city building of the past is inefficient and wasteful – is not the planning of cities on broad, business-like and economical lines a most vital subject for the consideration of every civic organization and municipal authority on whom this grave responsibility rests?

The time has come when we must cease to foolishly and vaguely regard city planning as simply a visionary scheme of idealists for civic embellishment; and we must now realize it in its fundamental, practical scope of actual planning and replanning of cities as they should be. We must not accept the present lack of planning and hopeless jumble of unrelated and conflicting parts as unavoidable.

While European, English and even South American cities have been making immense strides along this line, a wonderful civic awakening has been taking place throughout our own country, foretelling, a revolution in our present low standards of city making.

Efficient city planning involves vitally every industry and every individual of our cities. It is the insistent demand of business and human instinct for the use of reason, fairness and foresight in the organic construction of a city – according to a carefully prepared plan – on exactly the same principles as govern any commercial undertaking, the building of any house, the laying out of any farm or the intelligent, execution of any human activity.

A city – a civic machine – is dependent upon the efficient performance of its every part, as is the body, the human machine, dependent upon the workings and relation of its parts.

An intelligent city plan thinks impartially for all parts of a city at the same time, and does not forget the greater needs of tomorrow in the press of today. It recognizes the economy of preventive measures over corrective costs. It is simply good, practical hard sense. On account of the lack of the use of proper plans, British cities spent $150,000,000 in the ten years from 1898 to 1908 in the effort to partially correct a few mistakes in their physical structure. In the last fifty years Chicago has spent $300,000,000 and New York City $500,000,000 in municipal work that could have been saved by a good, businesslike city plan.

A scientific city plan should be prepared after a most comprehensive survey, under a well-balanced, continuous commission of realtors, merchants and experts on all phases of civic life, cooperating with the administrative officers of the city. Compared with the cost of the plans of any house, factory, barn, bridge or public utility, the cost of preparing a city plan is ridiculously low – perhaps not exceeding 1/10 of 1% of the property involved, while you pay 3% to 5% for the plans of a mere barn or garage.
“The good city plan” constantly endeavors to establish the individuality of a city, preserve its historic memories, its surrounding points of interest, its traditions and the pride of its citizens, catch its peculiar spirit, preserve its distinctive flavor and accent its particular situation. Why do cities fail to appreciate their most interesting features? For instance, abandonment of old Colonial architecture of our Southern States, and in San Diego, California, which has been the center of the most interesting Indian and Spanish historical events, has chosen such uninteresting names for its streets as “C,” “D” and “E” Streets.

The indescribable personality and individuality of a city is an immense factor in the competition for commercial supremacy between cities, and is always recognized and accentuated by the alert city planner.

Revolutionary as it may seem, in the planning and replanning of our cities on a business-like bases, the time is coming when the private owner of urban property will no longer be permitted to use his own land as he pleases. Upon September 20, 1915, the United States Supreme Court, in the case of Hadacheck against the City of Los Angeles, ruled that a brickyard which had been in operation for fifteen or twenty years, could be excluded, without compensation, from a residence district which had been built up around the brick-yard. This ruling was made regardless of the contention of the timers of the brick-yard that its value would be greatly reduced. In fact, the city of Los Angeles, by powers granted it by the laws of the State of California, had recently created certain residential districts which were actually retroactive, in that they forced factories and other buildings already established to move out of these residence districts, without compensation.

In the United States Supreme Court, in the case of Reiman against Little Rock, April 5, 1915, the same ruling was made as to a long-established stable, in a residence district, putting it out of a residence district later established, and allowing no compensation to the owner of the stable. All this is done under the police power for the greater welfare of a community and is not held under the 14th Amendment as confiscation of property. Why should the early building of a brickyard or livery stable commit a whole region to undesirable property?

And now New York City, under her recent law passed by the State Legislature, has divided the city into three districts – business, residential and unrestricted, and absolutely determined not only the maximum height, area and minimum free space, but also the use of buildings hereafter erected in these districts.

In the residence districts certain streets will be reserved for strictly residential uses, and the business in these districts confined to certain thoroughfares with liberal allowance for free space, limited height of office buildings, suitable building lines, etc. This is being done from the sheer necessity of preserving decent living conditions and the conserving of property values.

