

Municipal Research Helps City Officials and Saves Money in Hoboken

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MUNICIPAL research in Hoboken is no new activity. Ever since the Robert L. Stevens Fund was established in 1911, city problems have received the attention of some local organization. This paper will trace only the municipal activities of the Hoboken Chamber of Commerce from 1920 to the present, believing that such a review will prove of interest to similar bodies.

In March, 1920, Philip H. Cornick, now staff specialist on taxation for the National Institute of Public Administration, was engaged as Assistant Manager. During his stay Mr. Cornick devoted almost his entire time to municipal affairs.

Fire Prevention Activities

Fire prevention claimed first attention. The Fire Prevention Committee of the Chamber, with Gilbert E. Stecher, special agent for insurance companies, as Chairman, had been especially active. An ordinance providing for a Fire Prevention Bureau in the local fire department had been prepared from the model of the National Board of Fire Underwriters. The necessity of a detailed and comprehensive fire prevention code to supplement this ordinance was apparent. After investigating other municipal fire codes, fire hazards peculiar to Hoboken, and the specifications of the National Board of Fire Underwriters, Mr. Cornick and Mr. Stecher prepared a Fire Prevention Code. The completeness and detail of this Code have made it a model for many other cities.

A surprising and almost immediate result of the emphasis on fire prevention came when the Hoboken Chamber of Commerce won the Grand Award for the year 1923, in the first Inter-Chamber Fire Waste Contest held by the Chamber of Commerce of the United States. The total fire loss dropped from \$417,496.37 in 1922 to \$157,041.23 in 1923. While fire losses increased again in 1924 and 1925, Hoboken's record is still excellent, winning second place among cities of 50,000 to 100,000 population in 1924 and a place on the honor list in 1925. Chief Engineer John J. Gilday of the Hoboken Fire Department deserves special credit for co-operating so effectively with the Chamber's program and showing what can be accomplished by a

Fire Prevention Bureau that is on the job.

Zoning and Waste Disposal

Because of its nearness to lower Manhattan, Hoboken has many manufacturing plants. Though its population is about 70,000, its area is only 1.3 square miles. Yet, even in this limited area, there are about 200 acres of vacant land in the west and northwest part of the city adjoining the industrial area. In the fall of 1920, the "Owens Plan" was initiated by a Chamber of Commerce Committee. The plan was to intensively develop this industrial area by connecting it with adequate switching facilities to adjacent railroad lines. Mr. Cornick took advantage of this opportunity to point out the necessity of protecting this area by proper zoning, as well as the advantage to the city in greatly increasing the existing ratables, seriously reduced by the United States Government's acquisition of valuable pier properties. The outcome of this agitation by the Chamber was that the City Commissioners engaged Herbert S. Swan to draw up a zoning ordinance, which they adopted January 17, 1922. However, enforcement of municipal zoning regulations to date has been seriously weakened by adverse decisions of the New Jersey courts.

As in other cities, the removal of garbage and refuse is a serious problem. For years city wastes had been dumped on vacant land

in Hoboken. This piling-up of garbage was hurting property values and becoming a health menace. Agitation by the Chamber with a display of actual photographs of the dangerous conditions, caused the City Commissioners to purchase, on March 1, 1922, at a cost of \$19,845, an outlying tract of land in Secaucus, where the garbage is now hauled and dumped.

Bureau of Municipal Research Organized

In August, 1921, Mr. Cornick resigned, and in June, 1923, Wylie Kilpatrick was engaged as the Director of a Bureau of Municipal Research established on the initiative of A. W. Coffin, the Chamber's Manager. This Bureau was financed from year to year by a fund contributed to by local

"Research Bureaus as a Function of Chambers of Commerce"

Under this title The American City published in the issue of January, 1926, a paper by John B. Blandford, Secretary of the Bureau of Research of the Chamber of Commerce of Newark, N. J. In this paper Mr. Blandford pointed out that a chamber of commerce is so organized that it can not only develop and interpret the facts, but can aggressively press the resulting recommendations.

Knowing that many chambers of commerce which are not now conducting bureaus of municipal research would welcome definite information as to their operation, the accompanying article on recent activities of the Hoboken Bureau is published. It is believed that many an organization which is aiming to strengthen its civic work could conduct such a bureau to advantage.

taxpayers. The policies of the Bureau are determined by a Taxpayers' Committee of the Chamber with Julius Lichtenstein, a local attorney, as Chairman. An alarming increase of 137 per cent in the total debt of the city from 1916 to 1923 was the impetus for the first survey. Mr. Kilpatrick prepared an intensive study of the city debt administration, with complete tabulations showing all future debt charges for sinking fund and serial bonds outstanding. Specific changes were recommended to the City Commissioners which, if adopted, would result in savings of \$750,000, for debt charges over a ten-year period.

