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DEAR FRIENDS

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Greetings:

A trip away from Tucson helps to put things in perspective. The local economy continues its distressing slide. An inept administration grasps at projects with Federal Aid. A moribund Chamber of Commerce, with a fat annual budget, manages to hatch out a lone lingerie manufacturer - payroll possibly fifteen.

Other groups, impatient for improvement, bring forward their panaceas - to attract industry, a civic community center, to boost Tucson as a great health center, etc. All of which are desirable, but open to question whether they are the cure for what is wrong with Tucson.

Recently, a large Committee on Community Goals completed a study of local conditions. Why it took a full year to produce their report, which was so superficial in nature it failed to deal in depth with a single problem, was unfortunate. It recalls the old chestnut about the patient who expired while the consultants debated his case.

My trip took me to Worcester, Massachusetts - area 38.41 square miles, population including the surrounding area 328,898 - about the same as Tucson. Called "The City of Diversified Industry", Worcester has some 800 manufacturing concerns, many small, others very large. They turn out abrasives, small arms, aircraft materials, envelopes, shoes and much more. They employ about half of the total labor force. And the Help Wanted ads are full of good jobs at good pay with lots of fringe.

This prosperous picture is reflected in the commercial life - over 1900 stores - large downtown department stores, shops of every kind and big shopping centers. They share in a big \$650,000,000- retail market.

Worcester is the home of famed Clark University and nine other colleges. Also private, parochial and trade schools as well as 66 public schools. There are libraries, museums, art and historical societies. Also seven modern hospitals, 25 parks, 7 beaches and over 130 places of worship.

The city enjoys year-round activity and stability. It is the hub of a large population area with good highways and ample rail, bus and plane service. This month, Worcester was awarded for the third time in recent years the title of "All American City" by the National Municipal League.

To the visitor from Tucson, it would seem that Worcester was the ultimate that all the little committee people in Tucson might aspire to.

Yet Worcester, for all its advantages, has slums and widespread blight and is plagued with the same social and civic ills that beset all cities.

Presently a big urban renewal project is being boosted for downtown Worcester. The sponsors are more sophisticated than the Tucson boys. Four big combines bid for the project - with impressive plans, glittering mock-ups and scale models - to transform 36 dilapidated acres at a cost of 40 million dollars, into an area of high rise buildings, glamorous shopping arcades and parking paradises. Of course, it will barely dent the sea of blight. What that will cost - who can guess?

With this perspective, the answer for city ills must be deeper. The cure must be more than panacea poultices and urban renewal unguents. Proponents of proper land value taxation point out that outrageous underassessment of land exists in most communities. Most local governments are loath to probe this subject because the beneficiaries of this inequity are usually the same people who control the political power. But how much longer can we ignore the realization that:

- Underassessment of land deprives the city of considerable revenue; which makes necessary other regressive taxes and debt.
- Underassessment of land encourages speculation; which holds land out of productive use, preventing orderly growth, and reducing the demand for Labor, Capital, materials and services.
- Underassessment of land creates an artificially high land cost which weighs heavily on every aspect of community life.
- Underassessment of land is unjust because it enriches the privileged while impoverishing the community.

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It would be well for the city if part of the enthusiasm and energy and publicity devoted to pushing panaceas were used to expose the existing facts on underassessed land.

-- Joseph Zashin