In certain business sections there is segregation of trades and undesirable factories from retail sections, the economic depreciation hazard attendant in all classes of property, arising from the proximity of property of injurious character of uses, became so intense that this sweeping control of private property under the police power, for the welfare of the community became essential to the future growth of this great city.
This plan was not only enthusiastically endorsed by the Advisory Council of Real Estate Interests of New York City, but during the adoption of the plan, perhaps the most remarkable justification of city planning in this country appeared in the form of a full-page advertisement in all the leading newspapers of New York City, signed by practically all of the retail merchants in the central shopping district of the city, with the vital question as a head-line “Shall we Save New York?” These merchants even in advance of the final consummation of the municipal districting plan then under way united to save New York from the depreciation of established retail and residence property values; and in unanimity they asked the pertinent question, “Shall the finest retail and residence sections in the world – from 33rd Street north – become blighted the way the older sections of New York have been?” The great manufacturing left buildings had crowded on 5th Avenue, one after another, until the limit of endurance by the very survival of their trade demanded that they unite in a fight for their very existence against these conditions.

They gave written notice that after February 1st, 1917, in all of their purchases of merchandise, they would give preference to firms whose manufacturing plants were located outside of the zone bounded by 33rd Street and 59th Street, 3rd Avenue and 7th Avenue.

Fine buildings originally erected for office buildings had been converted one by one into manufacturing buildings until land values between 23rd and 34th Streets on 5th Avenue were in many cases out in halves. The high-class shipping value was being forced down to a manufacturing value, although further south wide areas of empty and abandoned buildings, entirely suitable to manufacturing purposes, were still available.

But the most remarkable thing of all was that the majority of the manufacturers themselves after it had been so forcibly presented to them, enthusiastically accepted this plan of segregation of their trades, and at the same time effected a big saving of rents.

If this remarkable example of this one particular phase of efficient city planning in New York be followed in other large cities, property values, business-like arrangement and living conditions of all our cities will be mere improved and made more stable than our American cities have ever known. Why should a dirty, noisy factory, or any injurious trade be permitted adjoining a fine retail shop? Why should a flat be allowed to steal the light and air of the homes next door by covering the entire lot?

This zoning or districting system, so successful in German cities, and already getting under way in several large American cities – this organic development of a city – puts the various inter-related parts to their highest and most specialized use, and in the same general way in which any business institution would organize and lay out the physical arrangement of its plant, and the handling of its raw and finished material, so that every part would nourish and stimulate every other part. The present planless and wasteful procedure of our large cities is just about as sensible as the building of a house and providing for the piano in the kitchen, the cook stove in the drawing room, and the entrance of your guests through the coal chute or the basement window.

To consider another phase of city planning, “A proper city plan should provide for its public buildings around a square or plaza, not only for the convenient and agreeable conduct of city business and the anchoring and stabilizing of down-town business center, but for the impression of dignity and appropriate civic beauty in a city, and so that this
public group of civic buildings should become a rallying place for the city’s life, and the crystallization of a devoted public spirit.”

How costly has been the belated acquirement of land and removal of improvements for public buildings. No well-managed, private enterprise would fail to anticipate its future need of ground space now would tolerate such scattered and disconnected buildings for its transaction of business. A wise city plan, as already being executed in this respect in certain large cities like Cleveland and San Francisco, should exercise this same good judgment and foresight; and it is an indisputable fact that the accumulative effect of a number of good civic buildings is far greater than the sum of the units.

Also, a complete city plan provides all the proper time well distributed parks, boulevards and play grounds for the health, pleasure, morality and inspiration of its people, as well as advertising a good impression to its visitors; and perhaps second only to an efficient street system and zoning of a city, offers the greatest opportunity of saving public cost by the adoption of an early plan. No city offers a more notable example of this than the famous Park and Boulevard System of Kansas City laid out and executed by the eminent landscape architect, George E. Kessler. Many wealthy men have moved their families to Kansas City and invested their money there largely as a result of the Park and Boulevard System. A well planned Park and Boulevard System encourages and protects residential property and tends to anchor and stabilize business centers and property values.

