

South Facing Open Space

People use open space if it is sunny, and don't use it if it isn't, in all but desert climates.

This bald statement is amazingly simple, but nevertheless true. Thousands of acres of open space in every city are wasted because they are north of buildings, and never get the sun. This is true for public buildings, and it is true for private houses. The recently built Bank of America building in San Francisco—a giant building built by a major architect—has its plaza on the north side. At lunchtime, the plaza is empty, and people eat their sandwiches in the street, on the south side where the sun is. Just so for small private houses. The lot shapes and orientation common in most developments force houses to be surrounded by open space which no

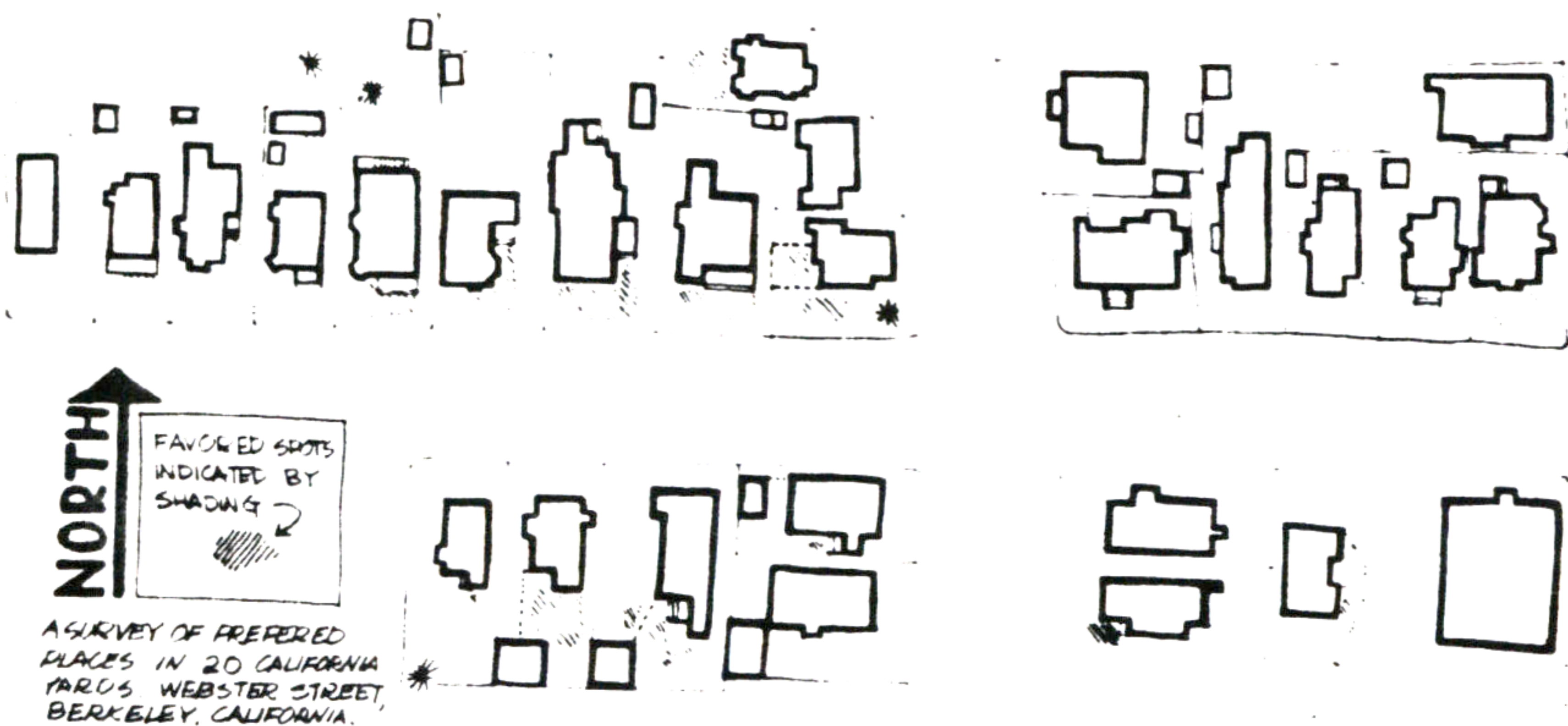
one will ever use because it isn't in the sun.

