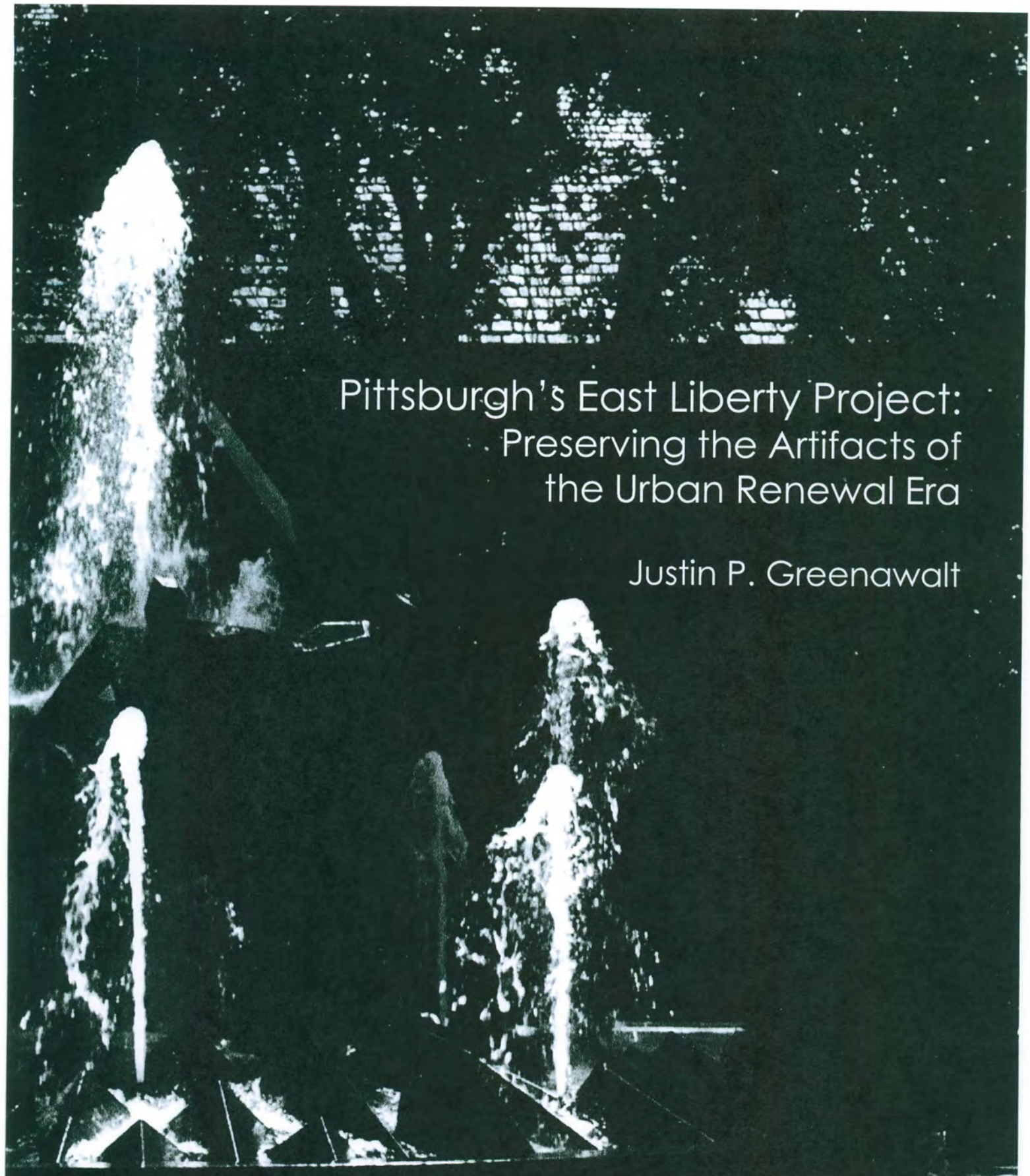

Pittsburgh's East Liberty Project: Preserving the Artifacts of the Urban Renewal Era

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To my mother,
whose remarkable strength is
my greatest inspiration.

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Table of Contents

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Introduction

This thesis seeks to explore how historic preservation can address the challenges currently facing the remaining artifacts of the East Liberty Project, a mid-century urban renewal project executed in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. This document will examine the project, explore its importance to the greater history of Pittsburgh, and accentuate the need to preserve renewal-era elements that are currently being heavily altered or demolished. This document will also propose several recommendations as to how renewal-era elements might be better utilized in a plan for a revitalized East Liberty. The main argument of this thesis is that the discipline of historic preservation has the potential to correct the poor stewardship of renewal-era artifacts in East Liberty, thereby positively influencing current redevelopment practices. By fostering an understanding of the importance of the East Liberty Project, a more enlightened approach relying on historic preservation will help a revitalized East Liberty to retain a sense of place and develop as a viable, vibrant community center.

The first chapter of this thesis introduces the East Liberty Project and details its significance. The chapter also addresses the current challenges facing specific buildings of the East Liberty Project. In the second chapter, Pittsburgh's late nineteenth and twentieth century attempts to renew itself are profiled. This entails a discussion of Pittsburgh's efforts related to the City Beautiful movement and the events that gave rise to the urban renewal movement. Chapter three places the East Liberty Project in context with two other urban renewal efforts to remake and redefine the image of Pittsburgh: The Point Park and Gateway Center Project and The Lower Hill District Redevelopment Project. The fourth chapter gives a brief history of the East Liberty neighborhood, the urban renewal strategy that was developed there, and its eventual decline. The fifth chapter profiles the development, ideology, and implementation of the project. Chapter six discusses the ultimate decline of the project and chapter seven outlines current

practices in revitalizing the East Liberty district. It asserts that the direction of current development practices is misguided, and argues the significance for preserving the remaining elements of the East Liberty Project. The final chapter details recommendations for the preservation of existing artifacts.

Chapter 1:

The East Liberty Urban Renewal Project

Urban renewal was a large-scale urban planning initiative undertaken in the United States during the mid twentieth century. Nearly every major city in America was impacted by urban renewal in some way. Following the Second World War, the American city experienced unprecedented disinvestment as residents moved to the suburbs. With Federal funding made available in the late 1940s, urban renewal was viewed by administrators as an attractive and financially accessible solution to the problem of urban blight. The movement's goals were to modernize cities, stabilize land values, and control the spread of blight. But in doing so, urban renewal cleared and repurposed thousands of acres of inner city land across the United States. No program either before or since has brought such profound change to the urban environment. In some circles, the movement is viewed as a failure. In others, the movement is understood to have been imperfect, but not entirely negative. Regardless, the urban renewal movement made significant contributions to the mid-century history of the American city. Nowhere is this more evident than in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, specifically the city's East Liberty district.

> *On June 16, 1960, a crowd formed in Pittsburgh City Council chambers to hear about plans for saving East Liberty, a neighborhood fixed in memory as a chaotic, turn-of-the-century shopping bazaar, second only to Downtown in size and popularity. A plan was proposed to redevelop an area three-fourths the size of Downtown. At 254 acres, it was the largest urban renewal project ever attempted in Pittsburgh.*[1]

The East Liberty Project embodied the qualities of an era of civic renaissance that was iconically Pittsburgh. Developed in response to deterioration that was beginning to

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[1] Dan Fitzpatrick. "The story of urban renewal." Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. 21 May 2000.

spread throughout Pittsburgh's East End, the East Liberty Project was planned and implemented from 1960 to c. 1971. The project occurred relatively late considering that the bulk of urban renewal projects in America had been initiated during the 1950s. But as a later example, the East Liberty Project demonstrated advancement in the thinking and implementation of urban renewal in Pittsburgh and elsewhere. It addressed large-scale redevelopment, sought to revitalize the East Liberty commercial district, and functioned to preserve existing built fabric. The project possessed a dynamic that previous projects in Pittsburgh had lacked. Pursuing a *tabula rasa* approach, the forerunners to the East Liberty Project took parts of the urban fabric and gave them new uses. Sections of the city were entirely demolished and built anew. For example, the land at the confluence of the Allegheny and Monongahela Rivers was converted from industrial use to park land and office space. In another project, the Lower Hill District was converted from residential and commercial use to civic cultural space. But in a departure from the norm, the planners of the East Liberty Project sought to rejuvenate the area, not change its function completely.

East Liberty began as a center for farming in the early 19th century and had later developed as a town dominated by taverns. With the construction of a rail line through the area, the town developed into a thriving commuter suburb. It became a preferred location for Pittsburgh's middle and upper class citizens. East Liberty also became a center for commerce as other public transportation lines developed. By the 1920s, East Liberty had assumed the title of Pittsburgh's second downtown. But the economic depression of the 1930s and rise in automobile culture following the Second World War led to disinvestment in the commercial core. This type of inner city disinvestment had become a nationwide trend. Individuals with an interest in the well-being of the East Liberty community understood that without an intervention, the district would ultimately fail. The urban renewal approach was one of very few tested methods of civic

rejuvenation at the time. With the short-term effects of other urban renewal projects showing promise, leaders forged ahead with a plan for renewal in East Liberty.

Despite its decline, East Liberty was important to the East End community, both in a commercial and social sense. Planners of the East Liberty Project understood this. They knew that retaining some of the existing buildings could contribute to the vibrancy of a revitalized commercial district. A plan was developed to construct a large pedestrian mall in addition to improving traffic circulation and creating better housing. The pedestrian mall was a popular method of commercial district redevelopment in the 1950s and 1960s. Cities across the United States viewed the pedestrian mall as one of the ways to keep their downtown commercial cores relevant and relatively intact while addressing the needs and desires of a changing consumer culture. The East Liberty Project would serve as Pittsburgh's version of this national trend in redevelopment. It would combine old East Liberty with new planning and architectural principles with the hope of reviving and redefining a once prominent commercial district.

The project incorporated talent from some of the most notable Pittsburgh-based architectural firms of the day. The influential landscape architecture firm of Simonds and Simonds is credited with the design of the East Liberty pedestrian malls.[2] Tasso Katselas designed many of the residential complexes built on the periphery of the commercial core. The firms of Larsen and Ludwig; Howard, Burt & Hill; and Liff, Justh & Chetlin contributed designs for several new buildings. The project's vast scale, implementation of the most current renewal ideologies, and characteristic architectural aesthetic made it a paramount example of the mid-twentieth century civic renaissance of Pittsburgh. It also served as a noteworthy example of the national phenomenon of the pedestrian mall.

Ultimately, the East Liberty Project fell short of its goal of renewing East Liberty. A brief revival in the 1960s and early 1970s gave way to an extended period of decline.

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[2] "At last! You can get there from here."*Industrial Design* v.15 n. 4 May 1968. p. 55

There was a great deal of support for the East Liberty Project in the beginning, but consumer habits during this period made drastic shifts. East Liberty began to be viewed as unsafe. As a result, consumers began patronizing suburban shopping centers. The East Liberty Project began to fail. Its decline only functioned to validate its critics' views. Today, the East Liberty Project is an example used to demonstrate the shortcomings of the urban renewal era. Urban planners have acknowledged that the project was a gamble, but they maintain that it was a gamble that needed to be taken. It is impossible to know what East Liberty might look like today if the project had not been implemented. Regardless, the project's shortcomings fuel the stigma that has become synonymous with both it and the greater urban renewal movement.

Preservation Challenges

The challenges to the preservation of the remaining elements of the East Liberty Project are numerous. Over the past 25 years, the area has been largely stripped of its characteristic urban renewal features. This has been done to promote investment in the commercial core. Local developers have insisted that the removal of elements from the urban renewal era is crucial to the area's reinvigoration. But the destruction of renewal-era buildings and projects in East Liberty is not an isolated phenomenon. With support from the government and other agencies, the architecture and urban planning designs of the urban renewal movement are being demolished across the United States. The real cost of such poor stewardship of the urban fabric has yet to be totaled. With the demolition of these buildings and places, many see the destruction of a misguided experiment in fixing American cities. But many fail to understand that, to a significant number of people, these buildings and places served as a part of a broad cultural landscape. In East Liberty, demolition and alterations to the urban landscape have been vast and incredibly expensive. As a result, a significant portion of the East Liberty Project is gone, but the district has yet to meet its potential and East Liberty's place identity is quickly eroding.

Since the decline of the East Liberty Project, the pedestrian malls have once again become automobile thoroughfares. High-rises on the periphery of the commercial core were imploded in the late 2000s. With many of the larger vestiges of urban renewal gone, focus has shifted to the demolition or alteration of the smaller renewal-era buildings; especially where they exhibit an overt 1960s aesthetic vocabulary.

The following three examples demonstrate current practices in dealing with urban renewal era buildings in East Liberty.

Friendship Plaza **(image 1.1)**

Friendship Plaza is one of the buildings that has been marred by a seemingly careless campaign of alteration and modernization. The building is unique in its siting and design. It has two commercial facades: one on the former Highland Mall (now Highland Avenue) and another on Highland Plaza. A portion of the Highland Plaza is the only remaining part of the East Liberty pedestrian mall. It is complete with original paving, multi-level landscaping beds, mature trees, and the only remaining street lighting fixtures from the era. This imparts a unique quality to Friendship Plaza in that much of its original context remains. Friendship Plaza was also in active dialog with its surroundings. A portion of its original cladding was made of the same white, pebbled concrete that was used in the paving of the pedestrian mall.

Friendship Plaza was one of the only buildings from the urban renewal era to maintain both its 1960s aesthetic and a significant portion of its context. Its façade was modernized in the late summer of 2009. The original façade was replaced with metallic orange panels and blue translucent glass. An out-of-context cornice was placed over a section of the building, imparting an awkward visual tension to the once balanced composition. This has severed the relationship between the building and its surroundings.

The restoration of Friendship Plaza and Highland Plaza could have strengthened the visual composition of Highland Avenue and preserved a rare and unique piece of the

East Liberty Project. Developers have instead decided to cheapen the visual *parti* with materials that are already beginning to show wear and will most likely not stand the test of time.

Pennley Park and Penn Plaza **(image 1.2)**

Another example of façade modernization is Pennley Park. Pennley Park was partially demolished in the late 1990s and early 2000s as part of the nationwide phenomenon of removing renewal-era housing projects. Additional housing was built on the site. The buildings that replaced Pennley Park are uninspired in their design. They fail to draw inspiration from their context. Although the new buildings provide much-needed housing, this goal could have been accomplished without the demolition of a significant portion of Pennley Park. The section of Pennley Park that was not demolished had its façade removed and modernized; replacing modular glass, brick, and concrete walls with a faux second-empire aesthetic.

Unlike Pennley Park, Penn Plaza is completely intact and demonstrates the original design intent of the complex. It serves as an important document to the mid-century, urban planning ideal of creating good, humane housing with plentiful light and air and outdoor recreational space. Surrounded by well-kept lawns and recreational areas, Penn Plaza is an example of a solid, renewal-era building with an uncertain future. Developers understand the complex not as an architectural work, but as a complex of buildings sitting on underdeveloped land. It is of great importance to preserve buildings like Penn Plaza intact, not only for aesthetic or historical concerns, but for the reason that these buildings serve their purpose. They provide good, humane housing for their occupants. Considering current development trends in East Liberty, its location on the periphery of the commercial core, and the size of the plot of land on which it sits, Penn Plaza could potentially be faced with demolition by big-box retail.[3]

Carnegie Library – East Liberty Branch **(image 1.3)**

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[3] Justin Greenawalt. Interview with Eric Jester and Nathan Wildfire. January 7, 2010.

Whereas the redesign of Friendship Plaza and Pennley Park has allowed the buildings to retain some original character, the East Liberty Branch of the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh has been altered to the extent of having no resemblance to its original design. Built in 1970, the building exhibited a staid permanence befitting of a community institution. The exterior was characterized by a brown brick second story mass supported over a glass-enclosed first story.

The new 2009 design by the Pittsburgh firm Edge Studio has demolished the building to its internal supports and cloaked the structure in an amorphous metallic skin. The ostentatious new design does little to complement its surroundings: the Beaux-Arts former YMCA building, the polychromatic terracotta storefronts, and the neo-gothic, East Liberty Presbyterian church by Ralph Adams Cram. The original library building was structurally sound. The preservation of the 1970 structure could have served as a symbol of the endurance of the institution in East Liberty. However, the library has opted for something flashy and new. The treatment of the East Liberty Branch of the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh further asserts the library's notorious track-record of abandoning or marring its historic buildings. By their nature, libraries are supposed to be permanent, enduring civic institutions. This contemporary redesign for the East Liberty branch fails that test.

A campaign of demolition and alteration is being undertaken in East Liberty; not due to necessity, but due to misunderstanding and general a failure to see the potential in renewal-era buildings. Vast, potentially profit-yielding spaces are being demolished due to stigma. Non-descript buildings that draw no inspiration from their surroundings are being built in their place. The current approach to revitalization in East Liberty may appear to have advanced from its controversial urban renewal forerunner, but upon closer examination, little has changed.