An efficient city plan copes with the housing problem of the poor, so serious in every city. It provides the cheaper land in tracts of economical size for the poor man, instead of the highest priced land, as is generally the custom. Has any survey of these facts been made in our cities, or is it generally left to chance and the greed of the individual operator?

A good arrangement of a city distributes the public markets, fire stations, police stations and all such utilities from the standpoint of efficiency and the interests of the whole city. For instance, the Neward City Planning Commission discovered that its cost of living could be reduced from 10% to 15% by an efficient arrangement of markets and handling of food freight. Every one who is really interested in economic saving in his city, should insist on food and food freight surveys being made.

City planning looks ahead and provides for the future development of the city – it looks beyond the present city limits and foresees the demands of the still greater city. In fact, the heterogeneous, inharmonious masses of beautiful country estates and modest suburban homes, mixed with factories and outlying stores, truck gardens, quarries, rubbish dumps, slaughter houses and other tag ends making up the usual suburban belt just beyond the limits of most of our cities, present one of the most crying needs for fore-planning. And yet, plats and additions beyond our city limits are permitted, with no regard, whatever, for the adjoining city as a whole, or the future needs of the city when the limits are extended.

In any city plan, perhaps the most important fundamental factor is the lot and block and the street plan – the skeleton of the city. The streets, the vary basis of civic life, comprise from 22% to 40% of the whole land area within the city limits. It has been
estimated the streets of New York City alone and their improvement equal quite a large per cent of the value of all the farm land in the United States.

The width and location, the improvement and maintenance of these streets create by far the largest municipal investment and expense – their location and development touch most closely the life of every person who lives in the town.

The common system of standardization of the size of lots and blocks, and of the width and locations of streets throughout our American cities, if given any consideration at all, certainly cannot receive the approval of the professional man, the business man or the citizens at large. By standardization is meant the making of streets and their improvements, with only a few exceptions, the same width. To standardize street widths or improvements without regard to their present or future functions and needs, and to standardize lot and block sizes without regard to the character of the property for which they are to be used, or the desires of the occupants, in such an extravagant, inefficient and senseless procedure that this one need alone of more intelligent city planning should enlist and arouse the unanimous support of every dweller in our cities.

The social and economic burden of standardization of lots, blocks and streets is far reaching. Traffic streets should be of suitable locations and of varying widths and grades, and residence streets of width and improvement adapted to their particular needs. In 9 cases out of 10 the uses of streets can be foreseen as easily as the use of a sewer or water-main.

In the last fifty years, cities have undergone more change than they did in the prior 2,000 years, due to the growth in traffic, development in means and size of transportation units, and the general extension of cities over wide areas. The greatest curse of cities today in the street plan, is their too fixed adherence to set rules and uniform widths.

The common rectangular street platting is perhaps the main cause of our unwise standardization. It is known to all of us as the checkerboard or gridiron method. It is simply and unthinkingly applied to cities, regardless of topography, building site, strategic lines of communication, uses or needs.

It is wasteful, extravagant, inelastic and an absolute failure in fulfilling the real purpose of a street plan. You may as well try to make one suit of clothes fit all sizes of men. It affords so little recognition of the real functions of streets in a city that generally the quiet residence street, with a few vehicles a day, contains almost as much land and improvements as the most congested street of the city. It has no regard, whatever, for grades and contours, not only causing immense expense in street building and handling drainage, but also involving great cost in bringing adjoining properties to proper levels. It also renders monotonous and stereotyped our American towns, destroying all of their individuality, natural beauty and charm.

It involves an immense traffic burden for industry in requiring traffic to travel, regardless of hill or valley, the greatest distance between two points, in every movement of trade. What one of you, while still a boy on the farm, failed to hit out diagonally across the field to bring home the cows? What railroad increases its length? What bird in the air, fish in the sea, or even the savage beast in the forest so handicaps itself by
rectangular movement? We alone are willing to suffer under a system that has little defense except custom, and the fact that rectangular plats are so easy to make – saving the nominal expense of an engineer, yet entailing millions of dollars of loss and inefficiency to future generations.

In the standardization and rectangular platting of purely residence streets, there is not a city in the United States of 10,000 or more population which has not wasted thousands or millions of dollars in sidewalks and paving of unnecessary width and unnecessary land dedicated for two wide streets, and provided a street system inefficient and burdensome.