A survey of a residential block in Berkeley, California, confirms this problem dramatically. Along Webster Street—an east-west street—18 of 20 persons interviewed said they used only the sunny part of their yards. Half of these were people living on the north side of the street—*these people did not use their backyards at all*, but would sit in the front yard, beside the sidewalk, to be in the south sun. The north facing back yards were used primarily for storing junk. Not one of the persons interviewed indicated preference for a shady yard; 2 of 20 gave no preference whatsoever.

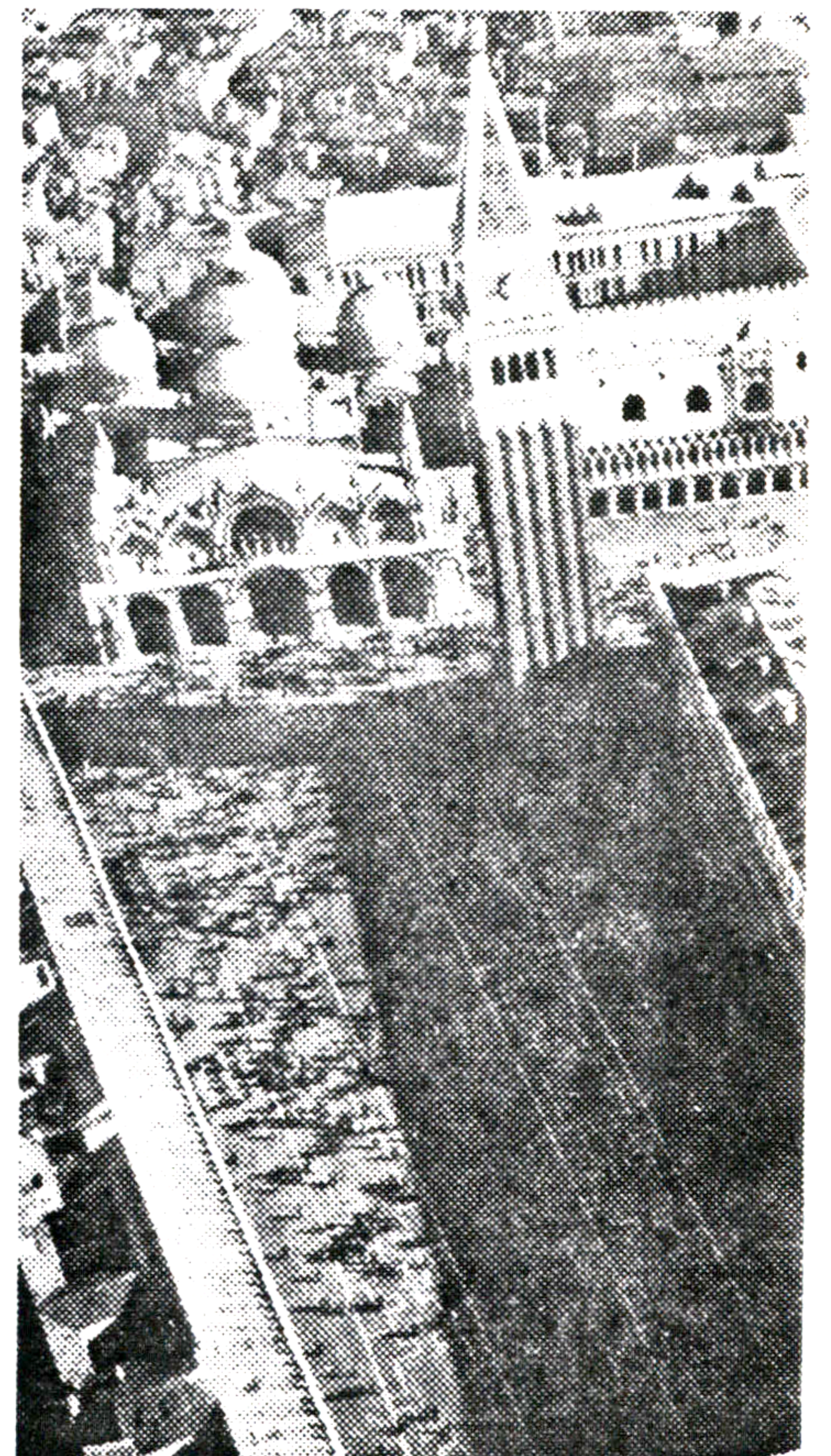
The survey also gave credence to the idea that sunny areas won't be used if there is a deep band of shade, up against the house, through which you must pass to get to the sun. Four lots to the north had backyards large enough to be out of the shade of the house, and sunny, toward the rear. In only one of these yards was the sunny area reported as being used—and in it, it was possible to get to the sun without passing through a deep band of shade.

