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URBAN LAND CLASSIFICATION
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The Housing Act of 1949, under Title I, enables communities to obtain financial aid from the federal government for slum clearance and redevelopment programs. Under the act, four types of areas qualify for redevelopment aid. The act describes them this way:

1. Blighted residential: A slum area or a deteriorating area which is predominantly residential in character.
2. Blighted area not predominantly residential: A deteriorated or deteriorating area which is not predominantly residential in character.
3. Predominantly open land: The major portion of the area in question is not improved with buildings or other structures.
4. Open land: Whether platted or unplatted, which has not been developed by the provision of streets, utilities, site improvements or buildings.

A blighted residential area may be redeveloped for any appropriate use while the other three areas must be redeveloped for predominantly residential uses only.

The meaning of the term "residential in character" poses an administrative problem, as the interpretation of this phrase will determine how the area may be redeveloped. In spite of the weight that the phrase carries in the act, it is not defined. This paper attempts to define the phrase "residential in character" and show its relation to other urban land uses.

The earth as a whole, with the land considered to be the crust of the earth, has three general classifications:

1. Surface land: Agricultural, forest, land for transportation and communication, urban, and unutilized or barren land.
2. Water.
3. Subsurface minerals.

Urban land, the main concern here, is classified most satisfactorily according to its specific uses, which in turn are dependent on physical and economic conditions. A classification may be developed this way:

1. Publicly utilized land.
2. Privately utilized land: Industrial, commercial, and residential.

Publicly utilized land can be distinguished from other land quite easily although it cannot be found as a separate division of the urban area. That is, it is everywhere in the urban area where land is being used for streets, transportation facilities, utilities, schools, libraries, parks, playgrounds, and hospitals which are located in both residential and commercial areas.

Public utilities such as garbage disposal, sewage treatment plants, and power plants usually are forced to satisfy their land requirements in the industrial area.

Land utilized by industry in the urban area can be identified easily as a separate part of the city. Its particular location is due to physical and economic conditions, and perhaps to some extent by public pressure. Industry favors flat land which requires a simply constructed foundation. Swamp or marsh land, although flat, is usually not stable enough to support heavy machinery and buildings on a simply constructed foundation. Industry today, however, will go to the expense ofsuiting swamp land to their buildings rather than locating on rough topography. The flat land favored by industry is served by railway, water ways (where possible) and highways of minimum grade. Public pressure or laws will force industry to stay in its part of the city because of its undesirable characteristics — smoke, noise, odors, high tension electric lines, heavy transportation facilities, and other nuisances.

Commercial establishments also favor flat or nearly flat ground, but they do not require the extensive heavy transportation facilities nor the storage space so essential to industry. Therefore, in general, it occupies land on the outskirts of the industrial area and grows in the same direction as the residential area. Competition for favorable locations in the commercial area usually increases land value to the extent that other uses are eliminated or economically prohibited. In recent years, the mounting cost of favorable locations has forced some commercial establishments to leave the central commercial area, and to develop outlying business centers at the intersection of main highways and other potentially desirable locations where the land is considerably cheaper and there is no parking problem.

Land utilized for residential purposes has a wider variation in topography than that used by commerce or industry. The most favorable residential location is high ground which has utilities and transportation facilities accessible. The most undesirable land is low-lying land, subject to flood or requiring special sewage facilities, or land which abuts an industrial area, a commercial area, a railway line, or another such physical barrier. Since such a large portion of the urban area is used for residential purposes, only the ability to pay will determine whether a person lives on desirable or undesirable residential land.

Unlike commercial and industrial land, residential land has no characteristic type of topography. Thus, the residential characteristics of an area can be determined only from man-made changes in the land, the use that is made of the land, the type of structure placed on it, and the surrounding influence.

The Slum Clearance and Redevelopment Manual indicates that "residential in character" means, first, that the land is being used for dwellings and such necessary facilities as schools, churches, health clinics, parks, and police and fire services; second, that the structures on the land were built for dwellings and have been maintained as such. The Manual notes that the Division in Washington will decide what is residential in character without further definition, thus leaving the reader without a definition and leaving the mistaken impression that land must have a dwelling or an incidental neighborhood use in order to have residential character. Therefore, according to the Manual, a vacant lot, no matter what its surroundings, belongs in the category of open land. This should not be so, because every lot in a residential area has the same characteristics as the rest of the area, whether or not it has a dwelling on it. The land has, in general, been platted, recorded, and sold for residential uses. The streets are generally narrow, with pavement designed to carry only local traffic. All utilities -- water, sewerage, gas and electricity -- have been designed to serve the needs of a residential neighborhood. Every lot is taxed to provide police and fire protection, schools, parks, and recreation areas for the neighborhood. There is usually access to a transportation system and the area is, in general, free from hazards and nuisances. Vacant lots in a residential neighborhood possess the same characteristics as an occupied lot with the exception of having a residential structure. In short, if a neighborhood has begun to develop as a residential area, the term "residential in character" should apply to all of it and not just to lots with residential structures on them.

Unutilized land is somewhat like publicly utilized land in that it may be found anywhere in the urban area. Probably it does not belong in a class by itself, except for the purpose of description.

Unutilized land, although the Manual classes all such land as "open land," is usually divided into two classes -- vacant and open land. Vacant land is actually in the nature of semifinished producers goods or partially processed raw material intended for combination with a structure to create the finished commodity ready for use. Therefore, it should be classified according to its location. That is, vacant land in a residential area would be classified as residential land, in a commercial area it would be classified as commercial land, and in an industrial area it would be classified as industrial land because once a few lots in any subdivision have been put to use the entire plot crystallizes, resists revision in plan, and is not readily subject to the correction of mistakes and deficiencies.

Open land may be considered as land which is uneconomical to utilize or is not likely to be utilized. Such land would include swamp, solid rock, land left as a buffer zone, the face of very steep hills, and land laid waste by surface mining.
