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New School for Social Research  
Jacobs555 Hudson Street  
New York 14, N.Y.

July 23, 1959

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Mr. Chadbourne Gilpatric, Associate Director  
Humanities Division  
The Rockefeller Foundation  
49 West 49 Street  
New York 20, N.Y.

OCT 23 1959

Dear Gil,

Thank you very much for your letter of July 21. While I leave it to your judgment as to the most propitious time to seek additional help, I do have reasons for wishing that a decision might be made in the near future. My plan is not to abandon this project in any case, no matter what happens, because I think it is too important to abandon. But without further help, the problem and decision I will have to face is whether I ought to go back to work at my job for a period of time, probably a year, save up as much as I can and finance as much as possible of the continuation of the book later by this means, or whether I ought to attempt to borrow the necessary money from some source and pay it back in the years after the book is completed. I shall have to make up my mind which to do, if these are my alternatives, considerably before my deadline, because if I am to postpone completion I will have to let the Forum know and see if such an arrangement is possible. I will also have to see if borrowing the money is a practical possibility, as an alternative.

I do not entertain the idea of abandonment, but the idea of postponement is almost as repugnant to me. Without wishing to sound immodest about it, I feel very deeply that it is important for this book to get finished and published, because I think it is needed. City rebuilding, and plans for rebuilding, for renewal, for civic facilities and for traffic and highways are going ahead very fast, to say nothing of the speed with which unplanned development is also occurring. To a very large extent, these developments are based on faulty thinking and misguided notions as to what the results will be. The end results of current planning theory and practice --homogeneity of city areas, insularity, paucity of eyes and activity on the street, lack of sufficiently varied and sustaining use of open spaces, damping down the effects of urban density, resistance to continual change and adaptation--these are precisely the attributes to be found in demonstrably unsuccessful city, and they are attributes not characteristic of successful parts of our cities. We are copying failure, in new architectural and planning dress, and we are creating city which is, more and more, composed of mutually hostile or non-interacting islands, city which at worst lacks even such primitive necessities as built-in safety for humans from one another in its public spaces, and which at best is inhospitable to urban variety, vitality and experimentation. We are doing this, not because we have to, but from lack of the understanding

required to do better.

In my book, I am not rehashing old material on cities and city planning. I am working with new concepts about the city and its behavior. Many of these concepts are quite radically opposed to those accepted in orthodox and conventional planning theory. I think I am proving the validity of these new concepts and giving evidence, from experience in the city itself, which shows that the alternative to ignoring them is not the rebuilding of some improved type of city but, rather, the social, economic and visual disintegration of the city. I am trying to get the theory and practice of city planning and design started on a new and different track. How much effect this will have remains to be seen, but from my discussion of these concepts with people like Charles Farnsley, former mayor of Louisville, with intelligent, concerned citizens like Eric Larrabee, or Helen Hall of Henry Street Settlement or Douglas Haskell of the Forum, and with a number of intellectually curious planners and designers, troubled by the disappointments arising from conventional planning, I have confidence these concepts will have an effect. The times, intellectually speaking, are ripe for understanding and accepting these ideas. My observations and reasoning do check with the experience of people like these, whom I respect, and do make sense to them. My contribution is the organizing of these observations and ideas into workable systems of thought about the city, and in indicating the new aims and tactics which planning must adopt to catalyze constructive and genuinely urban city behavior.

Some examples: I am treating the functions of the city street from the point of view of the public street's role in social control and public contact, subjects which are ignored in planning literature and practice (with some dire results), but which are absolutely fundamental to the successful workings of the city. This raises new concepts about the proper design of the street and the things on it, and also about proper arrangements respecting traffic. I am examining the city neighborhood, not from the conventional nostalgic viewpoint of those who try to warp it closer to a town neighborhood, a place where people know each other in varied contexts and share a more or less closed, central life in common, but rather from the viewpoint of what it is, a fragment of geography and of public scene and conveniences which people hold in common. I find that there is no successful all-purpose city neighborhood, that the effective and, by experience, successful city neighborhood, is composed of two quite different kinds of units, for very real functional reasons; neither of these has been recognized as significant in planning literature or sought for in planning practice. Open space is not the automatically upgrading influence it is wishfully supposed to be, as experience amply shows, and I treat it as the volatile element which it is in the city, examining what makes it behave for good or for evil in conjunction with its surroundings and uses. Conventional planning concepts about the very structure of the city for which we should aim --how the amorphous mass is to be made understandable and manageable-- have to be revised in the light of understanding how the city's great talent for intricate mutual support operates. The conventional concepts of why city areas become blighted are largely based on symptoms, not causes, with demonstrably foolish myths invoked to explain the symptoms. I have found by examining into the processes of slumming