Although the idea of south facing open space is simple, there will have to be major changes in land use, to make it come right.

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Therefore: Place all open space on the south side of the buildings which give onto it — avoid putting open space in the shadow of buildings, and never let a deep strip of shade separate the sunny area from the building it serves. Reorganize the shape and orientation of lots, to make this possible for private houses and small buildings.

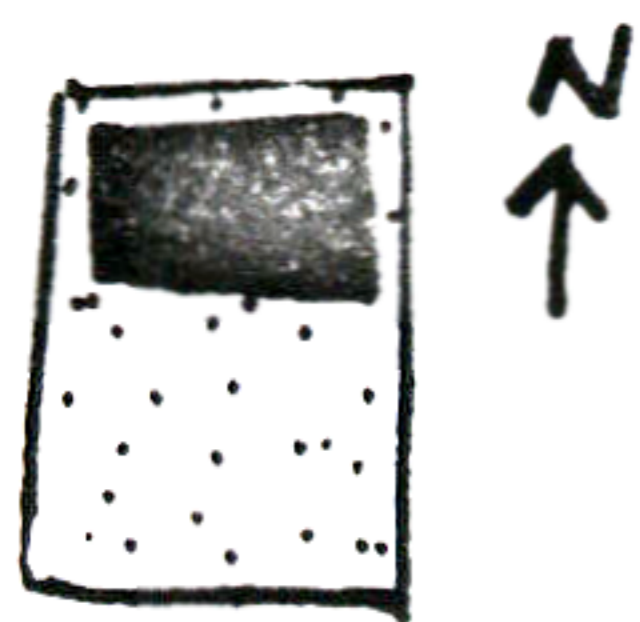


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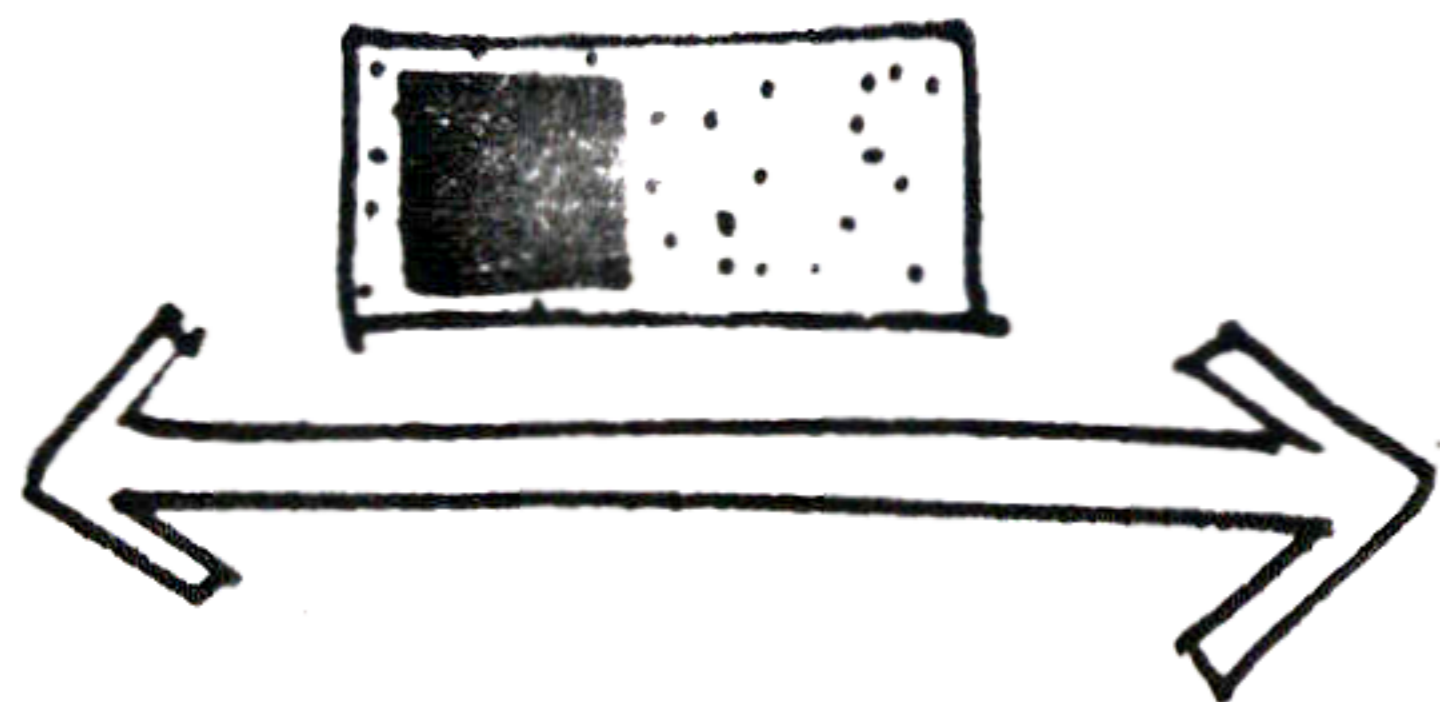
Problem (continued)