In summary, the poor stewardship of the remaining elements of the East Liberty Project is contributing to the erosion of place identity in East Liberty. Given its immense

role in reshaping the East End community and its contribution to an era of transformation for the City of Pittsburgh, the East Liberty Project and all of its associated buildings, structures, and objects deserve recognition and preservation as part of Pittsburgh's broader cultural landscape. The East Liberty Project serves to physically document an important period in Pittsburgh's developmental history: the city's change in paradigm from "Smoky City" to "Modern Metropolis". Resources such as the East Liberty Project often generate considerable debate and are subjects of mixed emotion. But they serve to punctuate a moment in the urban history of the United States characterized by unprecedented civic reinvestment. The remaining elements of the East Liberty Project should not be destroyed. They should be celebrated and given due consideration and a rightful place in the plan for a strong, vibrant, and revitalized East Liberty.

Image 1.1: (above) Friendship Plaza prior to façade renovation. **(below)** Friendship Plaza after façade renovation.
October 2009
Source: (above) Google Earth Streetview (below) Justin Greenawalt

Image 1.2: Buildings are located across Penn Avenue from one another, but were once identical in terms of appearance. Façade alterations on the bottom building occurred c. 2005
Source: Justin Greenawalt

Image 1.3: Progression of façade alteration of Carnegie Library East Liberty Branch

(top) Rendering for Library c. 1970
Source: John Fulton Stuart Collins, Jr. Stringtown on the Pike. Michigan: Edwards Brothers

(middle) Structure with façade removed October 2009
Source: Justin Greenawalt

(bottom) Rendering of new façade
Source: Edge Studio, Pittsburgh

Chapter 2:

Pittsburgh's Early Attempt to Redefine Its Self-Image: A Brief History of the City's Struggle with Renewal

The City of Pittsburgh was made famous by industry; a nineteenth century behemoth of coal, coke, steel, and glass. It fostered some of America's greatest inventors and industrial barons. It pioneered the material technologies on which the twentieth century was built. According to John Gabbert Bowman, tenth Chancellor of the University of Pittsburgh, "Business insight was developed [in Pittsburgh] as the drama, for example, was developed in London at the time of Elizabeth."[4] Pittsburgh rightfully earned its title as one of America's great industrial manufactories, but its industrial production can never outweigh its reputation as a poor environmental steward.

Pittsburgh is a city renowned for having burned its streetlights twenty-four hours per day during the late nineteenth and early to mid twentieth centuries; the smoke, soot, and smog rendered noon and midnight virtually indistinguishable **(image 2.1)**. It is a city where difficult topography and rapid expansion resulted in often haphazard development and a semi-organic tangle of streets. Immigrants clamored to Pittsburgh for a better life, only to be poisoned by their own drinking water. Cholera and Typhoid Fever outbreaks were commonplace in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The *Pittsburgh Survey* of 1907-13 served as the first evaluation of environmental conditions in the city. The survey "... filled several volumes attesting to the uninhabitable conditions in places such as Skunk Hollow in East Liberty [and] Painter's Row near the South Side Carnegie Mill...The city was legitimately earning its reputation as 'Hell with the lid taken off.'"[5]

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[4] John G. Bowman. "Pittsburgh's Contribution to Civilization." Pittsburgh and the Pittsburgh Spirit: Address at the Chamber of Commerce of Pittsburgh, 1927-1928. (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh Chamber of Commerce, 1928) p.9.

[5] Michael P. Weber. Don't call me boss. David L. Lawrence: Pittsburgh's Renaissance Mayor. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1988) p. 198.

To further validate the claims made by the city's assessors, visitors to the region often remarked on the poor conditions of the industrial metropolis. "'In Pittsburgh,' one English observer noted in 1913, 'man befouled the streams, bedraggled their banks, ripped up the cliffs, hacked down the trees, and dumped refuse in their stead. He sowed the imposing heights with hovels and set beneath them black mills to cover everything far and wide with a film of smoke.'"[6] Pittsburgh was noted from afar as being a powerhouse of production, but for those who traveled to and resided within the city, reality was far more grim.

As a leisure class in Pittsburgh emerged during the latter half the nineteenth century and cultivated "...finer tastes and more cosmopolitan ideals," the city's dinginess became insufferable to those identifying with the upper echelons of Pittsburgh society.[7] Pollution aside, another detractor to a growing base of aesthetes were the dreary, uninteresting buildings that dominated the city **(image 2.2)**. Architecturally speaking, Pittsburgh was a backwater. By 1888, Henry Hobson Richardson's Allegheny County Courthouse **(image 2.3)** had been completed and was enjoying a considerable amount of celebrity, but it was more an architectural anomaly than anything. Prior to the late nineteenth century, austerity was a characteristic of many of Pittsburgh's buildings. The industrial city could not be bothered with ornamental flare and public amenities. Its primary concern was making the land pay. But the brusque, industrial aesthetic of Pittsburgh would not endure for long. A trend in the reformation of cities was sweeping across the nation in the form of the City Beautiful movement during very late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Pittsburgh was not to be spared.

The resurrection of neoclassical architectural and planning ideals had been simmering in the background of the American architectural sphere prior to the close of the nineteenth century. But prior to the City Beautiful movement, it had largely been

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[6] Ibid.
[7] Francis G. Couvares, The Remaking of Pittsburgh: Class and Culture in an Industrializing City: 1877 -1919. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984) p. 96

reserved for use in projects funded by wealthy patrons. That was all about to change. With the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition, the concept of the "White City" arose as an architectural and urban planning concept that would benefit the masses; a utopian dream of purity, morality, and order.

The growing City Beautiful movement served as an attempt to rescue the American city from the blight that had been caused by the Industrial Revolution. The movement was not mandated or financed by any federal government entity, but rather gained momentum as a method of civic reform. As cities across the country successfully implemented their own renditions of the City Beautiful, other cities joined them. In Pittsburgh, the city's wealthier and more cultured citizens adopted the ideals of the City Beautiful as a way to renew and rehabilitate the city. They envisioned painting over the soot and grime with grand civic monuments and parks, realigned streets, and re-graded topography **(image 2.4)**. "...[T]hose who endorsed the City Beautiful... trumpeted the meliorative power of beauty... stating their belief in its capacity to shape human thought and behavior."[8] Validating this notion, the City Beautiful would serve as Pittsburgh's first attempt to remake itself in the image of a respectable, modern city.

It was at this moment that Pittsburgh, its upper middle class citizenry, and its philanthropic elite began planning, financing, and constructing the monumental, neoclassical civic structures that the city is left with today. Pittsburgh developed plans for palaces of culture, voluminous libraries (**image 2.5**), grand civic monuments **(image 2.6)**, and immense parks in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[9] Two separate plans for a municipal center were considered for construction in the

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[8] William H. Wilson. The City Beautiful Movement. (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1989.) p. 79.

[9] Until 1889, Pittsburgh had no parks. Open space for recreation was auxiliary to the concerns of the city administration. Residents utilized undeveloped land near developed portions of the city for recreation grounds. Across the Allegheny River to the north of Pittsburgh, Allegheny City had developed a Commons that surrounded the city center and was modeled after the English precedent. The only publicly planned open space afforded to the City of Pittsburgh was Market Square in the Downtown district. But even this space was filled with civic uses until the 1960s.

downtown district in the early 1900s.[10] The city's once ramshackle rail stations were transformed into palatial reception halls. Pittsburgh's efforts at the City Beautiful were impressive and the monuments of the era are lauded for their beauty. But while the City Beautiful movement in Pittsburgh contributed to its architectural heritage, it fell short of its goal of making the city a more civilized place to live.

Setting the Stage for an Urban Paradigm Shift

The greatest detriment to Pittsburgh was not poverty, immorality, or lack of a united, uniform culture. It was pollution. Industry in Pittsburgh perpetuated a poor environmental condition that could not be addressed by the precepts of the City Beautiful. The city's residents may not have been fully aware of the dire consequences to health that such pollution caused, but they were aware of the filth that perpetually draped the city's buildings. The new, white, gleaming civic monuments were quickly covered in a blanket of black soot, and Pittsburgh's leaders found themselves no closer to achieving their goals of making the city a respectable place to live.

Swift action curtailing pollution and regulating civic development was needed, but no such legislation would be enacted for several decades. In 1918, the Citizen's Committee on City Plan (CCCP) was established as a means of facilitating civic change by engaging Pittsburgh's businessmen. The CCCP chose to engage private entities because the city administration was considered corrupt and of little use in shaping change. By advocating for public improvement with private sponsorship, it was the aim of the CCCP to create an improved Pittsburgh. The *Pittsburgh Plan* was developed by the CCCP and served, '"...to give Pittsburgh an orderly, scientific, comprehensive plan of city

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[10] In 1909, an effort to construct a new courthouse along with a great public square was discussed. Richardson's Allegheny County Courthouse—only 21 years old at the time—was to be converted into Pittsburgh's new City Hall. "COURT HOUSE MAY BECOME CITY HALL UNDER PLANS OF MR. MAGEE AND COMMISSIONERS, PROPOSE ERECTION OF NEW COUNTY BUILDING" *The Pittsburgh Post.* Sunday Morning, April 11, 1909. p. 2

building."'[11] Despite the fact that the City Council adopted several of the CCCP's plans for civic improvement, no plan was actually implemented. It became clear that "[a] voluntary agency could not impose a plan upon the City of Pittsburgh."[12]

As a direct result of inaction on the part of the city, Pittsburgh wallowed in filth between the World Wars. It continued to be the target of unrelenting published scorn and critique. Journalist and satirist H.L. Mencken said of the Pittsburgh region in his 1927 essay "The Libido for the Ugly":

> *Here was the very heart of industrial America, the center of its most lucrative and characteristic activity, the boast and pride of the richest and grandest nation ever seen on earth--and here was a scene so dreadfully hideous, so intolerably bleak and forlorn that it reduced the whole aspiration of man to a macabre and depressing joke... I am not speaking of mere filth. One expects steel towns to be dirty. What I allude to is the unbroken and agonizing ugliness, the sheer revolting monstrousness, of every house in sight.*[13]

Following Mencken's critique, *Harper's Magazine* published a piece entitled "Is Pittsburgh Civilized?" and writer Dwight MacDonald authored a piece entitled "Pittsburgh: What a City Shouldn't Be" in the August 1938 edition of *Forum.* What should have been the envy of the nation for its capitalist fortitude, Pittsburgh had effectively stagnated—politically, environmentally, and culturally.

Under Mayor Cornelius D. Scully (1936-1946), Pittsburgh's environmental issues were finally brought to the fore. With Scully's leadership, the city began tackling the policy changes that would need to be implemented if Pittsburgh were to remain a viable city. Smoke controls were discussed, but the United States' involvement in World War II

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[11] Roy Lubove. Twentieth Century Pittsburgh: Government, Business, and Environmental Change. (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1969) p. 89
[12] Ibid.
[13] H.L. Mencken. "Libido for the Ugly" Prejudices: Sixth Series. (New York: Knopf, 1927)

made environmental issues less of a priority. It was necessary for Pittsburgh's steel plants to increase production to meet demand for the war effort.[14]

The first successful push to alter the city's stance on environmental stewardship began after the war had ended. In the wake of World War II and what had been an economically prosperous time for the city, civic leaders came to the realization that drastic measures were necessary to maintain the viability of Pittsburgh as an industrial and commercial center. The reality was: "By 1945, 'large corporations which had long made their headquarters in Pittsburgh had actually taken options on properties in other cities and were laying plans to build skyscrapers there and move their offices.' These included Westinghouse, Alcoa, and U.S. Steel Corporation."[15] Pittsburgh was branded as a nineteenth century city in a burgeoning twentieth century world.

Tides of Change in the Steel City

The year 1943 marked the formation of the Allegheny Conference of Community Development (ACCD) and the turning point for actual change regarding Pittsburgh's plight. Unlike previous private interest groups, the ACCD had been convened by the wealthiest and most influential citizens that the city could boast. Richard Mellon, heir to the city's Mellon banking empire, called for the group's formation. Robert Doeherty, president of Carnegie Tech (now Carnegie Mellon University) served in the capacity of chairman.[16] The group formed "'...a non-profit, non-partisan civic organization, to be devoted to research and planning, to develop an over all community development program.'"[17,18]

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[14] During World War II alone, Pittsburgh steel foundries produced 95 million tons of steel. This unprecedented production added immensely to the already overwhelming pollution. Stefan Lorant. Pittsburgh: The Story of an American City (5th ed.). Esselmont Books, LLC.
[15] Lubove, 106.
[16] Ibid, 108.
[17] Lubove, 108.
[18] The non-partisan aspect of the ACCD would prove to be the most integral of the Conference's qualities. It was the collaboration of the many Republican-indentifying individuals in the ACCD with the Democratic government of the City that allowed the most ambitious urban renewal projects to move forward. Richard King Mellon and his cronies would also provide the City with one of the largest private sources of financial backing for Urban Renewal ever realized.

The founding members of the ACCD agreed that the primary goal of the fledgling organization was to take on the matters affecting the future of Allegheny County. But more specifically, the aim of the group was to improve Pittsburgh. The group would invest the bulk of its time in the "...resuscitation of a devitalized and deteriorating metropolitan area..."[19] The ACCD possessed an enormous potential power in the remaking of Pittsburgh. It succeeded where the CCCP had not due to a requirement that the members of the organization carry their own active interest in the organization's work. It was not acceptable to participate through representatives or act on behalf of a corporation. The founders of the ACCD certainly organized in hopes of protecting their own business interests, but they also managed to exact considerable physical change that both ensured the city's viability as a competitive commercial center and demolished vast tracts of the city in the name of renewal.

Whereas the ACCD would do much to influence the paradigm shift necessary to secure the economic viability of the city, even the most powerful private commission would require the backing of the city's administration. The election of Democrat David L. Lawrence (1946-1959) to the Office of Mayor ensured that the enormous plans for the city would be implemented. Two major renewal projects undertaken by the Lawrence administration demonstrate the measures that would have to be undertaken to rectify issues that had been exacerbated by the inaction of previous administrations.

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[19] Lubove, 109.

Image 2.1: Downtown Pittsburgh prior to the enactment of pollution and smoke ordinances (Fall 1945, 9:20 AM)
Source: University of Pittsburgh Digital Archives: Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania

Image 2.2: Typical housing at the Point in Pittsburgh's Downtown, c. 1910.
Source: University of Pittsburgh Digital Archives: Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania

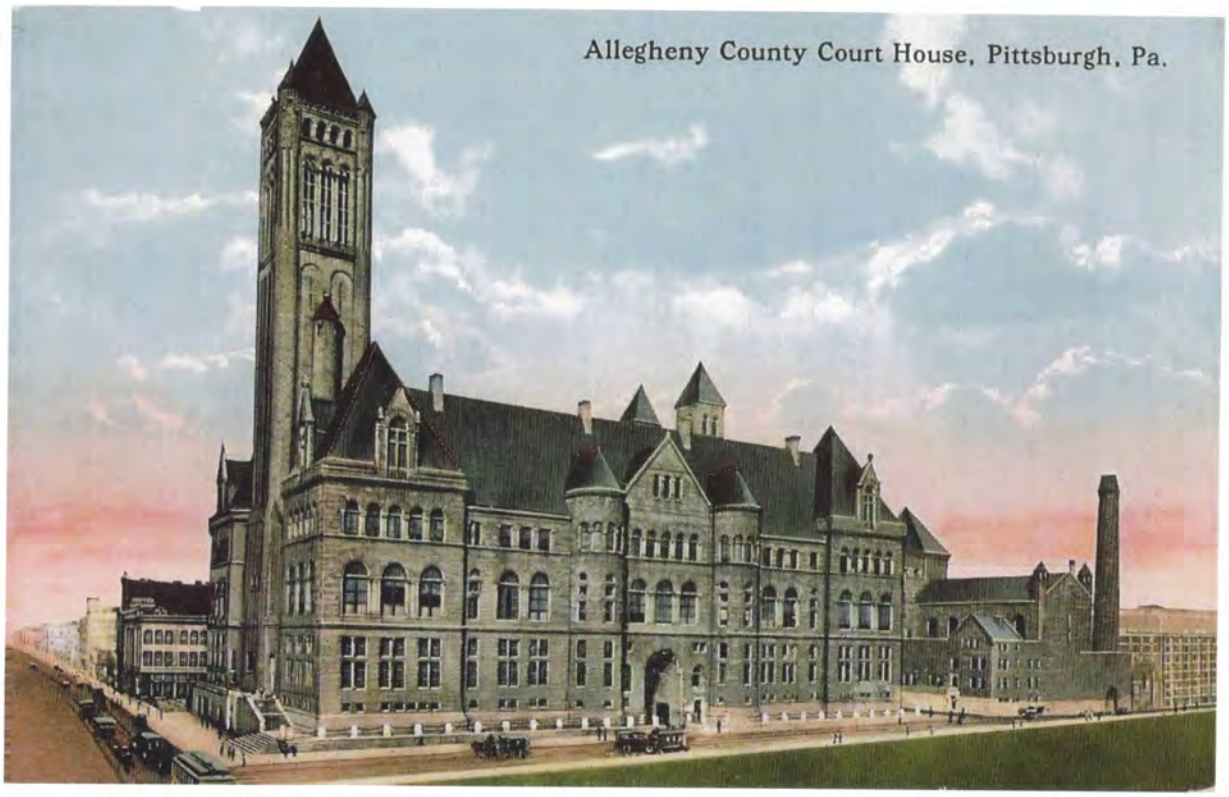

Image 2.3: Henry Hobson Richardson's Romanesque Allegheny County Courthouse was one of the few major, nationally recognized architectural works in Pittsburgh in the late 19th century.
Source: Postcard. Author's Personal Collection