An extra 6 inches or one foot of unneeded walk on minor residence streets is no small item in every addition, and an appalling sum of economic waste to the city as a whole.

For years I laid paving thirty feet wide on local residence streets – not quite wide enough for four lines of vehicles and about six feet wider than necessary for three lines of vehicles. In the past four years I have built about 20 miles of minor residence streets (not main residence streets, please notice) with either 18 or 25 foot paving, and I have never lost a sale or had a serious objection to the lack of paved width on these streets. On the contrary, I have had many purchasers frankly state their preference for the narrower, more economical paving, on account of the lessening of noise and dust, less radiation of heat, greater safety for children, lessening of maintenance cost, discouragement of traffic, and the affording of wider grass space and more opportunity for tree growth. This alone saves several thousands of dollars in every mile of paving in local residence streets. I have gradually reduced my minor residence streets from 60 ft. (the width of the famous Cheapside Highway in London), and 3/5 as wide as 5th Avenue in New York City), to a sensible width of 30 to 50 ft. On the other hand, I have provided main residence streets, boulevards and parkways 80 to 100 ft., 140 to 160 and 200 to 225 ft. side, ample for all future growth, and rendering wide minor residence streets unnecessary.

On purely residence streets I have done less and less grading, giving steeper and steeper grades, to the greater pleasure of the people living upon these streets, on account of the discouragement of through traffic. The very narrowing of the improvements in the street itself is a constant discouragement to business conditions and through traffic, and gives additional assurance and holds the permanent residential character of the neighborhood.

In many of these streets, I am laying sidewalks only on the side most convenient for coming and going to the car line, saving half of the sidewalk construction, and occasionally on very minor streets omitting the sidewalk entirely. In many places I have greatly reduced the cost of street construction and prevented the too frequent unpleasant intrusion of the inharmonious stretches of paving by the replacing of the most unimportant streets is by pedestrian ways 8 to 12 feet wide, with a 4 to 6 ft. sidewalk, bordered with a pivet hedge or stone walls. These purely residence streets are and should of course be well related to the main boulevards, business streets and traffic ways, of ample width and easy grades. The plan of these residence streets should eliminate alleys, follow the contour of the land, be fitted to the lots and blocks, affording sites of interesting shapes, and permitting individual landscape treatment. These streets should
be linked together and well related to the main thoroughfares, so as to be most easily found by the casual stranger. They should preserve and reveal vistas, creating street pictures instead of stiff monotony, of the usual rows of houses and garages.

Closed street views, so interesting in the Medieval towns, should be frequent and wherever possible, architectural accent should be given the street by building fitting homes on the axis of its best related approach.

These streets, or any character of streets, should not extend for a long distance in the direction of the prevailing winds.

Triangular parkways at appropriate street intersections add interest to the street scene as well as serve as traffic guards and dust shields.

Building lines should not be uniform, but should be varied according to site and view; blocks should be treated as a unit and whenever possible harmonious group planning and collective building should be carried out. Local residence streets should have a cozy, domestic character, quiet, self-contained and gardenlike, creating a charming suburban feeling, affording sunshine, with ample free space to every home – a residential triumph of our modern cities.

Such local residence streets, free of poles and overhead wires, should have economy, picturesqueness, healthfulness and convenience, and create a homelike atmosphere, exclude industrial encroachment, fix permanently the residential character of the place, and establish security of value.

My experience in this residential development in which the total cost of land and its development and the homes already erected total more then $25,000,000, is corroborated by the experience in every large residential development of which I know in the country, and the time has come when we must realize that this much-needed reform in the general structures of our cities cannot be left to individual and selfish enterprise, and the present ineffective municipal regulation alone. It is only by the adoption of a progressive, intelligent city planning commission, with wide, municipal control, cooperating with the city administration and supported by the population at large, that we can give residence sections of our cities in general the same economy, efficiency and convenience being worked out in the high-class residence developments of our country today.