This pattern has wide-spread implications for our cities. For example, our residential neighborhoods would have to be organized quite differently from today. Let us take this case for more detailed discussion:

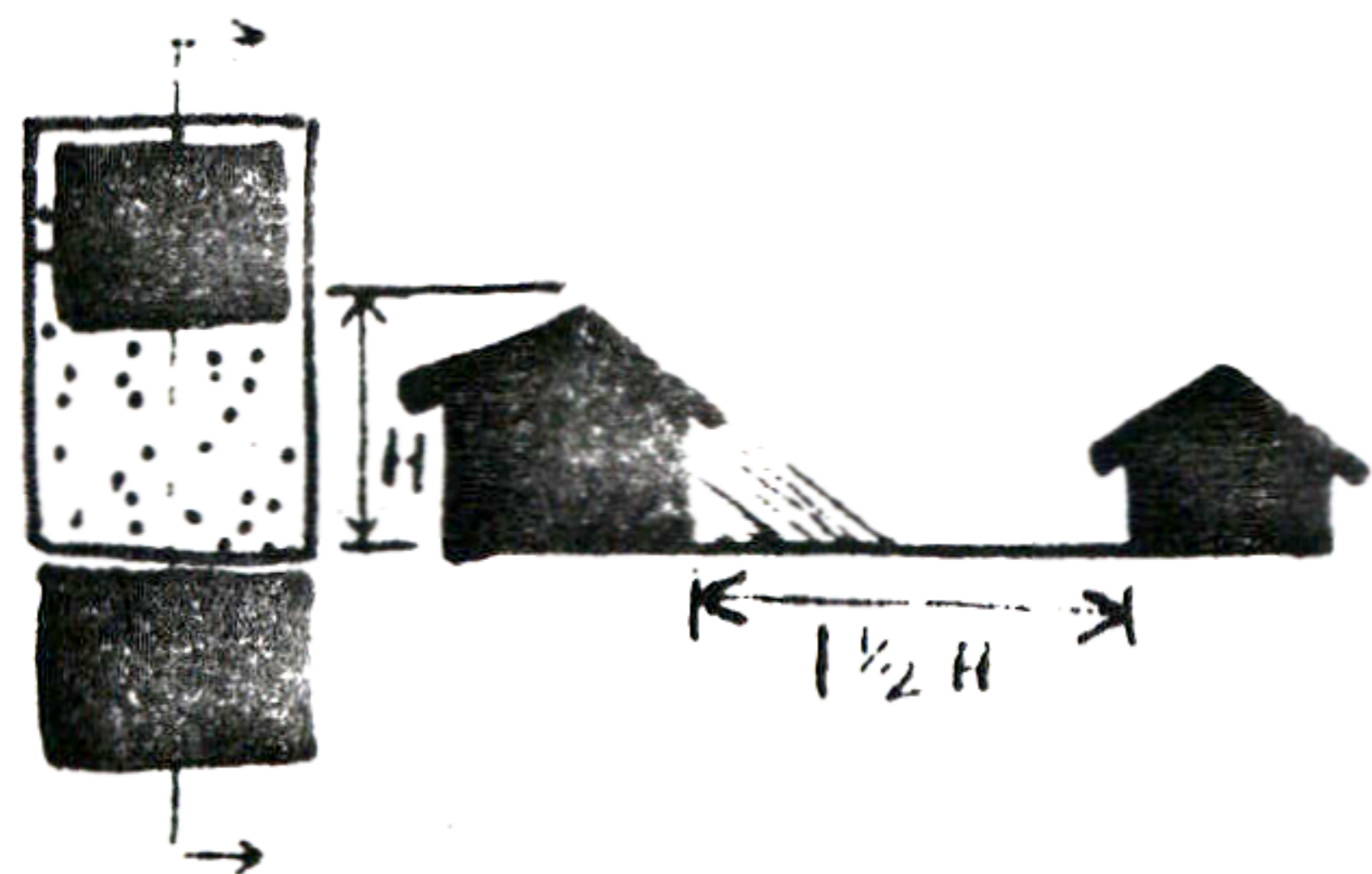
· In general, private lots would have to be longer north to south, with the houses on the north side.



