

Realty Interests Form an Urban Institute To Study the Problem of Decentralization

By LEE E. COOPER

New York business men, troubled by reports of an exodus of industry from the city, will follow with more than passing interest the studies to be undertaken by the Urban Land Institute to meet the problem of decentralization of cities.

The steady residential and business development of the "fringes" of metropolitan centers at the expense of the older central districts is serving as a threat to land values in the higher-priced areas in nearly all large cities.

New York's problem apparently has been intensified by the competition of neighboring States, which are promoting claims of lower taxes and fewer labor difficulties.

The Urban Land Institute, formed under the aegis of the National Association of Real Estate Boards, has Walter S. Schmidt of Cincinnati as chairman. Its studies will include detailed surveys of trade and industrial conditions in the chief business centers of the nation in the hope that this analysis will point the way to solution of some of the problems of decentralization.

The directors of the association look upon the trend away from the central districts as "the nation's major realty problem today." In some cities, they point out, the movement has gone so far as to result in "great and unnecessary damage to owners and merchants through declining volume of sales, and also to municipal finances." The institute will carry on research which it hopes will combat these losses and check the unorganized

development of the suburban districts at the expense of the "downtown" districts.

At the outset, a committee appointed to suggest a program for the institute has suggested the need for broad city planning policies which might promote the orderly development of a community and protect the city from any drain on its taxable values which might arise from sudden changes or "uneconomic tendencies" in population movement.

Other factors which are emphasized in the preliminary reports to the association are the need for preservation of civic beauties, the conservation of residential sections which are good and the rehabilitation of areas suffering from blight, often arising from lack of planning in the past. These studies of urban land use also will seek some way to assure provision for housing families of all income groups in each city, and the realty men believe that large-scale reconstruction of old buildings in run-down neighborhoods would be a step forward in filling in some of these housing gaps.

The institute has been conceived as "a permanent and unbiased instrument for fact finding" on urban land planning. It will offer an advisory service with a corps of consultants to make studies of transportation problems, retail business needs, industrial economics and municipal finances particularly with a view to making suggestions which might head off any tendencies toward realty blight.