Image 2.4: A civic improvement effort known as the "Hump Removal" took place c. 1912 in Pittsburgh's Downtown. The "hump" was the remainder of the historical Grant's Hill which had made traversing Downtown's eastern portions difficult due to its steep grade. The removal of the "hump" served to remove some of the Downtown district's most dense building stock and provided the opportunity for the construction of such historically inspired buildings as the Union Arcade and William Penn Hotel. The building seen on the right is the F.J. Osterling addition of Richardson's Allegheny County Jail.
Source: Postcard. Author's Personal Collection

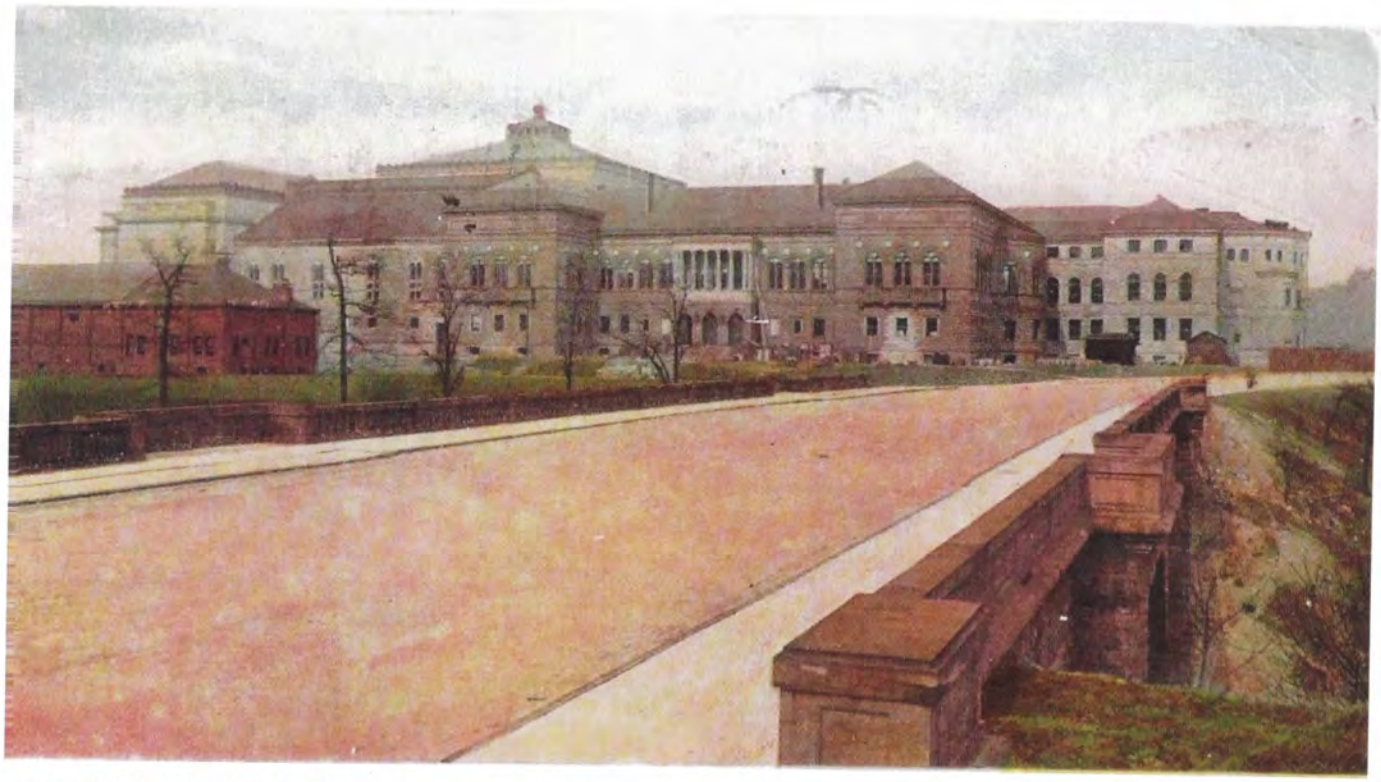

Image 2.5: The Carnegie Institute at the entrance to Schenley Park, seen here in 1907 shortly after expansion.
Source: Postcard. Author's Personal Collection

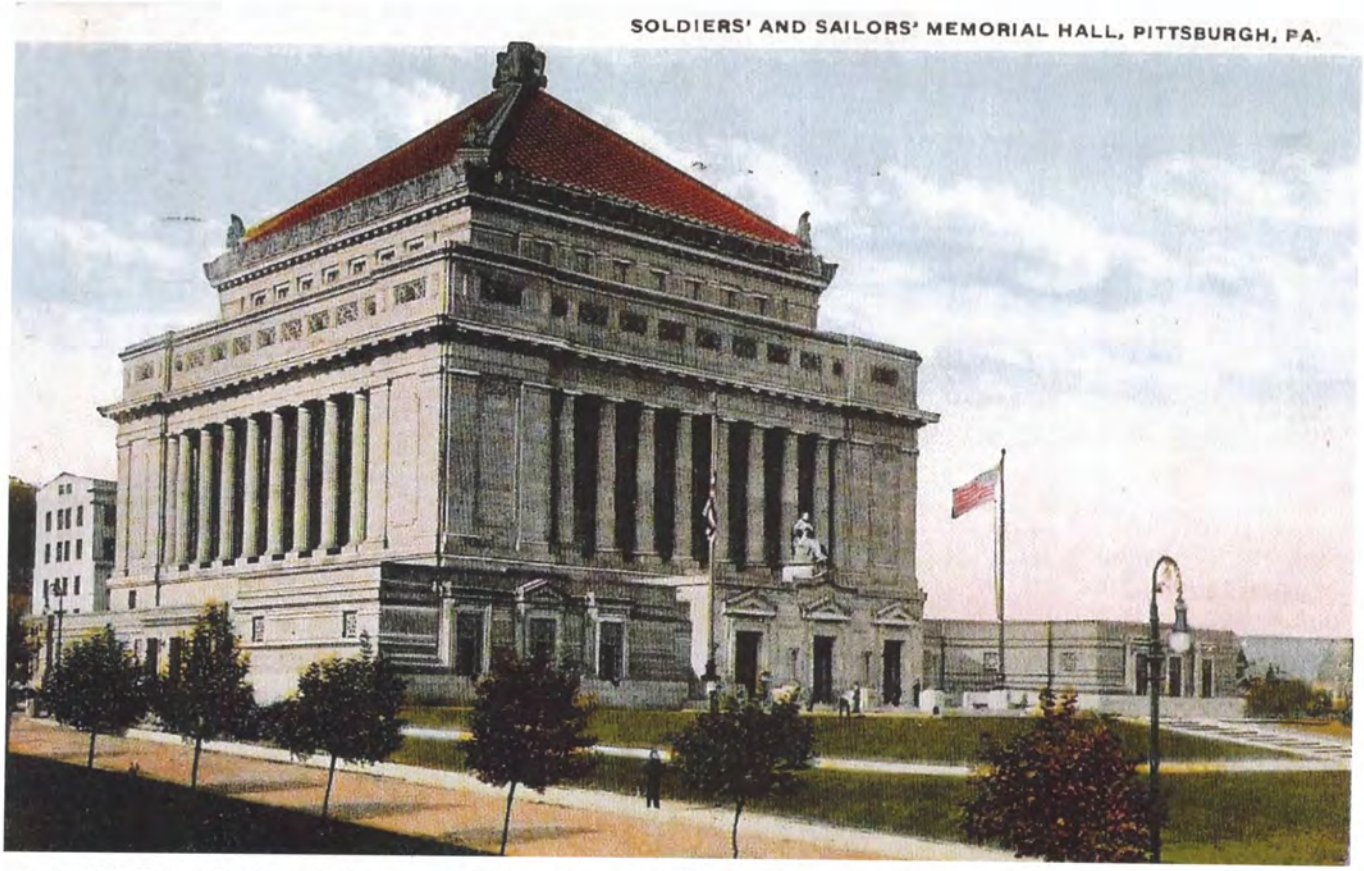

Image 2.6: Henry Hornbostel's Soldiers' and Sailors' Memorial Hall, a manifestation of Pittsburgh's City Beautiful attempt to display civic pride through grand, classically inspired monuments.
Source: Postcard. Author's Personal Collection

Chapter 3:

The Age of Renewal: Two Examples of Pittsburgh's Mid-Century Projects

> *The city welcomes tomorrow, because yesterday was hard and unlovely. Pittsburgh likes buildings that glisten with stainless steel and aluminum, and it has little time for the niceties of architectural criticism when it compares what it gained with what it lost. The town has no worship of landmarks. Instead, it takes its pleasure in the swing of the headache ball and the crash of falling brick.*[20]
>
> - *Mayor David L. Lawrence*

The Point and a Plan

The Point Park and Gateway Center Project was Pittsburgh's first major, highly visible opportunity to remake its image under the Lawrence administration. Planned for the most publicly viewed portion of the city, the idea for a park at the confluence of the Allegheny and Monongahela Rivers, formally known in Pittsburgh as the "Point", had existed since the early twentieth century. The concept—championed during the City Beautiful era by Pittsburgh's Municipal Art Commission—sought to glorify George Washington and the sites of Fort Duquesne and Fort Pitt.[21] It also aimed at simplifying the street grid that had to be navigated to cross either the Manchester or Pittsburgh Bridges **(image 3.1)**. But the planners of the earlier concept faced the obstacle of Pittsburgh's railroads: the owners of the vast majority of the land at the Point. Nothing of this early plan was built. The Point remained a predominantly industrial area for nearly four more decades.

By the time of the 1940s, the Point was characterized as a large group of defunct and abandoned industrial structures **(image 3.2)**. The Allegheny and Monongahela riverfronts were unimproved except for moorings for coal barges. Abandoned buildings

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[20] Stephan Lorant. Pittsburgh: The Story of an American City. Esselmont Books, LLC. p. 373
[21] Lubove, 57

from Pittsburgh's sesquicentennial celebration of 1908 were among the few architecturally noteworthy pieces in the district.[22] But most important to planning a renewal effort were the rise of automobile ownership and the decline of the railroad. The railroads that had blocked previous efforts to remake the Point were failing. Vacant warehouses, unused rail yards, and the abandoned Beaux-Arts Wabash rail terminal riddled the Point. With so much of the city's most visible—and potentially valuable—land believed to be polluted with the dinosaurs of industry, the idea of a grand park and office tower development gained momentum in a city determined to slough off its "Smoky City" moniker.

An earnest push to acquire the underutilized land at the Point from the Pennsylvania Railroad was launched. Concepts for the development of the area had been secured by local department store owner Edgar J. Kaufmann from Frank Lloyd Wright. "Wright... created a [proposal] for a vast concrete megastructure one-fifth of a mile in diameter and a dozen stories high, capacious enough to accommodate a third of the city's citizens either at work or play."[23] **(image 3.3)**Wright's proposal was never implemented, but the prospect of a Wright designed edifice in Pittsburgh stirred sufficient public approval to move forward with the revitalization project.[24] Once underway, the city met with little resistance from residents of the area, primarily because there were few people living in this section of the city. Indeed, there were a few residential units scattered throughout the district. Mayor Lawrence had been born and raised in the area. But the vast majority of the buildings to be demolished were deemed crumbling reminders of a dirty, industrial age; an age that should be quickly dashed from the city's collective memory.

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[22] Deemed expendable in the 1940s conceptualization of Gateway Center and Point State Park, the Exposition Buildings had been built to the design of D.H. Burnham & Co. of Chicago.
[23] Franklin Toker. Fallingwater Rising: Frank Lloyd Wright, E.J. Kaufmann, and America's Most Extraordinary House. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005) p.339
[24] Wright and Kaufmann had completed the now-famous house Fallingwater in Bear Run, Pennsylvania (approximately 60 miles southeast of Pittsburgh) nearly a decade earlier. The prospect of having a Wright designed building within the city limits excited city administrators and citizens alike.

Demolition commenced with fanfare on May 18, 1950.[25] A parade was held to commemorate the event. A wrecking ball felled a warehouse to signify the commencement of the city's rebirth **(image 3.4)**. National publications lauded the efforts in Pittsburgh as an endeavor to be undertaken by all American cities. "Wrote The Saturday Evening Post: 'There is good reason to believe that Pittsburgh is in the beginning of one of the most dramatic periods of municipal renaissance that any great American city is likely to undergo in the next decade.' Wrote Fortune magazine: 'Pittsburgh is the test of industrialism everywhere to renew itself, to rebuild upon the gritty ruins of the past a society more equitable, more spacious, more in human scale.'"[26] Nearly everything within the boundaries of the project was demolished save the Fort Pitt Blockhouse, the sole remaining element of the British Fort Pitt.[27] **(image 3.5)** In the eyes of the planners of the Point Park and Gateway Center Project, many of the buildings being demolished were old, but the Blockhouse was the only old building worth saving.

Out of the debris grew Gateway Center: Pittsburgh's answer to the Corbusian tower-in-the-park scheme **(images 3.6 & 3.7)**. It was designed on the idea that the modern city would be composed of tall towers, bathed in light and fresh air, situated amid green park land, and serviced by limited access highways. Gateway Center conformed to these principles with precision. Physically, the new development served as a buffer zone between the old central business district and new Point Park. It was hailed as an imposition of order on a haphazard city. Despite the fact that the development failed to attract the number of office tenants that had been anticipated, the positive feedback from these initial projects incited urban renewal frenzy amongst city officials.

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[25] Dan Fitzpatrick. "The story of urban renewal." Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. 21 May 2000.
[26] Ibid.
[27] The future of the Fort Pitt Blockhouse had been in question several times prior to the Gateway Center/Point Park project. At the close of the nineteenth century, the Pennsylvania Railroad had wished to move the structure to expand its rail yards, but Mary Croghan Schenley, benefactress of the city's Schenley Park, deed the redoubt to the Daughters of the American Revolution for care and protection in perpetuity.

The city's administration set its sights on the Lower Hill District for its next urban renewal project. With the Lower Hill District, the goal was not a park or commercial center. The plan was for a new civic auditorium and eventually a new cultural acropolis. However, in the instance of the Lower Hill, city officials would find that they were not dealing with abandoned rail yards and warehouses as was the case with the Point. They had to contend with a well integrated, and arguably thriving, low to lower middle class community.

The Lower Hill District and the Civic Arena

By the late 1940s, environmental controls were yielding an appreciable difference in the city's environment and the Point Park and Gateway Center Project was close to becoming a reality. City officials saw the timing ripe for the implementation of even bigger plans for civic rejuvenation. A large amphitheater structure for Pittsburgh had been discussed by city officials as early as 1944, but the social and political climate under Mayor Scully and the city's war-time activities proved the suggestion to be premature. The need for an amphitheater or other large event space was recognized as being of great importance to the viability of the city. Pittsburgh had no convention center and no major civic gathering space. The Exposition Hall at the Point had been used in the capacity of a convention space in the past, but was slated for demolition in the Point Park and Gateway Center Project. The Pittsburgh Pirate's Forbes Field (1909) and the University of Pittsburgh's Pitt Stadium (1925) were viable alternatives, but both were privately owned at the time and were largely outdoor venues.

On February 4, 1949, Edgar J. Kaufmann approached Mayor Lawrence about the possibility of constructing a permanent home for the burgeoning Pittsburgh Civic Light Opera (CLO). Kaufmann, Pittsburgh's wealthiest department store magnate, had clearly established himself by the 1940s as a person concerned with civic improvement and as a

patron of art and architecture.[28,29] Lawrence supported the Kaufmann proposal. With funding and support for the project being backed by Kaufmann, the ACCD, and the City, the City Council embraced building a new civic auditorium by a vote of 8 to 1.[30]

The selection of a site for the proposed arena was the first major issue for the city. As early as July 18, 1949, a prospective site for the arena had been chosen. The city had considered 15 different options before settling on a site located in the upper-middle class neighborhood of Highland Park at the terminus of Negley Avenue.[31] Although vacant and relatively flat land was available in this area, the city, under Pennsylvania Public Law 991, was prepared to exercise its newly authorized powers of eminent domain to secure any additionally required land for parking.[32]

The residents of Highland Park strongly opposed the site selection citing a lack of public transportation and inadequate infrastructure for a major public facility in a primarily residential neighborhood. Petitions flooded city hall in opposition to the proposal. "J. Vincent Burke, an attorney representing the signers of the petitions, attacked the 'terrible power of eminent domain.' He charged that in taking the land for entertainment purposes, the city would be exceeding its power."[33] In an attempt to halt the proceedings, Robert B. King—whose estate would be claimed by the project—offered his estate to the City Council for use as parkland upon the event of his death should the site decision be reversed. King was an influential resource for the Highland Park group as he was the uncle of Richard King Mellon, heir to Pittsburgh's Mellon banking empire.