Most of these considerations, and to a still greater degree, apply to the workingmen’s homes. I know of no greater crime in our city planning than the forcing of streets of unnecessary width and improvements of high costs, and lots of unused depths, into the workingmen’s districts. It has been estimated that the cost of workingmen’s homes is increased from 15 to 20% by this blind conformance to standardized lots and blocks, street width and improvements.

As great as I have endeavored to show the inefficiency and the economic loss, totaling millions of dollars in every large city, in the extravagant and home-destroying standardization of residence lots, blocks and residences, street widths and improvements, I believe city planners will generally agree that far more important to a city’s life and a city’s growth is the abandonment of standardization of business and traffic street widths and the checkerboard layout, and the application of a greater differentiation of street
widths and locations in the business, wholesale and industrial sections of the city. The time is not far when this axiom of good city planning will be admitted by every progressive real estate man.

An adequate street system once established in these commercial sections of the city is most difficult and costly to readjust and replan; and for this reason rapidly growing cities of only 25,000 to 100,000 population are a particularly attractive field for early street city planning.

In what large city today is there not evidence on every hand of the inefficiency of the business streets? The expense of salaried traffic officers at all the congested corners, the necessity of isles of safety; poor ventilation of down-town sections; limitation of the height and cubage of buildings to relieve street congestion and afford light and air; the one-way business streets are known to all of you. There is a frequent loss of actually 50% of movement time at congested corners, and in many cases the loss of 10 to 20 minutes per day of the time of every workingman and business man, due to inefficient business and traffic streets, totaling an economic loss of millions of dollars in any large city.

Milwaukee found a greater cost of a few miles’ transportation of freight within its limits than the cost of 1000 to 1500 miles of transportation outside the city. Many cities are spending stupendous sums in necessary widening or regrading of traffic ways and the making of room for street railway transportation. The constant shifting of business centers, the insecurity of business values, the uneconomic scattering of related industries, the intrusion of objectionable trades and industries into retail districts, and the crying demand for their segregation by the zoning system I have described, the abandonment of certain areas with the blight of vacant business buildings, are growing more acute every day in our large cities. Congested throats of traffic, as in Newark, where a recent 12-hour traffic count on one corner showed more than its entire 375,000 population, is a striking example of the lack of businesslike arrangement. All these conditions are evidence that our cities have been built haphazardly, piecemeal, with little forethought, and in conformance to no intelligent city plan.

At the same time, the transportation unit has been constantly increasing in size, and traffic increases with the square of the population. The conflict between swift and slow moving vehicles is becoming more acute every day, and in our large cities, elevated car lines, passenger and freight subways, built at stupendous cost, are still failing to relieve the congestion; yet our real estate profession is still, as a rule, meeting this problem in the same senseless way as the street plan of New York City is said to have been adopted – by one of the commissioners happening to pick up a mason’s sieve and unthinkingly suggesting that the meshes between the wires in that sieve be taken for the street layout for what has since become the greatest metropolis in the world. Have you taken traffic counts in your city? Industrial surveys; density counts; raw product surveys; freight movement surveys? Do we have maximum distribution at a minimum in Kansas City?

The future needs of a business street should be more carefully studied before deciding upon its width than the residence streets of which I have spoken. Its relation to topography; its grades, its connection to freight yards, water fronts and industrial centers,
relation to possible outlying development and towns, its relation to lot sizes, should all be determining factors. There is even more reason that business streets should not all be of the same width than that residence streets should not all be of the same width, and while it is a generally accepted real estate axiom that business abhors a vacuum, and that too wide streets may check business growth, it is equally true that the time will come when congestion and inconvenience will drive business from inadequate, poorly related streets. It is equally true to say nothing of the rights, convenience and safety of the public, that a street of sufficient width, to accommodate the traffic of the business upon it, is much more unlikely to ever lose that business once acquired than the narrow street, where the transaction of business soon becomes almost intolerable.

As I said before, we must not forget the increase in size of the transportation unit upon our street, such as the increase of size of street cars, increased size and number of automobiles and trucks; and as I particularly pointed out in my opening remarks, the startling increased percentage of our population crowding to cities, thereby increasing by the square of the population, the load upon our business streets. We know our cities will continue to grow, and it is a crime for our profession to defend our comparative inaction on city planning by the idle remark, “Who could have foreseen the growth of our cities.” We are now talking about 1916, and the future, not the past.

