FOCUS ON OPTIMAL HOUSING

Housing is a basic necessity of man; thus, it is deserving of attention by scholars and researchers. Because housing is generally expensive, it is fitting that a major focus be on lowering its cost. The danger of this focus, however, is in lowering the cost at the expense of quality.

Lowering quality results in failure to provide optimal housing which is important for helping occupants reach toward their potential. This paper reviews the many facets of housing and suggests how each facet contributes to the achievement of optimal housing.

Housing is multi-faceted; it is shelter, product, design, business, economic good, and physical environment.

As shelter, housing serves to protect man from the elements, from vermin, animals, and hostile or unfriendly people. Housing is thus a refuge to which man can retreat from a disagreeable or alien world. Shelter may be adequate or inadequate. Adequate shelter is comfortable, safe, and convenient; inadequate shelter is uncomfortable, unsafe, and/or inconvenient.

As a product, housing is a tangible reality for the producer and for the consumer. To serve both optimally, this product must be satisfactory. A satisfactory product is durable, safe, easy to operate, and easy to care for. An unsatisfactory product is fragile, unsafe, hard to operate, and/or hard to care for.

As design, housing is a visible product that endures over time, whether the design is good or poor. In fact, house design reflects the culture of the era from which it sprang. Good (or excellent) design is functional (that is, serves the purpose for which it was designed) and is aesthetically pleasing, in terms of sight, sound, smell, and feel. Housing of poor design is either unfunctional or dysfunctional and/or is aesthetically displeasing (that is, the elements of art and principals of design are violated).

As a business, housing has far-reaching ramifications, in that many occupations are related directly or indirectly to housing. A housing business may be sound or unsound. A sound housing business is profitable for the producer and is dependable, in terms of product and business agreements between producer and consumer. An unsound housing business is economically unfeasible for producer and consumer and consequently, is not profitable for the producer and/or is a poor investment for the consumer.

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As an economic good, housing is valuable to government, to the producer and to the consumer. For government, housing is a potential source of revenue. The economic value is appraised, and taxes are generally levied against the assessed value. For the producer, as an economic good, housing is a product of design which is marketable. The marketability depends on how well the producer has achieved a desirable product for a given market and a particular set of circumstances. Optimally, the housing unit commands the price asked and is sold within a reasonable time.

For the consumer, housing as an economic good represents a large share of his real or potential assets and total net worth. For most consumers, housing also generally represents a financial liability or obligation. Optimally, housing as an economic good for the consumer is economically feasible and is a good investment. Less than optimal housing or economic conditions may result in a poor investment or be economically infeasible.

As physical environment, housing provides the setting in which its occupants live. Optimal housing provides a favorable environment which reflects the needs and values of the occupants and permits the occupants to grow and develop. In short, housing is a setting in which occupants feel inspired. Less than optimal housing contributes toward a frustrating environment which constrains, thwarts, or discourages its occupants—mentally, socially, and physically.

In our zealous endeavor to provide low-cost housing let us not ignore, forget, or purposely dismiss all of the functions of housing. Final judgment of any housing unit must be made not only in terms of economic considerations but in terms of the effect of the housing unit on its occupants. To achieve optimal housing, any housing solution must provide adequate shelter and a favorable environment for its occupants, be a satisfactory product of excellent design, a highly marketable product, and a sound economic good.