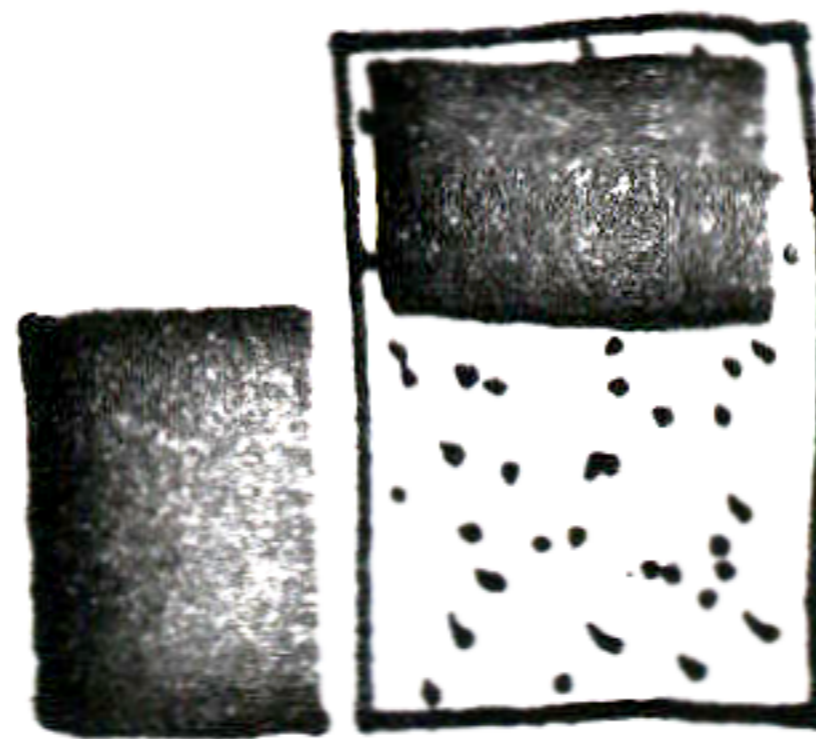
· If there is a city street immediately to the south of the lot, however, it will be better to make the lot longer east to west with the yard to one side so that access to the house does not destroy the privateness of the yard.



· If there is another building to the south, make the yard at least $1\frac{1}{2}$ times the height of that building to allow sun in at least some part of the yard and into the house even in winter—about 15' if it is a one storey building and 30' if it is two. (These figures are appropriate for San Francisco. They will vary, of course, for different latitudes.)



· If there is a building to the east or west, make the yard at least $2\frac{1}{2}$ times the height of the building so it will be in the sun as much as possible when the sun is usefully warm, above about 20 degrees elevation—about 25' if it is a one storey building, and 50' if it is two.



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This pattern is tentative. If you have any evidence to support or refute its current formulation, please send it to the Center for Environmental Structure, P.O. Box 5156, Berkeley, California 94705; we will add your comments to the next edition.