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[28] E.J. Kaufmann, aside from being an avid art collector, had commissioned three major architectural works by the late 1940s; two of which would earn international acclaim: "La Tourelle" (1924) in Fox Chapel, PA by Janssen and Cocken, "Fallingwater" (1936-39) in Bear Run, PA by Frank Lloyd Wright, and the "Kaufmann House" (1946) in Palm Springs, CA by Richard Neutra.

[29] Kaufmann had commissioned Wright to propose numerous pans for Pittsburgh's civic improvement including a scheme for Point Park and Gateway Center as well as a parking garage for the Kaufmann's Department Store. None of Wright's schemes for the city were realized and it would appear as if Kaufmann had, by 1949, abandoned any prospect of pursuing a Wright design for his new arena.

[30] Weber, 266.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Pennsylvania General Assembly. Pennsylvania Public Law 991 (24 May 1945)

[33] Weber, 267

Influence aside, the City Council was unmoved and voted to move forward with the project, going so far as to have test holes for footings dug immediately thereafter. Shortly after the meeting between residents and the City Council, Mayor Lawrence decided to rescind an earlier decision to move forward with the project. He suggested that it would be in the best interests of the city if a new site for the arena were found. He offered no reasoning for his decision.

By 1952, the city was still without an appropriate site for the arena. A second site had been chosen in one of the city's largest parks: Schenley Park. The city owned the land and would not need to resort to the contested tool of eminent domain, but the erection of such a facility as a public auditorium purportedly violated the terms of agreement upon which Mary E. Croghan Schenley had donated the parkland in 1889. Schenley had stipulated that no privately owned institution or building was to be placed in her park. It was argued that a privately funded arena—despite its intended public function—would have been in violation of this agreement.

Almost concurrently with the rejection of the Schenley Park site, the Federal Housing and Home Finance Agency allocated $5,000,000 toward the clearance and renewal of the Lower Hill District. The Hill District had been a neighborhood adjacent to Pittsburgh's Downtown that civic leaders had deemed a substandard, dilapidated slum despite the existence of a vibrant African American community **(image 3.8)**. "In 1943, a member of Pittsburgh's City Council, wrote: 'Approximately 90 per cent of the buildings in the area are sub-standard and have long outlived their usefulness, and so there would be no social loss if they were all destroyed.'"[34] The Federal Housing Act of 1949 and the Federal Housing Act 1954 helped to further legitimize the proposal of urban renewal in the Lower Hill District. An additional $100,000,000 was secured through private investors for the redevelopment of the area and a plan for up-scale

[34] Robert Pfaffmann. "Pittsburgh Civic Arena: Memory and Renewal." Proceedings of the 10th International Docomomo Conference: The Challenge of Change: Dealing with the Legacy of the Modern Movement, 2008. p. 159

housing, the Crosstown Boulevard, and a parking lot for 2000 cars was proposed.[35,36] Space for the accommodation of an arena was later added to the proposal and it was upon the site of the Lower Hill District that the Civic Arena was constructed.

The Hill District had historically been Pittsburgh's refuge to newcomers. The area was among the oldest urban development outside Pittsburgh's central business district. Adjacent to the Woods Plan to the northeast, the Lower Hill District had been home to Pittsburgh's Jewish community, followed thereafter by an in-migration of eastern Europeans in the late nineteenth century, and "... had welcomed tens of thousands of African Americans to the city in the first half of the twentieth century."[37]

Mindy Fullilove, in her book Root Shock: How Tearing Up City Neighborhoods Hurts America and What We Can Do About It asserts that behind the ruse of removing blight was the greater goal of removing minorities from urban centers. Corroborating Fullilove's point, the vagueness of the standards of identifying blight allowed nearly anything to be deemed blighted and razed with federal dollars. With the clearing of 95 acres of the Lower Hill District in the late 1950s and the failure to construct affordable housing in a reasonable quantity, Pittsburgh effectively created a housing crisis for some of its most disadvantaged residents **(image 3.9)**.

The City of Pittsburgh made what was considered to be a good-faith effort to relocate individuals displaced by the Lower Hill District Redevelopment Project, but the majority of displaced persons moved "to other parts of the Hill... as well as to other black communities in Pittsburgh, including East Liberty and Homewood."[38] The city had not solved its problem of blight, but had rather moved its poorest citizens to other

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[35] Weber, 270

[36] One of the issues surrounding the redevelopment of the Lower Hill was the lack of affordable housing. The proposal included the construction of new upscale housing designed by I.M Pei and Associates, but the city in the 1950s had no plans to include affordable housing in the overall development scheme nor did it possess adequate affordable or government subsidized housing elsewhere to accommodate those being relocated.

[37] Mindy Thompson Fullilove. Root shock: how tearing up city neighborhoods hurts America, and what we can do about it. (New York: One World Ballantine Books, 2004) p. 61

[38] Fullilove, 171

communities not as visible to the public eye. The Lower Hill District had been entirely demolished by 1959; not even the street grid remained. Construction of the Civic Arena began around May of that year **(image 3.10)**.

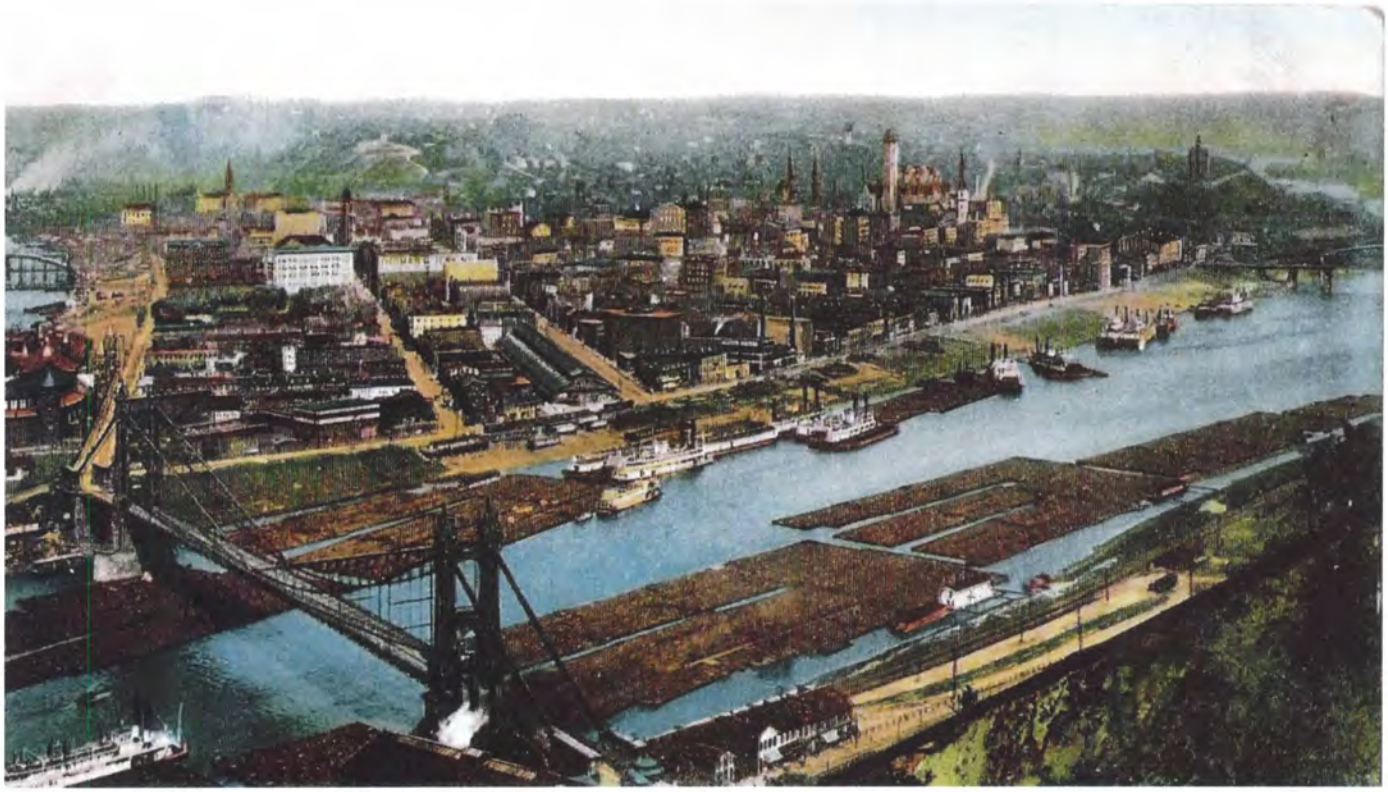

Image 3.1: Pittsburgh's Point at the turn of the 20th century. By the 1940, the area was largely typified by abandoned railroad structures, warehouses, and substandard housing.
Source: Postcard. Author's Personal Collection

Figure 3.2: The "Point" c. 1950 before the execution of the Point Park and Gateway Center Project
Source: University of Pittsburgh Digital Archives: Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania

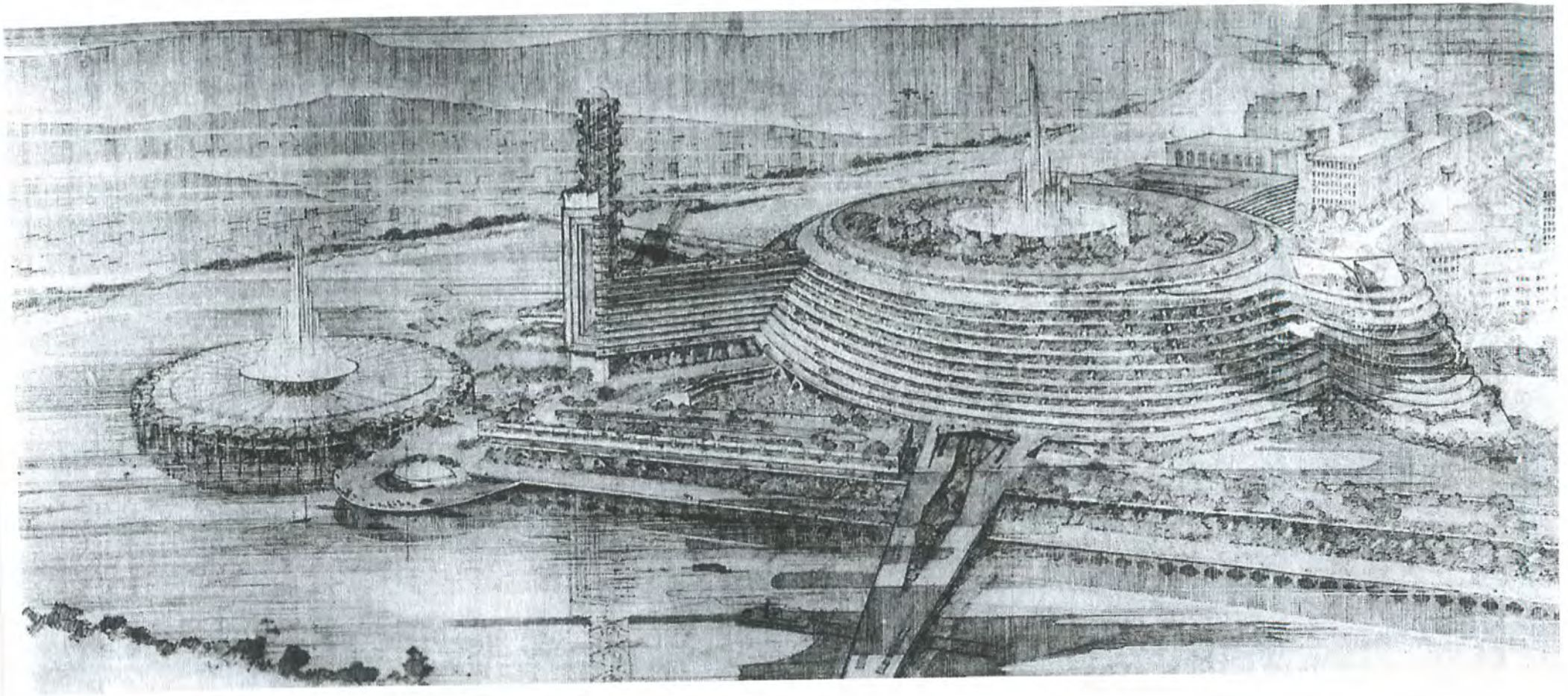

Image 3.3: Frank Lloyd Wright's proposal for the development of the Point
Source: Franklin Toker. Fallingwater Rising: Frank Lloyd Wright, E.J. Kaufmann, and America's Most Extraordinary House. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005)

Image 3.4: Commencement of Demolition for the Point Park and Gateway Center Project, May 18, 1950
Source: University of Pittsburgh Digital Archives: Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania

Image 3.5: Fort Pitt Blockhouse, Constructed 1764
Source: University of Pittsburgh Digital Archives: Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania

Image 3.6: Gateway Center Towers under construction, c. March 1955
Source: University of Pittsburgh Digital Archives: Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania

Image 3.7: Gateway Center Towers and Pennsylvania State Office Building after completion.
Source: Postcard. Author's personal collection.

Image 3.8: Pittsburgh's Lower Hill District prior to demolition for the Lower Hill Redevelopment and Civic Arena Project
Source: University of Pittsburgh Digital Archives: Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania

Image 3.9: Demolition of the Lower Hill district for construction of the Civic Arena, August 1957
Source: University of Pittsburgh Digital Archives: Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania

Image 3.10: Civic Arena completed, 1961
Source: University of Pittsburgh Digital Archives: Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania

Chapter 4:

Pittsburgh's East End and the East Liberty Project

A History of Pittsburgh's East End: Its Development, Rise to Prominence, Decline, and Renewal

Contribution of the Forbes Road

The East Liberty valley is located five miles east of Pittsburgh's historic downtown. The communities in this area are collectively referred to as the East End **(image 4.1)**. Many of the neighborhoods of the East End had their beginnings as stopping points along the historic Forbes Road. Forged in 1758 during the French and Indian War, the Forbes Road was constructed as little more than a military path. Named for British General John Forbes, the road stretched from Fort Bedford in present day Bedford County, Pennsylvania to Fort Duquesne at the confluence of the Allegheny and Monongahela rivers. As was the case with many military paths in southwestern Pennsylvania, the Forbes Road was incrementally improved and expanded as a commercial trading route after the French and Indian War. By the early nineteenth century it had become a major artery for travel between Pittsburgh and Philadelphia.[39]

As the southwestern region of Pennsylvania expanded, the Forbes Road grew in importance. Early settlers in the East Liberty Valley regarded the route as a critical lifeline to the burgeoning City of Pittsburgh and the bounty of the Pennsylvania hinterland. The viability of the communities along the road depended on its periodic improvement. Each jurisdiction developed, improved, and maintained the Forbes Road, but each did so differently. Some paved the road while others simply maintained an otherwise unimproved trail. The importance of the road to the East Liberty Valley is demonstrated by its unprecedented width.

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[39] From an 1821 account of a Mr. M.B. Augustin, the journey across the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania took only 10 days on foot. John Fulton Stuart Collins, Jr. Stringtown on the Pike. (East Liberty Chamber of Commerce, 1968) p.39.

Within the boundaries of old East Liberty, the Forbes Road grew to an expansive 100 foot width. At the time of the community's development, the route was merely a dirt road, but it was understood that as the community grew, the road would need to expand. As a result, a 100 foot wide right-of-way was granted to the street. The vision of a grand boulevard running through the community was an early foresight in community planning. It ensured East Liberty's success as a commercial center and would factor heavily into the later development and redevelopment of the community. In an anecdote retold by Georgina G. Negley in her publication for the centennial celebration of the East Liberty Presbyterian Church, she recounts the skepticism of early settlers concerning the need for such a road. She writes:

> *On March 8, 1816, a civic charter was granted to Pittsburgh, and in the same year the Pittsburgh and Greensburg turnpike was constructed through East Liberty... The fact of its being constructed one hundred feet wide through what is now the business portion of East Liberty is due to the sagacity and foresight of Jacob Negley, who made a strenuous plea to the other property holders that this width should continue all the way into the city, but they failed to share his wider vision. However, he laid out a portion which passed through his own and his wife's domain the desired one hundred feet... As Mr. Negley superintended the moving back of his fences, his neighbors and passing travelers jocularly criticized his waste of land, but he calmly replied that the day was coming when the valley would need a wide thoroughfare.*[40]

This improved section of the old Forbes Road—to later be renamed the Pittsburgh and Greensburg turnpike—would develop into the western leg of the larger Pittsburgh

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[40] Georgina G. Negley. East Liberty Presbyterian Church with Historical Setting and Narrative of the Centennial Celebration. (Pittsburgh: Murdoch, Kerr & Co. Press, 1919) p. 7.

and Philadelphia turnpike.[41] Portions of the historic road would carry traffic for other well-known Pennsylvania thoroughfares like the William Penn Highway. Today, the Forbes Road is most well known within the city limits of Pittsburgh as Penn Avenue; the main commercial artery of Pittsburgh's East End.