The first result of this study was the grading of the installments of a serial bond issue of \$428,000 by the City Commissioners in such a manner that the taxpayers' burden will be reduced about \$34,700 in the next nine years. The extent of debt charges for very heavy street and sewer construction costs during and immediately after the war fell with unusual hardship on the present taxpayers when the installments were equally divided.

A New Water-Supply Contract

For years Hoboken secured its water-supply from the Hackensack Water Company, of Weehawken, N. J. An increase in water-rates from \$1 per 1,000 cubic feet in 1918, to \$2 in January 1923, caused dissatisfaction. Contracts were submitted by the Hackensack Water Company and Jersey City. Mr. Kilpatrick compared in detail the merits of each proposed contract as regarded potability, water pressure and rates. It was estimated that a gross saving of \$179,429 yearly would be made if Jersey City supplied the water. Finding no essential difference in potability or water pressure and a genuine difference in cost, the City Commissioners awarded the water-supply contract to Jersey City.

Traffic congestion in Hoboken is a serious problem, due to the heavy trucking from its own industries and from those in adjacent cities to the ferry lines that cross the Hudson River to lower Manhattan. With this in mind, a report on Regulation of Traffic was prepared. While the traffic plan was not adopted by the City Commissioners, a Junior Police Patrol and a special Traffic Squad advocated in the report were organized shortly thereafter.

A Study of Miscellaneous City Revenues

To relieve the excessive tax burden imposed on real property, a comparative study of miscellaneous revenues in other cities was made. As a result an ordinance sharply increasing the municipal charges for general licenses, health permits, and jitney franchise taxes was drafted. It was found that the city was spending considerably more to render certain inspectional services, such as those connected with its health activities, than it was receiving from the concerns benefited. The City Commissioners viewed this ordinance favorably, and it went into effect June 1, 1924. From that date to January 1, 1926, receipts from these miscellaneous revenues showed a net increase of \$70,662.

It was the further intent of the Research Bureau that this annual excess should constitute a revolving fund to be used to pay interest charges on tax anticipation notes, which now amount to \$50,000 a year. This interest outlay becomes necessary because the fiscal year starts on January 1, while the first half of the year's taxes do not become

delinquent until June 1. The revolving fund was not established, but the increase applied to salary costs for 69 additional policemen and 36 firemen appointed May 20, 1924. This meant an increase of \$92,794 in the 1925 budget for police and fire salaries over the 1924 appropriations, of which real property is relieved of \$45,000 annually because of the miscellaneous revenue study.

Equalization of Assessments

Hudson County is considerably over-assessed as compared with other counties and Hoboken ranks high in property assessments in the county. The result is that Hudson County pays more than its fair share of state expenditures, and Hoboken more than its due of state and county charges. Realizing the need for revising the existing tax machinery in the state, a comprehensive survey of the methods of the other states was made. A chart, illustrating in detail the legal steps in the equalizing procedure of each of the other states, was prepared. In two recent legislative sessions the Chamber of Commerce sponsored a bill to revise the tax procedure along the lines suggested by this study, but no action has been taken as yet.

The above surveys were all prepared by Wylie Kilpatrick, who resigned as Director of the Municipal Research Bureau and was succeeded on October 1, 1924, by the writer.

Analysis of Local School Expenses

During the fall of 1924 an analysis of local school expenses was made. In 1914 the cost per pupil for current expenses only was \$54.81 per pupil; in 1924 the per pupil cost had grown to \$132.83. This was a net increase of 174 per cent, while the pupil attendance increase was only 13.3 per cent. After making allowance for the decreased purchasing power of the dollar, the Bureau recommended in a report to the Board of Education an immediate cut of \$25,810 in the 1925 budget and a net reduction of \$119,163 in school appropriations during the next few years. The Board of Education received the report in good spirit, reconsidered the already adopted budget, and made a net reduction of \$26,550. Again, when the 1926 budget came up for passage, the Bureau submitted a statement requesting specific decreases amounting to \$50,000. The Board of Education adopted a budget for 1926 that made a net reduction, in all items other than salaries, of \$48,985. These substantial decreases were made in expenditures for repairs, text-books, school supplies, equipment etc. Thus, in the last two years the Board of Education has made net reductions of \$75,535 by a careful scrutiny of budget estimates.

