STATEMENT OF ELDRIDGE LOVELACE, PARTNER
White House Conference on Natural Beauty

May 26, 1965
Preservation of natural beauty must start with a reverence for land. When mistreated the land "fights back" with results that are more than ugliness. Mud in the canyons of Los Angeles is one example. Rampant erosion that occurs in the Peoria area whenever the vegetative cover is removed from steep slopes of sandy, gravelly soil is another. There are hundreds of examples around every growing city.

By zoning we regulate what goes on the land. Why could we not regulate what is done with the land and require that land be treated reverently, carefully and judiciously? While they would vary from community to community, it is possible to set forth standards for the preservation of native plant material, for the intensity and character of urban use in relation to land slopes and to the character of existing tree growth. The bulldozer approach to urban expansion could be straightforwardly prohibited by local law. There is no reason why an individual should be allowed to destroy ground forms, plant growth, or wildlife on his property whether he builds anything on it or not. Some areas such as very steep slopes, drainage courses, and flood plains should not be built upon at all. Where an absolutely essential project had to disturb the landscape the regulations could specify the restorative measures to be put into effect.
Model ordinances to accomplish these purposes should be prepared under the sponsorship of the HHFA with assistance of committees formed for this purpose from the American Society of Civil Engineers, the American Society of Landscape Architects and the American Bar Association. Successful enactment and enforcement of such legislation in a few communities on an experimental basis could then be followed by requiring it as part of a "workable program" that should be the prerequisite for federal grants.

A few decades ago minimum standard housing regulations were almost unknown. Now they are commonplace. "Reverence for Land" regulations could have a similar history and bring an even greater benefit. Prevention of misuse of land would be preferable to the expensive and frustrating experience of trying to correct the mistakes later on. Surely there is more than enough public interest involved and a significantly great effect on the public welfare to warrant the extension of the police power into this field.
MEMORANDUM

May 26, 1965

To: The Partners

From: Mr. Lovelace

White House Conference on Natural Beauty

Jack Wood and I attended the White House Conference on Natural Beauty on Monday and Tuesday of this week. This was truly a most interesting and stimulating meeting and both of us felt quite privileged to attend. Both of us submitted material which is to be included in the Proceedings of the Conference. Incidentally, we were one of the very few private firms that was represented, insofar as we could tell.

In the President and First Lady I think that we have real friends for our basic objectives of improving urban and rural environment. How much good the conference or its recommendations will do is difficult to tell. However, it is obvious that at least for the duration of the present administration there will be a very heavy emphasis on preservation of natural beauty and upon conducting all public works projects in such a manner as to be as attractive looking as possible. It is also quite evident that the Federal Government will embark upon a tremendous scenic road program, probably in a year or two, and we should be prepared to participate in this.

There will also be a great expansion of park acquisition and development. We should be in a good position to get some of this work on a state or local level, although I doubt that there will be very much coming on a federal level.

I have written Governor Harrman of Missouri urging him to call a state conference on natural beauty. Members of the National Conference were asked to each do this in their own state so that we may see conferences similar to the one held in Washington being held in each state. These would be the best possible places to make contacts that would result in significant amounts of work.

I will not endeavor to go into the subject matter of most of the conference as the Proceedings will be published and, in any event, there was very little that was new that was put forth as a recommendation. I am sure all of you are familiar with the four major pieces of legislation that were introduced immediately as a result of the conference. The conference did spend a good part of its time dealing with such immediately obvious difficulties as billboards, junkyards and overhead wires. It showed a tendency to either skirt around or use a "God is love" approach to real basic problems of urban sprawl or inappropriate urban uses destroying the natural landscape.
The conference was primarily worthwhile in calling public attention to the problem. It was beautifully organized and conducted. Among other things the President and the First Lady are marvelous salesmen. It is wonderful in this connection to have them selling the same things we are!

EMIL/df

cc: Mr. Bartholomew
Leland, Michigan