Early Settlement

The first permanent settler of European descent in the East Liberty area was Alexander Negley in 1778. "The valley was long known by the name of Negleytown, the name having been given by travelers who passed to and fro between Pittsburgh and Philadelphia..."[42] The incorporated town of East Liberty was established in 1819 by surveyor, engineer, and landowner Jacob Negley who "...laid out the town... with its center at Penn Avenue and Frankstown Avenue, giving it the name East Liberty."[43] **(image 4.2)** What began as nothing more than a large accumulation of farms along a military path, a village grew as a result of the area's fortuitous location near a gristmill, corridor of travel, and sources of fresh water. The village became a popular stopping point for the changing and watering of horses for those traveling eastward. But horses were not the only creatures enjoying brief respite in East Liberty. The village became known as a place with a significant number of taverns; the Black Horse Tavern and Beitler's Tavern being among the most popular.[44] But the area was not only a center for agriculture and tavern culture. As the community grew, East Liberty became a nexus of several prominent roads: Penn Avenue, Frankstown Avenue, Mill Street (Collins Avenue, now Penn Circle East), and Negley Lane (Negley Avenue). From its inception, the village was almost guaranteed to become a cradle of commercial endeavor.

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[41] In considering the naming of the "Greensburg Turnpike," it is important to be mindful of the importance of Greensburg in relation to Pittsburgh. In the late 18th century, the land now distinguished as Allegheny County and Westmoreland County were not separate. The entire area was simply known as Westmoreland County. Greensburg, or more precisely, Hanna's Town, was the seat of Westmoreland County. The Greensburg Turnpike served not only Eastward travelers, but also accommodated those who were on municipal business. Under pressure from officials in Pittsburgh, Allegheny County was formed in 1788 with Pittsburgh declared the seat in 1791.
[42] Negley, 5.
[43] Collins, 41.
[44] Ibid, 53.

Development as a Commercial and Residential Center

In 1851, the Pennsylvania Railroad purchased land for the laying of tracks through the village of East Liberty. With the goal of supplanting the Pennsylvania Main-Line Canal, "[o]n February 15, 1854, the Pennsylvania Railroad was formally opened between Pittsburgh and Philadelphia."[45] Until this point, East Liberty had developed autonomously from Pittsburgh due to its five mile separation from the city proper. The area was under the jurisdiction of the City of Pittsburgh, but it had developed its own shops and religious institutions to serve its growing base of residents. The building of the Pennsylvania Railroad opened East Liberty to the Pittsburgh region. An economic boom was inevitable. Not only was commerce to improve, but reliable commuter transportation to the East Liberty district ensured the growth of its residential base and the expansion of its religious institutions.

The area became an instant success, but not for everyone. Ethel Spencer, a member of the middle class who was raised in the East End community of Shadyside, recalls: "The new modes of transportation had inadvertently linked the fashionable suburb with the central business district while, at the same time, isolating one residential community from another. By creating the neighborhoods in distant semirural tracts, these middle class families became increasingly segregated from the neighborhoods of the laboring classes."[46] The East End served as an escape for upwardly mobile Pittsburgher's who were looking to escape the cramped confines of the city proper.

As the middle class grew and more people sought refuge in the East End, the large farms that had defined the East Liberty district—the farms of the Negleys, the Roups, and the Aikens—were divided for speculation. Thomas Mellon, patriarch of Pittsburgh's Mellon National Bank (later Mellon Financial and presently BNY/Mellon) saw

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[45] Negley, 9.
[46] Spencer, Ethel. The Spencers fo Amberson Avenue: A Turn-of-the-Century Memoir. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1984) p. xix.

promise in the speculative development of the area. Mellon relocated his family to East Liberty **(image 4.3)** and other wealthy families followed.

The type of speculative subdivision and construction that became popular in East Liberty during the nineteenth century explains the architectural vocabulary present today. Many of the East End communities are comprised of detached, architect designed homes of the upper middle class, but East Liberty is characterized by row houses divided by party walls and smaller, detached single family houses based on a common plan. There is a mix of housing typology in each of the East End communities, but the speculative row house and small, detached house are the dominant features of the residential sectors of East Liberty.

Whereas there was much building going on in the late nineteenth century in the East End, the neighborhoods did not immediately become entirely built-out. Tracts of pasture land existed well into the twentieth century. In another account of Ethel Spencer, she recalls the nature of the East End in the 1890s:

> *Behind the row of cannas at the end of our backyard a heavy wire fence shut off the cow pasture... Occasionally, cattle were still driven up Amberson Avenue from the Shadyside Station, where they were unloaded, to the stockyards at Point Breeze, and no farther away than Oakland...*[47]

The expanse of pasture land became one of the major selling points for the East End communities. East Liberty became highly desirable due to many of the same reasons that the city's Oakland District became popular during the City Beautiful movement. East Liberty was situated on an elevated plateau, offered sweeping views of unspoiled land, and was far removed from the squalor of industry. Many believed that the area's elevation exempted it from the ills of the pollution that plagued the rest of the city; although late nineteenth century medical thought was unsure of the effects that coal smoke had on health. The East End was, in all accounts, a prestige address.

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[47] Spencer, 4.

As the physical and social structuring of the East End changed, East Liberty was also quickly becoming the primary commercial node for the area. Not unlike the suburbs of today, much of the area exhibited an almost strictly residential character. Houses lined the majority of the streets and very small commercial districts could be found scattered throughout. These smaller commercial districts served the everyday needs of their communities. But these small commercial districts rarely extended beyond two or three blocks and none comprised much more than the local tailor, butcher, grocer, or baker. East Liberty, however, as mentioned previously, was situated serendipitously along one of the city's most widely traveled thoroughfares: Penn Avenue. The district sat at the confluence of seven distinct East End neighborhoods: Shadyside, Highland Park, Garfield, Friendship, Point Breeze, Larimer, and Homewood-Brushton **(image 4.4)**. As a node of transportation, East Liberty developed as the primary commercial center for all of the East End communities. By the 1920s, East Liberty had assumed the title of Pittsburgh's "Second Downtown," exhibiting not only the commercial fortitude that comes with such a title, but also the first-rate architecture that is expected of such a center **(image 4.5)**.

The buildings of the East Liberty district demonstrated a rich mélange of aesthetic movements **(image 4.6)**. By the mid-twentieth century, for a community so comparatively young, East Liberty was known for experimenting with the latest architectural trends. The main cross-streets of the district, Penn and Highland Avenues, were demonstrative of nearly every popular architectural style since the beginning of the community's active development. The Rittenhouse Hotel **(image 4.7)**, rich with Beaux Arts detail, was in dialog with the heavy Romanesque of the Bethany Evangelical Lutheran Church **(image 4.8)** across the street, which was a block away from the castellated exterior of Engine House No. 8. For a time, even an eighteenth century log cabin remained at the northern corner of Negley and Penn Avenues **(image 4.9)**. The Liberty Bank Building, a brusque, stone clad Romanesque affair is one of the extant

early tall buildings in the area; rising six stories **(image 4.10)**. The classically inspired Highland Building, completed in 1910 by the Chicago firm of D. H. Burnham & Co., rose to an unprecedented 13 stories. The East End Savings and Trust Company building also rose to 13 stories, but asserted itself as the tallest building at the time by climbing slightly higher than the Highland Building **(image 4.11)**. In 1935, Ralph Adams Cram's East Liberty Presbyterian Church was built. Rising 300 feet in Neo-Gothic splendor, it dominated everything.[48] **(image 4.12)** All the while, the peripheral residential districts developed in the most fashionable aesthetic vocabulary of the day. East Liberty was a community in a state of nearly constant flux. But by the 1930s, the constant development that had come to define East Liberty would drastically change.

Decline of the Neighborhood

Like many American communities, the boom of the early twentieth century gave way to the bust of the Great Depression. "While there were many problems that were slowly choking East Liberty, most of these centered on three main factors: a serious traffic circulation problem, a high vacancy rate for commercial space, and deteriorating residential units."[49]

Development Patterns and Traffic Circulation

Because East Liberty had developed as a residential suburb of Pittsburgh and not as a natural outward expansion of the city proper, the development patterns in the district exhibited the characteristic similarities of a first-ring suburb. Although eventually annexed as part of the city, East Liberty had always been low density. Uncharacteristically large buildings were constructed in the early twentieth century, but much of the area was modest in terms of size, density, and land coverage.

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[48] The church was the fifth church of the congregation—on the same site—in just over 100 years.
[49] Sorley S. Sheinberg. Case study, the East Liberty Urban Renewal Project : with a brief history of the events of the Pittsburgh Renaissance leading to the project. Internship report (M.P.A.) (University of Pittsburgh, Graduate School of Public and International Affairs, 1974.) p. 18

In the residential sections, large tracts of detached and semi-detached, single family dwellings sat on modest plots of land. The grand avenues—Penn, Highland, Negley, Frankstown, and Larimer—served as the primary thoroughfares connecting the residential and commercial sectors. Smaller residential streets, not unlike the cul-de-sacs of modern suburbs and subdivisions, were often poorly connected **(image 4.13)**.[50] The neighborhood was pedestrian-oriented, but relied heavily on the streetcar and commuter train as the primary modes of transportation.[51] But as automobile ownership increased following World War II, the streetcar centered neighborhood was ill-equipped to handle the influx of traffic that it would experience. Penn Avenue, at 100 feet in width, was the widest of the avenues servicing the district. In actuality, Penn Avenue was among the widest avenues servicing any part of Pittsburgh. But much of Penn Avenue's 100 feet width had been dedicated to sidewalks and street cars. The automobile was drastically changing the nature of the community. The East Liberty district was essentially a suburban neighborhood being forced to address distinctly urban problems.

Deterioration of Residential Stock

Having developed as a middle class residential area, the majority of the housing stock in East Liberty reflected the socioeconomic status of its residents. It was small and modestly constructed. But the idyllic qualities of East Liberty in the latter part of the nineteenth century made it a prime location for the residences of the Pittsburgh elite. Built primarily along Negley Avenue, the mansions of the well-to-do defined this portion of the district as one of the most aesthetically pleasing in the East End. But the ratification of the Sixteenth Amendment and the Federal Income Tax in 1913, in addition

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[50] G.M. Hopkins Map, 1890

[51] The commercial core centering on Penn Avenue and Highland Avenue served much of the East Liberty area. There was a distinct and recognizable line between commerce and residence. In East End communities that developed too far from the East Liberty commercial district—such as Larimer and Shadyside—to be reasonably well serviced, additional, smaller commercial nodes developed (Larimer Avenue in Larimer and Walnut Street in Shadyside).

to the gradual decline of Pittsburgh's industries, left most of Pittsburgh's industrial barons with very little monetarily.[52] Many, finding their fortunes depleted, left Pittsburgh. Other wealthy individuals—like Thomas Mellon—being of advanced age in the beginning of the twentieth century, died; their fortunes and estates to be divided amongst their next of kin. In the majority of cases, the homes of the wealthy were abandoned or sold to the highest bidder.

Concurrent with the socioeconomic restructuring of East Liberty, a new group of individuals began to take up residence. Prior to World War II, East Liberty began to experience its first major influx of lower middle class residents. With the Great Depression causing strife in Pittsburgh's hinterland, the unemployed flocked to the city in hopes of finding employment in the mills and factories. It was at this time that the community adjacent to East Liberty—Bloomfield—began to see its once large German population squeezed out by Italian immigrants. Whereas this influx of people meant a greater taxable base for the city, it also made for the city's first shortage of housing. A restructuring of the East Liberty district's long-time residents began to occur as well. Life-long East End resident Salvatore Belmonte recalls having moved from the adjacent Italian community of Larimer—where his father worked as a tailor—to a predominantly Jewish enclave on Mellon Street in East Liberty in 1939. His family had lost its house to the Depression and, like many others families, relocated to more affordable accommodations.[53] But not all families were able to find a new house like the Belmontes. With the mansions of East Liberty recently vacated, and few other high-density accommodations available, the estate houses of the wealthy were divided—often illegally—into smaller units to accommodate the influx of new people and those who had lost their homes to the Depression.

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[52] Some sources place the initial decline of industry in Pittsburgh as early as the late 1910s and early 1920s.
[53] Justin Greenawalt. Interview with Salvatore Belmonte. February 12, 2010.

Commercial Decline

With the influx of new socio-economic groups, the East Liberty neighborhood slowly became less desirable to middle and upper class families who had initially settled the area. Although by no means had East Liberty become a slum, "East Liberty, in the past a strong in-city organism, began backsliding in 1945, no longer able to compete in the post-war world."[54] The issues affecting this backslide were only compounded by the effects of economic depression and the entry of the United States into World War II.

The issue of "white flight" also had a profound impact of the structuring of the City of Pittsburgh. "City dwellers migrated outward into the suburbs followed by an increasing number of businesses... The large commercial core was experiencing declining revenues and profits, while new shopping centers in the suburbs were enticing shoppers."[55] The once bustling core of Pittsburgh's second downtown, for the first time in its history, began to witness a slow and seemingly uncontrollable decline as its clientele moved away and the businesses that served them followed.

Upwardly mobile residents of East Liberty moved to the suburbs, but for the newcomers to the area and the residents who stayed, frugality was of great importance. New construction ceased with the completion of East Liberty Presbyterian Church in 1935. No major investment would come to the district until the late 1950s and no new building would occur until 1965. Much as the residential sector suffered in the aftermath of the Great Depression, so did the commercial core. The commercial core was not blighted in a conventional sense, but it had begun to lose its appeal as a destination to those outside of the district. Also, many of those who lived in the area, worked downtown; meaning that a significant number of East Liberty residents also did their

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[54] Sheinberg, 18
[55] Sheinberg, 18

shopping Downtown.[56] Its ability to compete with suburban shopping centers and an American society increasingly reliant on the automobile also contributed to its viability being compromised.

[56] Justin Greenawalt. Interview with Salvatore Belmonte. February 12, 2010.

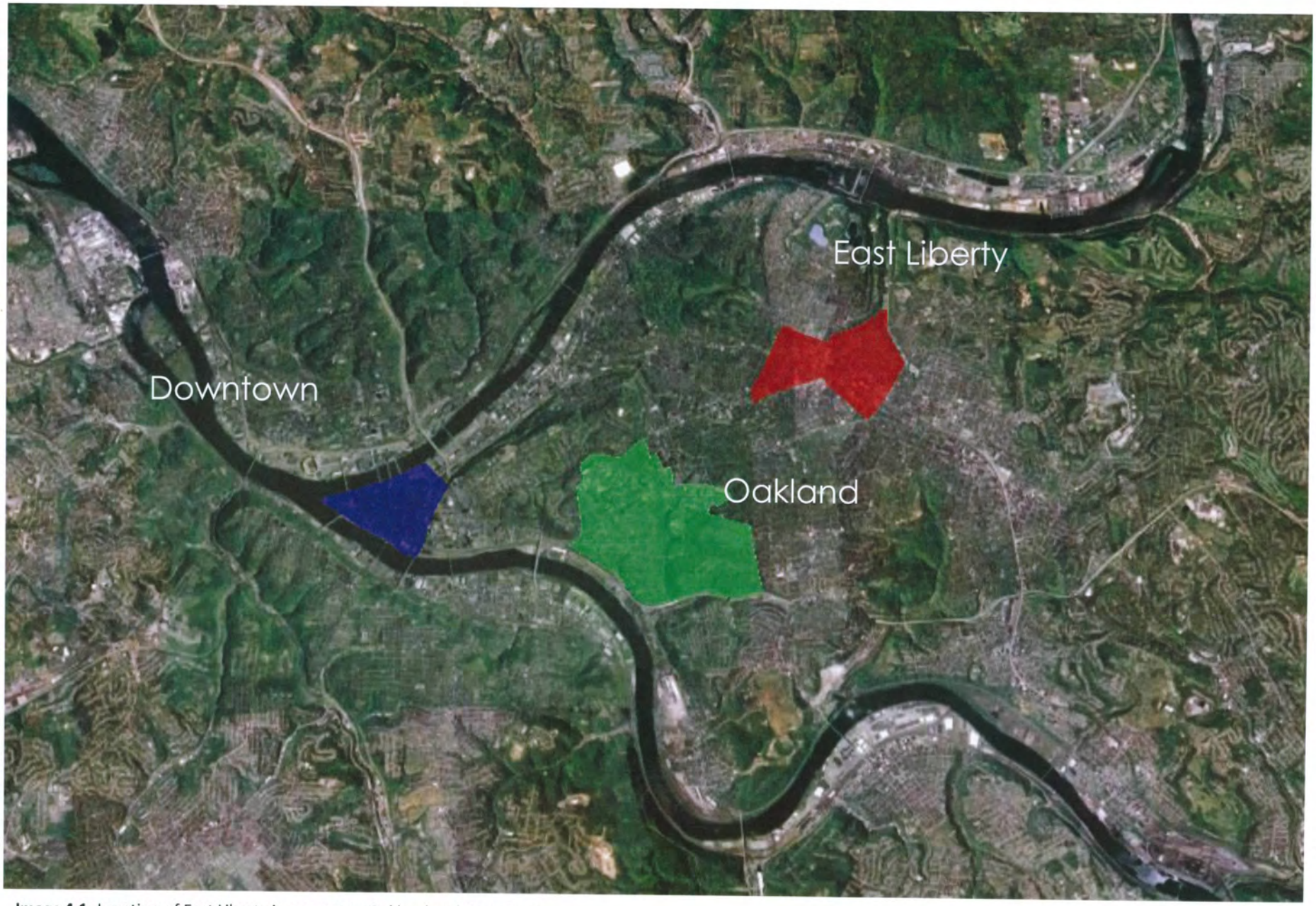

Image 4.1: Location of East Liberty in respect to Oakland and Downtown
Source: Google Earth