It is a significant fact in our business that the population of the United States from 1900 to 1910 increased 34.8% in cities and only 11.2% in rural districts. The complexity of commercial life of all kinds in a city has increased in geometrical ratio; and the city that is failing to make a careful survey of its traffic needs, and at once setting about the acquirement of traffic ways for the next 25 or 50 years, will just as surely run the risk of losing its commercial supremacy in the toll that it levies upon its trade.

Many interesting methods are being followed by municipalities in providing for the acquiring of additional street widths in its business streets. Building lines are being condemned many years beyond the actual need of the extra width so as to save the city the great expense of condemning the improvements that otherwise would be erected beyond these lines. Also, the interesting plan being frequently used abroad – that of legally taking lands for new streets long before they are needed and still allowing the private owners the use of the land, but avoiding the expense of condemning any improvements placed upon this land after the public taking.

The right of excess condemnation of land for street widening or opening new traffic ways, while not so successful in this country as it has been in Europe, has considerable argument in its favor. As you know, special taxation upon benefit districts has been particularly favored in our city. While many of our best city planners argue that a liberal issue of bonds, distributing over the future the burden of correcting the mistakes of the past in the making of our business and commercial street plan, is the only fair way of distributing the appalling burden of overcoming the maladjustment so common in every big city.

Radial diagonal traffic streets along the same lines of directness and easy grades as guide the location of every railroad are almost prohibitive on account of costs in replanning of our older cities, but they should be provided as I said before, by every smaller city which has the slightest ambition of growth, and may I add a plea for a certain
interest and individuality in our business streets by the introduction of an occasional square or plaza, affording an interesting street picture to the constantly thronging crowd, or by the introduction of an interesting civic or historic building upon the axis of the street.

While there is a masterful firmness in the broad, straight street, I venture to say the inviting picture of the slightly curving highway in some city remains larger in your mind and gives you a more friendly feeling. It is as possible to glorify the business street as it is to beautify the quiet residence way.

The thought I wish to drive home is that cities are purely artificial – largely the work of the man in this meeting, and subject to our direction. The importance of planning our cities properly and in a business-like and economical manner for the future and the greater welfare of the whole community is becoming imperative. We must abandon the hand-to-mouth method of the past – we must bring to it the scientific thought of our best men and the Local Real Estate Boards can delay the longest or perform the greatest service, and place our profession on the highest plane by taking the lead in the great movement sweeping over this country today for the efficient replanning of our old cities as far as we can, and the making of our new cities according to a comprehensive survey and intelligent plan.

Any far-reaching plan proposing any considerable change or innovation will require years for education and fulfillment, and whether or not all of an ideal plan may ever be acquired, we realtors can render no greater service to our respective cities than in giving each of them their own particular picture of their future greatness, convenience, efficiency, order and usefulness – know their future needs and functions and guide their future growth through the new conditions ever arising, and in the constantly changing administrations of every American municipality.

The J.C. Nichols Company Records (KC106) – Speech JCN005

Arguably Jesse Clyde Nichols (1880-1950) was the single most influential individual to the development of metropolitan Kansas City. Moreover his work, ideas, and philosophy of city planning and development had far-reaching impact nationally – so much so that the Urban Land Institute has established the J.C. Nichols Prize for Visionary Urban Development to recognize a person or a person representing an institution whose career demonstrates a commitment to the highest standards of responsible development.

Nichols’ objective was to “develop whole residential neighborhoods that would attract an element of people who desired a better way of life, a nicer place to live and would be willing to work in order to keep it better.” The Company under Nichols and his son, Miller Nichols (1911- ), undertook such ventures as rental housing, industrial parks, hotels, and shopping centers. Perhaps the most widely recognized Nichols Company developments are the Country Club District and the Country Club Plaza Shopping Center, reportedly the first shopping area in the United States planned to serve those arriving by automobile rather than trolley car.

The J.C. Nichols Company Records (KC106) contains both personal and business files concerning J.C. Nichols’ private and business life. Included are personal correspondence, family related material, and speeches and articles written by him. Business and financial files pertain to actions of the Company, including information about different developments and the securing of art objects; and printed materials produced by and about the Company.