(and the even more significant but ignored processes of unslumming), that our concepts of how to fight blight and how to retrieve the slums have to be revised.

This is the kind of thing I am up to, and it is hard work but I cannot think of anything I could do which might be more useful to my times.

Now you have made what I must admit is a very justifiable suggestion: Let's see what you have produced up to now, or up to September 15. I can do one of two things about this. I can show you very rough draft chapters, which I am most reluctant to do because in the very process of writing subsequent portions I have drastically revised my ideas of how to present earlier material, and even of what to say in connection with a particular subject. I have ~~xxx~~ vacuums, confused places, portions which I am loath to have read in their present form by anyone. I would hate to give you this raw material, which is not in the form I want it to be or in which it will eventually be, and you would hate to read it. On the other hand, what I can do is stop, go back, do a rewriting now, and show you a revision. From my point of view, this will be a wasted step in the whole process and, in ~~xxx~~ effect, a halting and postponement. The reason for this is that as I work on, the necessities of what must be done to the prior work continually come clearer to me, and this is a process which has to be continued through the whole book. To do an interim rewriting is a wasted step, for it will not and cannot be the final rewriting which will occur when I have worked through the whole book. Some of my earlier troubles came from not understanding this, and attempting to do it in article-sized chunks, and alternating basic creative writing and organization with rewriting and reorganization. It was a waste and a frustration. I have found I am not peculiar in the necessity for working through the material as a whole before knowing clearly what it demands in the retelling; Holly Whyte tells me he had exactly a similar experience with "The Organization Man" and that he got himself and the work bolluxed up at one point, and lost considerable time and direction by violating this. I have previously talked over this question with my publisher, too, and he advised me not to do anything with my earlier parts until I have worked through the whole book once. He does not want to read anything until I have been through the whole thing. I know from experience that this advice is sound, for in the past month if I had gone back to rewrite my start, the rewriting would have taken two fairly different forms, depending on what date I decided to do it. Each of the insights I got as to how it should present itself was an improvement, and the result of clarifications that came as I dealt with later material. Had I done the first, it would have been a waste and almost certainly a later block to me. Now I think my current approach is right, but I know I will have improved and clarified it many times more as I work on farther.

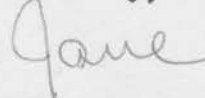
If this sounds esoteric or something, and not the way all books are written, which I know, I can only lay it to the fact that this book is neither a retelling in new form of things already said, nor an expansion and enlargement of previously worked out basic ground, but it is an attempt to make what amounts to a different system of thought about the great city. Many of the things it deal with are simple, in themselves, but their inter-relations are very complex, and the organization of this

complexity without confusion is not like chopping off blocks of wood: there, that one's done, now for the next. The end result should seem that way, all very straightforward and logical. I think it will, but only because the logic of every part is a portion of the logic of the whole, done in the light of the whole.

Since I hate to show you my work in its present form, and know moreover that much of it would be misleading as to what it is going to become, and as I am also most reluctant to halt for a premature rewriting, what I am asking is that you take my actual writing on the faith that I have written sensibly before and am in the process of doing so again. If this is too much to ask, I shall understand your position of course and do my best to comply with it.

I appreciate your interest and your help tremendously, as you know, and while I know what my own necessities and those of the work are, in this matter I rely very much on your judgment as to how to compromise these, if need be and if it is of avail, to meet the equally real necessities of intelligent giving.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Jane".

Jane Jacobs  
(Mrs. R.H. Jacobs, Jr.)