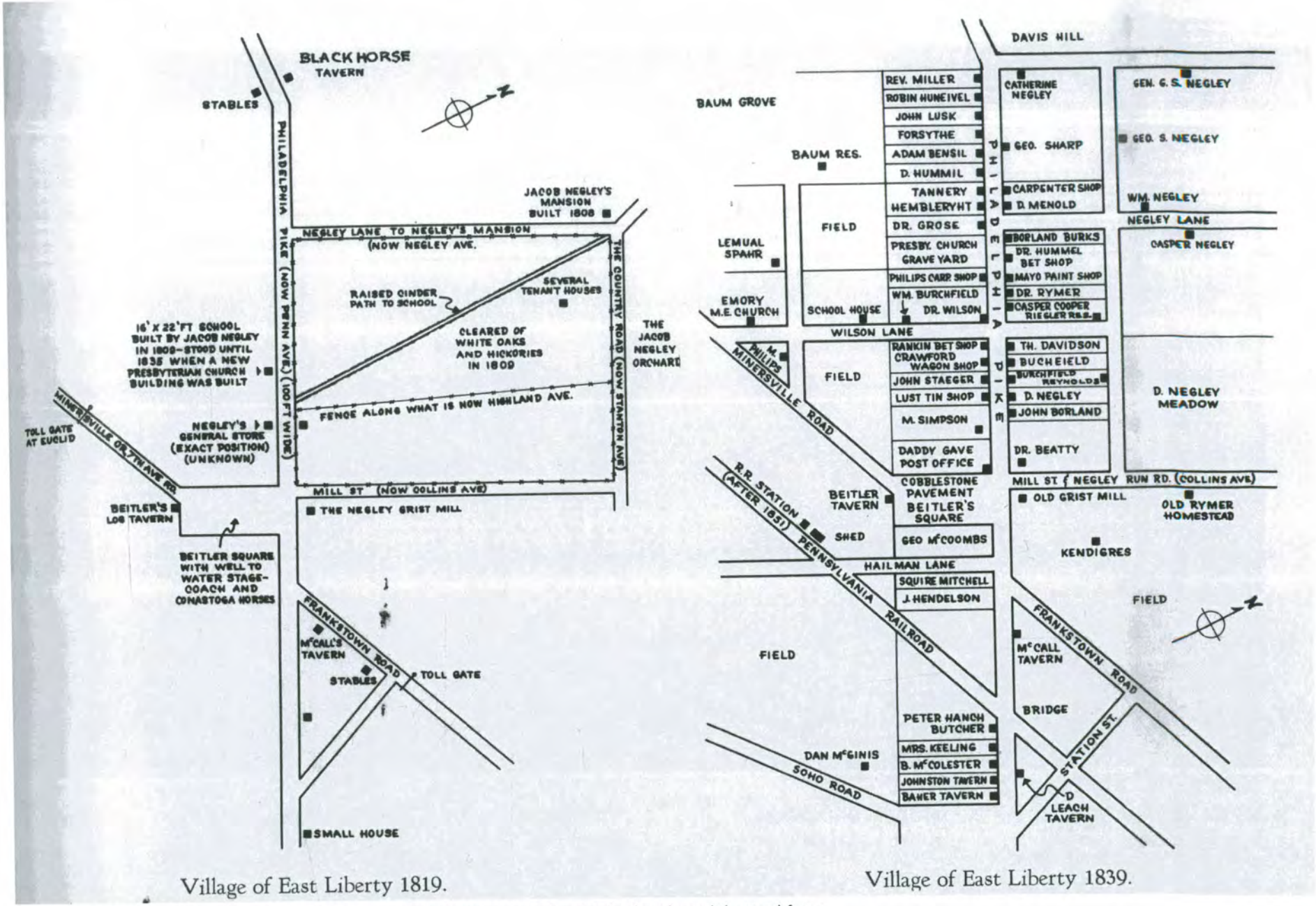

Image 4.2: Early configurations of streets in East Liberty showing sites of major landmarks and thoroughfares.
Source: John Fulton Stuart Collins, Jr. Stringtown on the Pike. Michigan: Edwards Brothers. p. 48.

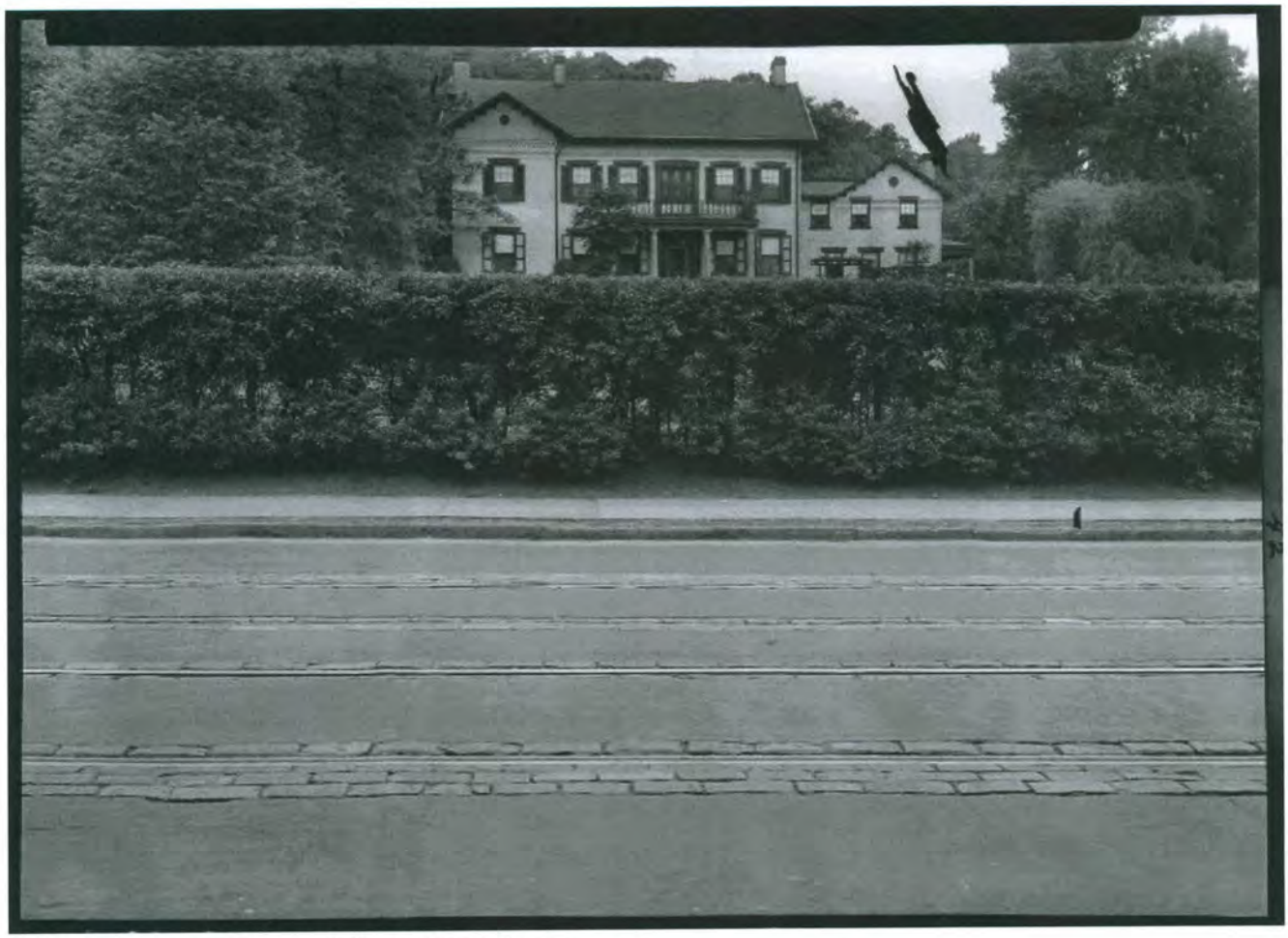

Image 4.3: House of Thomas Mellon at 401 N. Negley Avenue.
Source: University of Pittsburgh Digital Archives: Pittsburgh City Photographer Collection

Image 4.4: Aerial photograph of East Liberty prior to urban renewal demonstrating the convergence of numerous primary streets and avenues. Source: University of Pittsburgh Digital Archives: Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania

Image 4.5: Penn Avenue looking east, East Liberty, May 2, 1928
Source: University of Pittsburgh Digital Archives: Pittsburgh City Photographer Collection

Image 4.6: East Liberty, 1960. Penn Avenue looking east demonstrating the aesthetic melange of the district.
Source: University of Pittsburgh Digital Archives: Pittsburgh City Photographer Collection

Image 4.7: Beaux Arts Rittenhouse Hotel with Engine House No 8 at far left on Highland Avenue
Source: Postcard. Author's personal collection

Image 4.8 (left): Bethany Evangelical Lutheran Church
Source : John Fulton Stuart Collins, Jr. Stringtown on the Pike. Michigan: Edwards Brothers. p. 168.

Image 4.9 (above): Log cabin at the intersection of Penn and Negley Avenues
Source: Postcard. Author's personal collection.

Image 4.10: May 2, 1928, Penn Avenue looking East. Liberty Bank Building on left,
Source: University of Pittsburgh Digital Archives: Pittsburgh City Photographer Collection

Image 4.11: East End Savings and Trust Company (left), Highland Building (right)
Source : John Fulton Stuart Collins, Jr. Stringtown on the Pike. Michigan: Edwards Brothers. p. 182

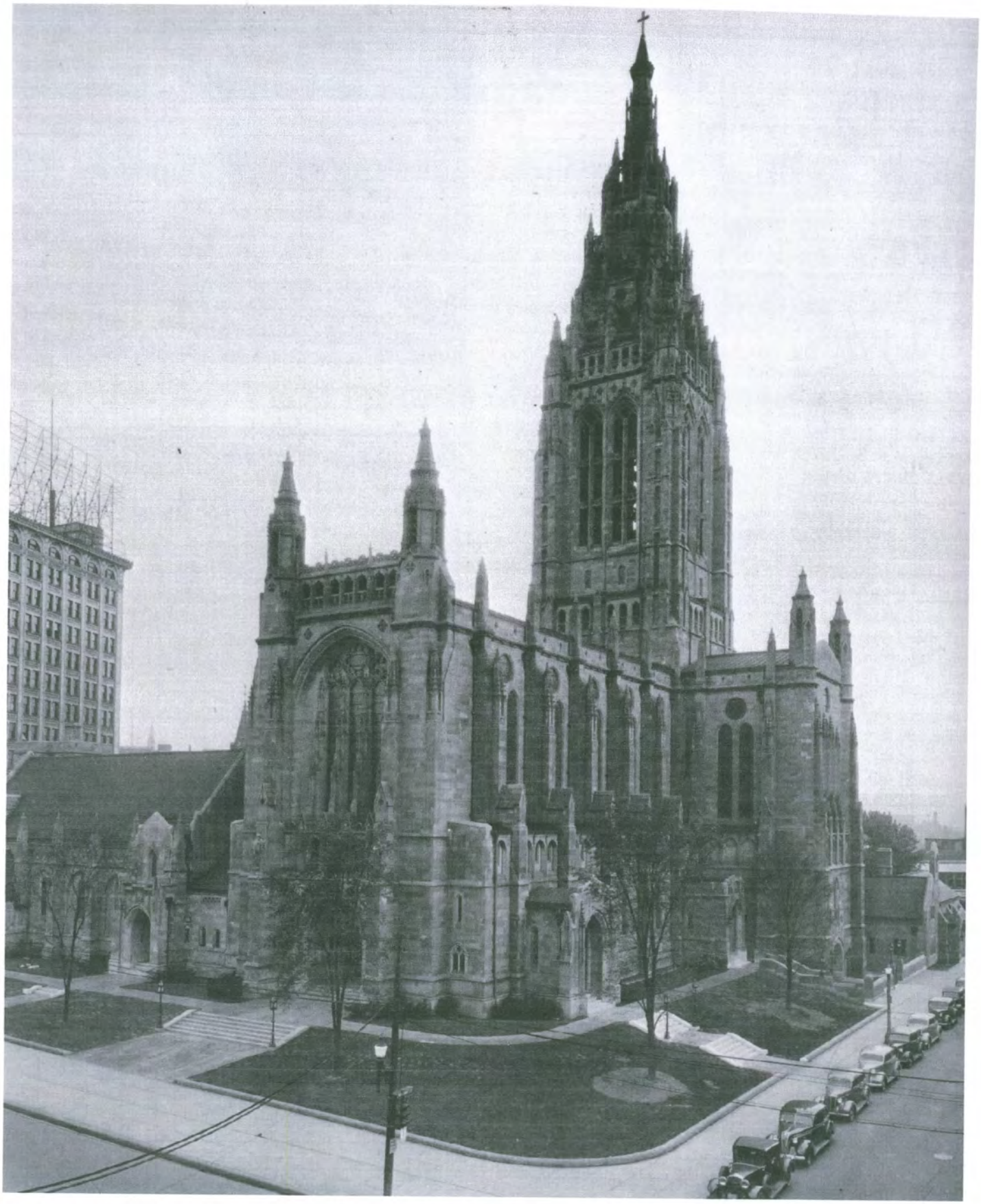

Image 4.12: Ralph Adams Cram's Cathedral of Hope, more commonly known as East Liberty Presbyterian Church
Source : John Fulton Stuart Collins, Jr. Stringtown on the Pike. Michigan: Edwards Brothers. p. 181

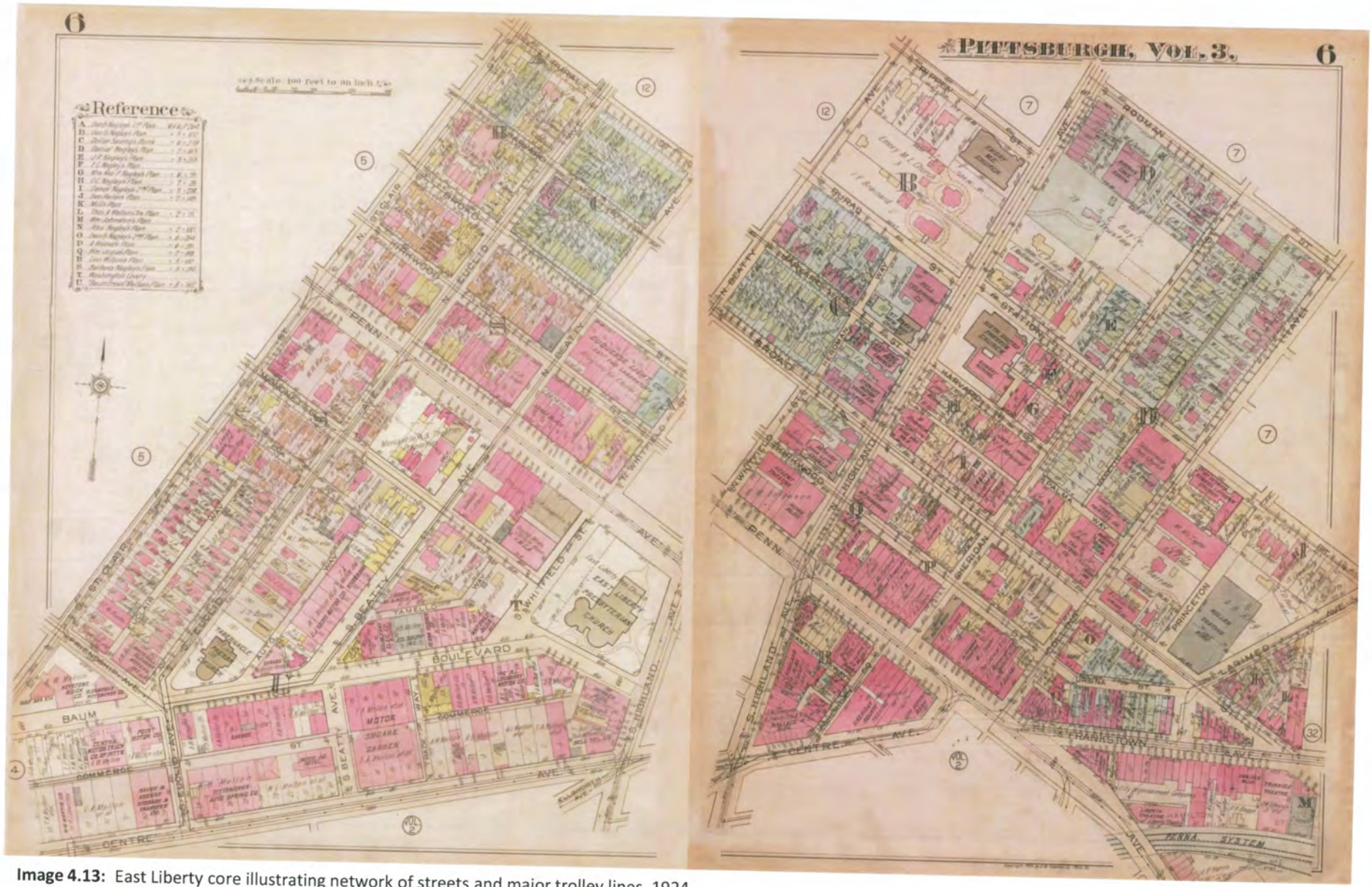

Image 4.13: East Liberty core illustrating network of streets and major trolley lines, 1924.
Source : University of Pittsburgh Digital Archive: G.M. Hopkins Fire Insurance Maps

Chapter 5:

The Urban Renewal Era in East Liberty: Development, Ideology, and Implementation

By the late 1950s, business owners in East Liberty recognized the signs of an imminent decline. The nature of business within the American city was changing. To the larger businesses in East Liberty, the neighborhood had begun to manifest the symptoms of that change. Civic leaders sought assistance from city officials. At the time, the Lower Hill District and Civic Arena project was underway and the Point Park and Gateway Center Project had been recently completed. Community leaders saw it only fitting that East Liberty should benefit from the renaissance that was sweeping the city.