A Survey of Budget Items

It was the intention of the Research Bureau to prepare a complete municipal budget for 1926 and submit it to the City Commissioners for their consideration. However, this task was too large to complete satisfactorily in one year's time. So the survey was limited to all items in the budget except salaries and personnel, debt charges, and revenues. By far the larger number of these items were for supplies. For detailed recommendations the comparative budget items of the preceding two years were of little value. It was necessary first to analyze and compare the supplementary estimates whose total comprised a budget item. But often such an estimate was only a lump sum request and did not tell much of a story. For ex-



AIRPLANE VIEW OF HOBOKEN, N. J., BY FAIRCHILD AERIAL SURVEY, INC.

ample, there would be a budget item, Health—Supplies, Medical—\$6,250. And in the supplementary estimates an item, Anti-Toxin and Vaccines—\$3,000. This made it necessary to determine the quantity, quality, and price that the Bureau would recommend for hundreds of items.

The first step was to keep a running record of every warrant issued by the city during the year. This was an index to the payee, the prices paid, and the nature of the supplies purchased, and proved especially valuable where first-hand investigation was not feasible. Wherever possible, first-hand data were collected. Thus, an appropriation for flowers in a certain park was \$400. The number of flower-beds in this park were counted, the areas determined, the number of plants, the replantings, various park superintendents in nearby cities were interviewed, and park budgets and nursery catalogs were consulted for specifications and prices. This made it possible to determine with exactness the quantities needed, the most suitable varieties, and current prices. Following this method item by item, a detailed budget was prepared and submitted to the City Commissioners recommending reductions of about \$100,000 over the prior city budget. The City Commissioners carefully considered the reports and made reductions in the 1926 budget that totaled \$27,833. On account of some temporary increases, however, the net reduction was somewhat less—\$13,606. The actual net decrease in these supply costs, as shown by an item-by-item comparison of the 1924 and the 1926 budgets, is \$56,009.

Snow-Removal Methods and Costs

Two heavy snowfalls in the winter of 1924-1925 proved expensive to local business and manufactur-

ing interests by seriously retarding traffic movement. After investigating methods of organization in other cities, types of snow-removal apparatus, personnel and costs, the Research Bureau prepared in detail a plan for snow removal based on local conditions. This plan was submitted to the Commissioner of Streets and Public Improvements, James H. Londrigan, who put into practice a part of this plan during the winter of 1925-26. While no saving in cost was effected, as the Bureau believes would have resulted if the plan had been followed completely, there was a distinct improvement in the speed and thoroughness with which the principal streets were opened to traffic.

Street Signs

For years Hoboken has been handicapped by a lack of street signs. True, there were a very few sign plates on buildings scattered throughout the city—the remnants of a sign system of another era. Realizing this, a representative of the local service clubs appeared before the City Commissioners and requested a modern street-sign system. The Research Bureau then prepared a report based on a block-to-block survey of the city corners. This report recommended that the New York type or White Way sign be attached to the electric light poles on the trolley-car lines and that sign plates be attached to buildings in the rest of the city. Detailed estimates of the costs of material and erection were contained in the survey. The recommendations made were adopted, with little modification, at a final total cost of \$4,650. If the original recommendation of the service clubs providing for a complete installation of signs on special posts had been adopted, the cost would have been about \$15,000 with no equivalent advan-

tage. Thus, by following this plan, a conservative saving of \$10,000 was effected.

Public Recreation

A recreation survey of the city has just been completed, particularly emphasizing the need for a readjustment of the existing personnel to provide for more trained recreation leaders, and presenting detailed costs for current operating expenses and major improvements needed for the next five years. It is the purpose of this report to anticipate all legitimate current expenses as well as all improvements needed for this period, together with a detailed statement of costs. Commissioner Harry L. Schmulling of the Depart-

ment of Parks and Public Property, has taken an important forward step by placing a trained recreation leader in charge of four play areas controlled by the city, under the general direction of J. Anthony Durstewitz, Superintendent of Recreation. A complete schedule of vigorous outdoor sport games will be carried on during the summer months.

In conclusion, the writer wishes to state that whatever has been achieved has been the result of a frank understanding between the Research Bureau personnel and the City Commissioners and the Board of Education. Their willingness to cooperate with the Research Bureau of the Chamber has resulted in some substantial municipal advances.

Chicago Has Learned Her Lesson--But How



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