With East Liberty as one of the most important commercial centers in the city, the Chamber of Commerce supporting the initiative, and federal programs willing to back nearly two-thirds of the total cost of a project, the city welcomed a proposal for renewal. Pittsburgh's Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) assumed the role of developer of the project. Two of the individuals working to develop the East Liberty Project from the URA were Robert Pease and Alan B. Jacobs. Jacobs described then-contemporary views on urban planning as "modernist" with no ideological sense for saving existing buildings.[57] But a new concept was being implemented in East Liberty that had not been used in other renewal projects. Considering that the East Liberty business community had pushed for the revitalization efforts, there was an effort to enlist the help and input of those who would be affected by the project. "Throughout th[e] Project there was a portion of the business community that was deeply involved. Those businessmen were essentially, representatives of the large merchants and institutions; Hahn's, Mansmann's, Sears, Pittsburgh National Bank, Century Federal, and Friendship Federal. There were some small businessmen represented but generally, it

[57] Justin Greenawalt. Interview with Dr. Allan B. Jacobs. October 2, 2009.

was the large merchants, who were heavily invested in East Liberty, that were really interested in renewal and pushed it."[58,59] The general public was also engaged.

Due to the immensity of the redevelopment proposal "[i]n December of 1959 the renewal plan was divided into three phases..."[60] Federal funding also proved insufficient to complete the entire project at once. "On June 16, 1960, a crowd formed in City Council chambers... Acting on the competitive fears of East Liberty's largest retailers, [the URA] proposed to redevelop an area three-fourths the size of Downtown. At 254 acres, it was the largest urban renewal project ever attempted in Pittsburgh."[61] July 6, 1960 signaled the true beginnings of the project with a 7-1 vote by the City Council to move forward.[62] "A Federal cash grant of $7.6 Million was allocated to the East Liberty renewal program in December, 1960 and shortly thereafter, the URA, through its contractual relocation agent, the Housing Authority of the City of Pittsburgh, established a field office in East Liberty."[63] In all, 1,017 parcels of land were to be acquired for the project. The process of acquisition began in March of 1961.[64]

"The traditional character of East Liberty... was the basic factor in the development of an urban renewal plan. The prime objectives were:

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[58] Sheinberg, 100

[59] The groundswell of support for the revitalization effort was spearheaded by two of the most well established business owners of the area—the May-Stern Department Store and Hahn Furniture. The May-Stern Store, located at the intersection of Penn and Highland Avenue, was already in a prime location, but saw that need for the commercial district to improve. Hahn Furniture, however, had much to gain from playing the part of an instigator in an urban renewal plan. The Hahn Furniture Store had, previous to renewal, been located on Frankstown Avenue in a peripheral section of the commercial core. Whereas the area of East Liberty centering around Penn and Highland Avenues had significantly developed at the opening of the twentieth century, the section of the district along Frankstown Avenue was comprised primarily of one and two story wooden buildings. Hahn Furniture had been considering an expansion of their business prior to the redevelopment of the district. The proposal of such a project in East Liberty was the prime opportunity for Hahn Furniture to not only expand, but potentially be relocated to a more desirable location. As one of the most successful businesses still in East Liberty, the involvement of the owner of the Hahn Furniture Store was the major driving force behind the choice of a mall concept and ultimately the determining factor for whether or not such a plan would be implemented.

[60] Sheinberg, 26

[61] Dan Fitzpatrick. "East Liberty Then: Initial makeover had dismal results." Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. May 23, 2000.

[62] Sheinberg, 28

[63] Sheinberg, 28

[64] Sheinberg, 28

(1) To restore East Liberty to its previous stature as a residential neighborhood by conserving and upgrading existing housing in the area and by creating substantial amounts of new housing for families of lower, middle and upper income levels.

(2) To restore the vitality of the business core by creating opportunities for new investment and large-scale commercial rehabilitation. Two of the main aims of the renewal plan were to relieve traffic congestion which had been strangling the area, and to provide the business community with 'built-in markets' through the development of new and rehabilitated housing."[65]

At the center of the plan, in addition to housing, was an initiative to convert the commercial core of East Liberty into a pedestrian mall **(images 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4)**.

What is a Pedestrian Mall?

> *A true pedestrian mall is created by permanently converting a cartway to an area for foot traffic. It implies that curbs are removed, and the entire public right of way is repaved in a unified design utilizing materials conducive to walking. Mall furniture is intended to be relatively immobile... In general utility lines are placed underground, and sign sizes and the distance they may protrude onto the right of way are strictly regulated. The façades of structures facing the mall are given some form of unified architectural treatment.*[66]

This definition, given my Michael Rosner in his 1966 thesis The Pedestrian Mall: Financing and Performing Maintenance and Operation, accurately depicts the majority of permanent pedestrian malls implemented in cities across the United States.

Although a development of the urban renewal movement, the pedestrian mall in the United States was itself a nationwide phenomenon. "...[P]lanners chose this strategy

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[65] Sheinberg, 30

[66] Michael Howard Rosner. The Pedestrian Mall: Financing and Performing Maintenance and Operation. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 1966) p. 54

to help save the cores of their cities between 1959, when the first downtown mall was implemented in Kalamazoo (Michigan), and the mid-1970s."[67] It was developed "...out of the need for renewing downtown shopping areas to compete with suburban shopping centers, to create a new image for a city, to increase retail sales, to strengthen property values, and to promote investor interest."[68] But the pedestrianization of urban space was not a new concept.

The American idea of the pedestrian mall was derived of the European commercial district model. Many European cities implemented traffic free zones in the 1950s and 60s.[69] But the European model was ideologically dissimilar to the one implemented in the United States. "...[T]he goals sought with European pedestrian malls were tied more closely to conservation of the urban fabric and improvement in downtown residential conditions than to economic development."[70] Still, the pedestrian mall was viewed by planners as an idea that could be adapted to achieve the goal of economic revitalization in the United States. Looking to their European counterparts, designers of American pedestrian malls sought to create undulating street walls, interesting vistas, intimate spaces, and large communal plazas by manipulating existing built fabric.[71] There is a common misconception that the pedestrian mall was like many other urban renewal initiatives: harsh, sterile, and lacking good design. The reality was that pedestrian malls were often lush, carefully orchestrated spaces that were not only intended to enliven commercial districts, but serve as a shopping experience.

In pedestrianizing space, there was also the underlying desire to control the automobile. The automobile had become a double-edged sword in that it revolutionized transportation more completely than anything that had come before, but at the same

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[67] Kent A. Robertson. "The Status of the Pedestrian Mall in American Downtowns." *Urban Affairs Review.* v. 26, 1990. p. 251
[68] Harvey M. Rubenstein. Central City Malls. (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1978.) p.vii.
[69] Robertson, 251
[70] Ibid.
[71] Justin Greenawalt. Interview with Dr. Allan B. Jacobs. October 2, 2009.

time was destroying the established and familiar aspects of urban society. The negative impact of the automobile is made clear as early as 1923 when Le Corbusier sowed the seeds of urban automobile reform in his work The City of To-Morrow and Its Planning. He states: "To-day traffic... is like dynamite flung at hazard into the street, killing pedestrians."[72] Nearly 35 years later, renowned commercial architect and planner Victor Gruen asserted that, "... the solution to coexistence of the human and the automotive populations *does not lie in the taming and training of people, but in the taming of the motorcar.* I am not in favor of the destruction of automobiles, not even necessarily of the diminution of the automotive population, but I am most definitely in favor of domesticating it, and making it useful to the human race, just as we did with the horse and the cow and with various types of poultry."[73] The pedestrian mall became the popular method of enacting automobile reform by completely removing it from high-traffic pedestrian commercial areas.

No two pedestrian malls were alike. Each mall responded to the issues of its particular locale. When opting for a mall treatment to revitalize a disinvested urban commercial area, planners generally chose one of three treatments: an experimental mall, a permanent pedestrian mall, or an enclosed shopping center.[74] In East Liberty, planners would opt for a permanent pedestrian mall.

In addition to taming traffic, in East Liberty the idea of implementing a pedestrian mall was put forth as a means of combating the indoor, suburban malls that were beginning to appear on the periphery of the city. While still in the early planning stages, a plan for a suburban mall in nearby Penn Township threatened the East Liberty Project.[75] The careful planning of the proposed East Liberty mall was critical, but still, "[t]he mall treatment generated considerable debate... There was a major project suggested by

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[72] Le Corbusier, The City of To-Morrow and Its Planning. (Dover Publications, 1987) p. 168
[73] Victor Gruen. The Heart of Our Cities: Urban Crisis: Diagnosis and Cure. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1964) p. 212
[74] Rosner, 51
[75] Justin Greenawalt. Interview with Dr. Allan B. Jacobs. October 2, 2009.

a group that both URA and a group from the Chamber [of Commerce] fought successfully. The project would, within the East Liberty area, install a totally air-conditioned mall which would immediately make everything else outside it a distressed area."[76] Regardless of stance on the pedestrian mall, city administrators feared that "...without a thriving downtown area [the American] urban culture--and with that probably our civilization, which is an urban one—[would] be dealt a death blow."[77] Although the idea is sensational, in observing the slow death of traditional urban commercial centers, it is easy to see how city administrators viewed this point as being valid.

Looking to other cities for inspiration, the idea for the East Liberty pedestrian mall came directly from the Toledo "Shoppers' See-way", an experimental pedestrian mall that had been constructed in Toledo, Ohio and operated from 1959 to 1960.[78] **(image 5.5)** The Shoppers' See-way exhibited the characteristic features of an experimental mall. It entailed no major infrastructure changes. Streets were closed to automobile traffic with temporary barriers. Street furniture was placed in the street bed to create the atmosphere of a permanent pedestrian mall. Skepticism as to the mall's effectiveness was expressed by merchants and city administrators. This was the reason for the temporary nature of the Shoppers' See-way.

Experimental malls were common. They were executed on a trial basis—typically for a few weeks to a few months—and then either removed or made permanent with the necessary infrastructure changes. The Toledo experiment was doing well at the end of its trial period. A 1959 newspaper article tells of shoppers "...[going] about their shopping in a leisurely park-like setting of trees, flowers and music. ...[A] sharp contrast

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[76] Sheinberg, 85-86
[77] Rosner, 43
[78] Justin Greenawalt. Interview with Dr. Allan B. Jacobs. October 2, 2009.

to downtown Toledo... when vehicular traffic monopolized the downtown area."[79] Although the Shoppers' See-way was popular as a consumer attraction, city administrators opted to dismantle the experimental mall and reopen the street to vehicular traffic in 1960.

There are several issues with experimental malls that made them poor examples to copy. First, many malls initially attracted a high number of shoppers out of curiosity. Many people came to experience the mall, not to patronize the stores. In many instances, most experimental malls were not in existence long enough to supply urban planners with the data to reflect this trend. Second, they were often poorly planned and caused traffic congestion. They lacked the kind of infrastructure changes like parking lots and widened streets that were needed to accommodate the automobile traffic displaced by the pedestrianized area. Third, the loading and unloading areas necessary for getting goods in and out of stores was not taken into consideration. Fourth, poor design was one of the most apparent flaws of the experimental mall. Planners did not consider it necessary to expend effort on properly designing a temporary fixture. As a result, experimental malls were rarely made permanent and were poor examples to replicate.[80]

In the instance of East Liberty, it was merely the *idea* for a pedestrian mall that came from Toledo. The vision for the type of pedestrian mall implemented in East Liberty was based largely on a plan developed for Fort Worth, Texas by Victor Gruen. Gruen was an Austrian-born architect who is known widely for his contributions to mid-twentieth century American commercial design. Although the pedestrian mall was a widely replicated model, Gruen's role in developing the governing precepts of the

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[79] "Mayor Sees Mall Boon to Toldeo." Bridgeport, Connecticut: Sunday Herald. September 6, 1959. p. 1,9
[80] Rosner, 53

American pedestrian mall cannot be discounted. His 1959 Kalamazoo Mall in Kalamazoo, Michigan is recognized as the first pedestrian mall in the United States.

The Fort Worth Plan exhibited the maturation and crystallization of the pedestrian mall concept. **(image 5.6)** The plan was enormous in its scale. It called for immense roads located in building-free green zones on the periphery of a newly pedestrianized commercial core. Underground networks of service tunnels were proposed. Public transportation throughout the pedestrian core was a key component of the plan. Although many existing buildings were to remain, Gruen asserted that a plan lacking automobile-related structures like parking lots and garages would allow for the creation of a new place identity in the commercial core. Gruen likened his plan to a medieval European city: distinctly pedestrian and ringed with defenses. In the example of Fort Worth, the defenses were the peripheral ring roads and parking garages. The bombardment was the automobile.[81] Of the plan, noted urban theorist Jane Jacobs writes:

> *The plan by Victor Gruen Associates for Fort Worth... has been publicized chiefly for its arrangements to provide enormous perimeter parking garages and convert the downtown into a pedestrian island, but its main purpose is to enliven the streets with variety and detail.... To these ends, the excellent Gruen plan includes in its street treatment sidewalk arcades, poster columns, flags, vending kiosks, display stands, outdoor cafes, bandstands, flower beds, and special lighting effects.... The whole point is to make the streets more surprising, more compact, more variegated, and busier than before—not less so. One of the beauties of the*

[81] Gruen, 213 - 221.

> *Fort Worth plan is that it works with existing buildings, and this is a positive virtue, not just a cost-saving expedient.*[82]

The praise that Jacobs had for the Fort Worth plan is compelling. As someone who earned her notoriety as a staunch opponent to the urban renewal movement, she is regarded as *the* voice of the grass-roots preservation movement. But Jacobs was not alone in her praise for the pedestrianization of urban commercial centers. Celebrated American historic preservationist James Marston Fitch stated in his text Historic Preservation: Curatorial Management of the Built World:

> ...[M]*ost central-city districts, in their basic street patterns, predate modern vehicular traffic by centuries. Even when large in extent, they are small in scale, fundamentally designed to facilitate pedestrian movement.... Such areas can be enjoyed only on foot. This suggests a policy of permitting no wheeled traffic in such areas (except for fire, ambulance, waste removal, and so on) is the correct one. Though merchants in such areas are initially skeptical of the impact of such measures on retail trade, they have proved to be successful in certain cities...*[83]

The support that both Jacobs and Fitch had for pedestrianized commercial centers speaks to the shift toward community-oriented planning that was happening within the urban renewal movement in the 1960s.

New Practices in East Liberty

The East Liberty Project was by no means a copy of Gruen's Fort Worth plan, but rather an adaptation and simplification of many of the governing principles of the plan. Pittsburgh had defined itself as a city willing to experiment with the *en vogue* planning

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[82] Jacobs, Jane. "Downtown is for People" The Exploding Metropolis. Berkeley and Los Angeles: The University of California Press, 1993. 162-163.
[83] Fitch, James Marston Historic Preservation: Curatorial Management of the Built World. Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 1990. 63.

principles of the day. This is exemplified by the fact that, on a national level, the East Liberty Project was "...the first pedestrian mall born from redevelopment in an area other than the central business district."[84]

The pedestrian mall served as the vehicle for implementing a new type of renewal procedure in Pittsburgh. "The East Liberty Project was the first major rehabilitation project in the Pittsburgh area. Rehabilitation, in contrast to total clearance, imposes constraints upon renewal. Roughly half the project area was to be conserved and improved... The process of rehabilitation was comparatively new in the Country and there was little in the way of experience to draw from. Considering the unfamiliarity of the process, the degree of success in East Liberty is respectable."[85] Whether or not urban renewal era planners understood the social benefit of preserving historic fabric as one does today is debatable, but the actions of the East Liberty Project planners helped to retain some sense of place identity while forging a new, redefined commercial district.

But saving existing built fabric was not only reserved for the pedestrianized commercial core. "The significance of the East Liberty Urban Renewal Project [was] that it served as a transition project between those early industrial-commercial projects and the ... emphasis on neighborhood residential renewal."[86] In the heavily residential sectors of the project, houses were only claimed and demolished if they had deteriorated beyond the point of salvage. One of the reasons given for this is reflected in a comment by planner Allan B. Jacobs, who had spent a great deal of time documenting the buildings and people in the proposed renewal area. He said: "...it was a lot more difficult to put an 'x' on someone's house when you knew the people who lived there."[87] Admittedly, the word "blight" was ill-defined and loosely used in referring to sub-standard properties, but never before in Pittsburgh had the term "blight" been used to

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[84] Rosner, 4.
[85] Ibid, 108
[86] Sheinberg, 12
[87] Justin Greenawalt. Interview with Dr. Allan B. Jacobs. October 2, 2009.

describe individual buildings as opposed to entire areas. Illustrating this point, "[t]here were eleven houses on Omega Street, located in the clearance area, scheduled for demolition. **(image 5.7)** The people who lived in those homes objected very strenuously. The residents... persuaded the planning staff and the executive director that their homes could fit into the plan.... A plan was worked out whereby those homes were retained instead of taken."[88] A program was developed through which homeowners could apply for funding to rehabilitate their properties.

Innovations did not stop with saving built fabric or assisting residents in rehabilitating their own properties. The project also incorporated "...the involvement of a substantial number of residents... It was the first project in the Renaissance that began to deal with neighborhood and residential problems, questions and issues. Following this project, the emphasis shifted to planning for residential neighborhoods..."[89] This further illustrates the transitional nature of the East Liberty Project. It was the first project of its kind in Pittsburgh and one of many nationwide that implemented the kinds of community involvement that is standard in pursuing redevelopment today.

Implementation

Beyond the intangible, ideological precepts of the East Liberty Project were the objectives of bringing real, measurable change to the area. Two of the most prominent objectives of the East Liberty Project were:

(1) An improved traffic circulation system which would enable auto movement to proceed around the East Liberty core by way of Euclid Avenue, Center Avenue, Collins Avenue and Station Street, thereby removing unnecessary through traffic from internal business streets. (After a great many studies on origin and destination URA found that 70 percent of the traffic had neither origin nor destination in the area. During rush hour the figure rose to 80 percent just

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[88] Sheinberg, 87
[89] Ibid, 82-83

passing through... Therefore, the loop road was designed to keep traffic off the shopping streets...)

(2) Conversion of portions of Penn Avenue, Highland Avenue and Broad Street into... shopping malls, designed to meet the specific needs of the pedestrian shopper...[90]

Traffic Circulation

East Liberty Boulevard, a landscaped, four-lane residential boulevard on the periphery of the project area, would serve as the outermost artery for traffic that wished to bypass the East Liberty commercial core entirely **(image 5.8)**. Citing that nearly 70% of all traffic in East Liberty was through-traffic, allowing these automobiles to circumnavigate the area would free the district from unnecessary congestion. East Liberty Boulevard, following what had been Margaretta Street and portions of Hamilton Avenue, made an arc connecting Negley Avenue with Penn Avenue.[91] The boulevard had few intersections and kept traffic signals to a minimum so as to promote the flow of traffic.

Closer to the commercial core, Penn Circle was the first true traffic loop in the East Liberty Project **(image 5.9)**. With rush-hour through-traffic following East Liberty Boulevard, the primary goal of Penn Circle was to accommodate those who had their destination in East Liberty. As an additional function to the facilitation of the flow of traffic, the planners of Penn Circle used the opportunity to redesign what they viewed as unnecessarily complicated intersections that had resulted from haphazard nineteenth century development.[92] Penn Circle was designed as a four-lane, unidirectional road with

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[90] Sheinberg, 33-34

[91] When the Margaretta Street portion of East Liberty Boulevard was constructed, the street was widened to the south. All existing structures adjacent to Margaretta were demolished. The lost buildings were replaced with new units in a contemporary architectural mode. This dichotomy creates a tension between the mixed-use, old built fabric to the north of the boulevard and the 1960s era low-rise housing to the south. It serves to demonstrate East Liberty Boulevard as being the northernmost boundary of the 254 acre East Liberty Project.

[92] One such intersection manifested itself at the meeting of Centre, Penn, Collins, and Frankstown Avenues. The street that would become Penn Circle South (Centre Avenue), prior to urban renewal, had abruptly ended in a street wall and then sharply angled itself to meet with Penn Avenue. This configuration resulted in an unwieldy three-way intersection that, during rush hour,

minimal cross-road interference. In considering the structure of the four-lane system, the center two were dedicated lanes for those wishing to circumnavigate the district The outer-most lane was dedicated to exiting the loop and entering the surrounding residential neighborhood and the inner-most lane allowed those who wished to patronize the commercial core to access the parking areas. **(image 5.10)**. "In order to compensate for the elimination of on-street parking [in the new commercial core], Simons and Simons [*sic*] and the URA provided 26 peripheral lots for public parking."[93] These lots functioned to clearly delineate the commercial core from the surrounding residential district.

Inside Penn Circle was a third circle that was intended to facilitate the movement of vehicles within the commercial core. This circle, like Penn Circle, was unidirectional and linked the various parking areas with the pedestrian mall. The inner circle also provided access for delivery trucks to the service alleys behind each of the storefronts that faced onto the pedestrian mall. Although an integral aspect of the greater plan, the inner circle was implemented, but only partially. The southeastern arc of the circle linking Bigelow Boulevard with Sheridan Square via Antler Way was only partially completed.

The Pedestrian Malls

Penn Avenue, Highland Avenue, and Broad Street were the streets selected to be closed in East Liberty. The Penn Mall extended from Beatty Street in the west to Penn Circle East in the East. The Highland Mall extended from Antler Way in the South to Penn

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caused traffic to bottleneck and become a hazard. With the implementation of Penn Circle, this intersection was altered so that Centre Avenue was able to meet Penn Avenue in a way that was conducive to traffic flow. Mere feet from the Centre and Penn intersection, Frankstown Avenue met with Penn and Collins Avenue in a fork configuration. This awkward configuration of streets, so developed because of original property lines and an unwillingness on the part of landowners when the streets were laid out, created for extreme automobile congestion at the height of rush-hour. It was the goal of Penn Circle to alleviate this congestion. In the plan, the two intersections were made one and Frankstown Avenue, at least within the boundaries of the project plan, was completely eradicated.

[93] "At last! You can get there from here."*Industrial Design* v.15 n. 4 May 1968. p. 55

Circle North in the north. The Broad Mall Extended from Whitfield Street in the west to Penn Circle East in the east. In the average plan for a pedestrian mall, "...a mall is more than two blocks long, automobile traffic is allowed to cross the main street at key intersections. Usually signal lights control traffic flow to protect pedestrians."[94] In the case of East Liberty, the Penn Mall occupied three east-west blocks, the Highland Mall occupied nearly three north-south blocks, and the Broad Mall occupied another three east-west blocks.

The most respected Pittsburgh-based architecture and landscape architecture firms of the day were given the task of designing the major structures of the new commercial core. Among the firms selected were Tasso Katselas Associates, Simonds and Simonds, Howard, Burt & Hill, and Liff, Justh & Chetlin. But the most recognizable elements of the East Liberty Project were designed by Tasso Katselas Associates and Simonds and Simonds.

Tasso Katselas Associates

The megalithic residential towers that once punctuated the periphery of the East Liberty Project (East Mall, Liberty Park, and Penn Circle Apartments) as well as several low rise developments (Pennley Park and Penn Plaza) were the work of architect Tasso Katselas **(image 5.11)**. These buildings represent an aesthetic vocabulary that exemplifies Katselas's work dating from the period. The high rise structures, as the tallest buildings in the district, functioned to visually define the new commercial core and served as communities within a community. From an engineering standpoint, Katselas's buildings were advanced in that they possessed no steel or concrete superstructure. "[They] may be the highest building[s] ever built without one."[95] The buildings were an essay in prefabricated construction. Using factory-made concrete components, steel rods, and thick brick buttressing walls, the bulk of an entire floor could be constructed in

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[94] Ibid, 54
[95] "20 Stories 'Popping Up' Fast." *Pittsburgh Press*. Section 8. December 8, 1968. p. 1

three days.[96] Katselas's buildings were engineering masterworks. Four of the five mentioned above stood for nearly 40 years before being demolished in the mid to late 2000s.[97]

Simonds and Simonds and John Ormsbee Simonds

Where Katselas's buildings served residential redevelopment in the East Liberty Project, the work of Simonds and Simonds satisfied commercial redevelopment and provided an integral public gathering space for East Liberty. The firm is credited with having designed the pedestrian malls that were implemented at the heart of the project. John Ormsbee Simonds, a Harvard educated, nationally-renowned landscape architect and planner, established the landscape architecture and urban design firm of Simonds and Simonds in Pittsburgh in 1939 along with his brother Phillip. The firm is known today as Environmental Planning and Design, LLC. The existing mid-century work of the firm is among the most celebrated and studied landscape architecture in Pittsburgh today. Mellon Square **(image 5.12)**—designed by Simonds and Simonds in collaboration with Mitchell & Ritchey—is nationally regarded as a masterwork of urban park planning and design. It is a listed National Historic Landmark. The firm's plaza in Gateway Center **(image 5.13)** is, more than fifty years later, still one of Pittsburgh's notable urban parklets. The East Liberty pedestrian mall was an evolutionary progression of these works.

The mall was a physical incarnation of John Ormsbee Simonds's belief that cities should be "...conceived as three-dimensional civic art and in terms of meaningful patterns form and open space." [98] He viewed American cities as being "...oriented to our traffic-glutted streets."[99] With the precept of molding meaningful space out of a tired, congested urban street, Simonds and Simonds created a lush landscape for the East

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[96] "20 Stories 'Popping Up' Fast." *Pittsburgh Press*. Section 8. December 8, 1968. p. 1
[97] As of May 2010, the only remaining, unaltered Katselas building in East Liberty is Penn Plaza.
[98] John Ormsbee Simonds. Landscape Architecture : A Manual of Site Planning and Design (4th Edition). (McGraw-Hill Professional Publishing, 2006) p. 320.
[99] Ibid.

Liberty pedestrian mall. The plan employed fountains, grand public spaces, impromptu plazas, multi-level planting beds, trees, and pagoda-like shelters to make the place an urban destination. Simonds and Simonds collaborated with Peter Muller-Munk Associates (PMMA) on the aesthetic scheme for the mall **(image 5.14)**.[100] "For the placement of street furniture, PMMA superimposed a grid (on a module of one foot) over the street and specified that no shop sign be lower than seven feet above the sidewalk or overhang. Suggesting that the undistinguished and often ramschackle appearance of most of the buildings could be improved with a coat of paint, the firm provided a color chart of eight base building colors—earth tones to resist grime..."[101] The PMMA aesthetic scheme was implemented as a pilot project but never fully implemented.

The entire mall was paved in a geometric pattern using a uniform material of contrasting gray and white pebbled concrete; a trademark of the firm's mid-century work. The space functioned as more than mere park space and it recreated East Liberty as more than a commercial district. It made East Liberty a shopping experience. The Simonds and Simonds design of the East Liberty pedestrian mall is among the most important urban spaces to ever be destroyed in Pittsburgh. **(image 5.15)**.

Actual work did not commence until 1965 and was slow to proceed. Utility lines were placed underground and the water mains necessary to service the planned water features for the mall were laid. The 100 foot expanse of Penn Avenue was narrowed to a single lane for bus traffic and all remnants of the trolley infrastructure were removed. Over one million square feet of built fabric (nearly one-third of the overall commercial core) was demolished to increase density in the commercial core and achieve an area that was financially sustainable by the decreasing residential population **(images 5.16 & 5.17)**. The majority of the buildings demolished for the project were those sited along Frankstown Avenue to the east of the new condensed commercial core.

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[100] "At last! You can get there from here."*Industrial Design* v.15 n. 4 May 1968. p. 55
[101] Ibid.

Despite the slow, incremental progress, on August 1, 1966, Charles Schwartz, President of the East Liberty Chamber of Commerce, expressed his delight with the progress made thus far. In a statement before the City Council, he said:

> *Several years have elapsed since the institution of the East Liberty Urban Renewal Program. A great deal has been accomplished, yet significant steps toward completion remain to be executed. As you travel through East Liberty today, you see the dawn of a new era characterized by new housing units completed and under construction; new concrete streets, handsome by any standards, set amid an environment being freed of overhead utility line; and finally, a good assortment of newly-erected commercial structures. These gems are set amid a mass of rubble, dust and confusion, as the slow but steady ace of the renewal program goes forward. Discouragement, despair and difficulty are slowly being replaced in East Liberty by encouragement, confidence, and ebullient hope... May I express the appreciation of the members of the East Liberty business community to each member of the Council for the continuing interest you have shown in East Liberty. We are confident your interest and support will yield a large measure of return for the over-all interests of the City of Pittsburgh.*[102]

Schwartz's address demonstrates the optimism of the East Liberty business community and clearly illustrates its confidence in the East Liberty Project to succeed.

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[102] Collins, 219.

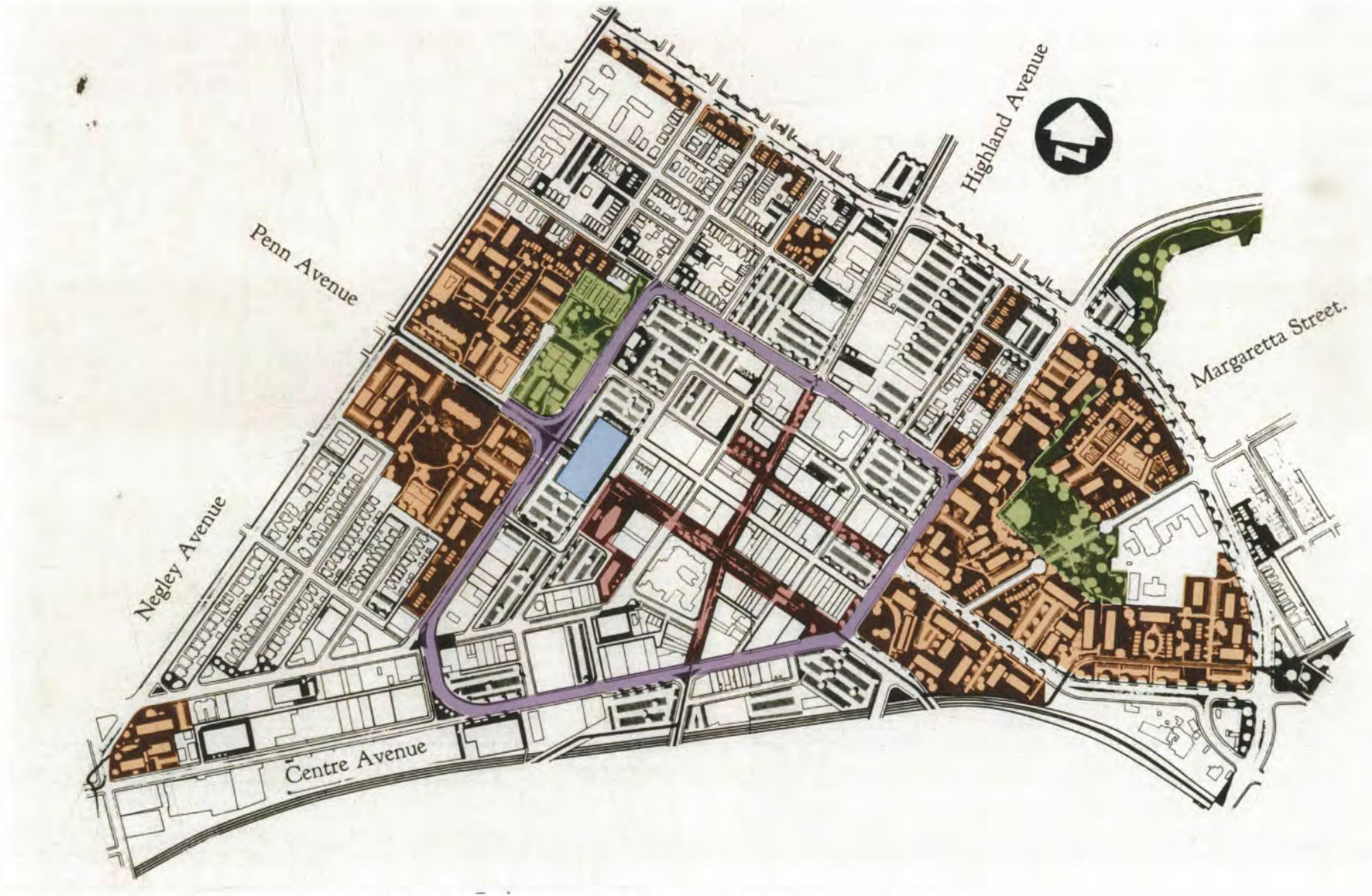


Image 5.1: Preliminary plan for the East Liberty Project showing and early concept for a pedestrian mall (red), a major building spanning Penn Avenue in the west (blue), Penn Circle (violet), new residential development (orange), and new park space (green).
Source : John Fulton Stuart Collins, Jr. Stringtown on the Pike. Michigan: Edwards Brothers. p. 181 (color added)

Image 5.2: Revised plan for East Liberty Project. Proposed Land use, 1966.
Source : Urban Redevelopment Authority of Pittsburgh. "Proposal for the Redevelopment of Redevelopment Area No. 10 in the seventh, eighth, eleventh, and twelfth wards of the City of Pittsburgh, County of Allegheny, Pennsylvania." 1966

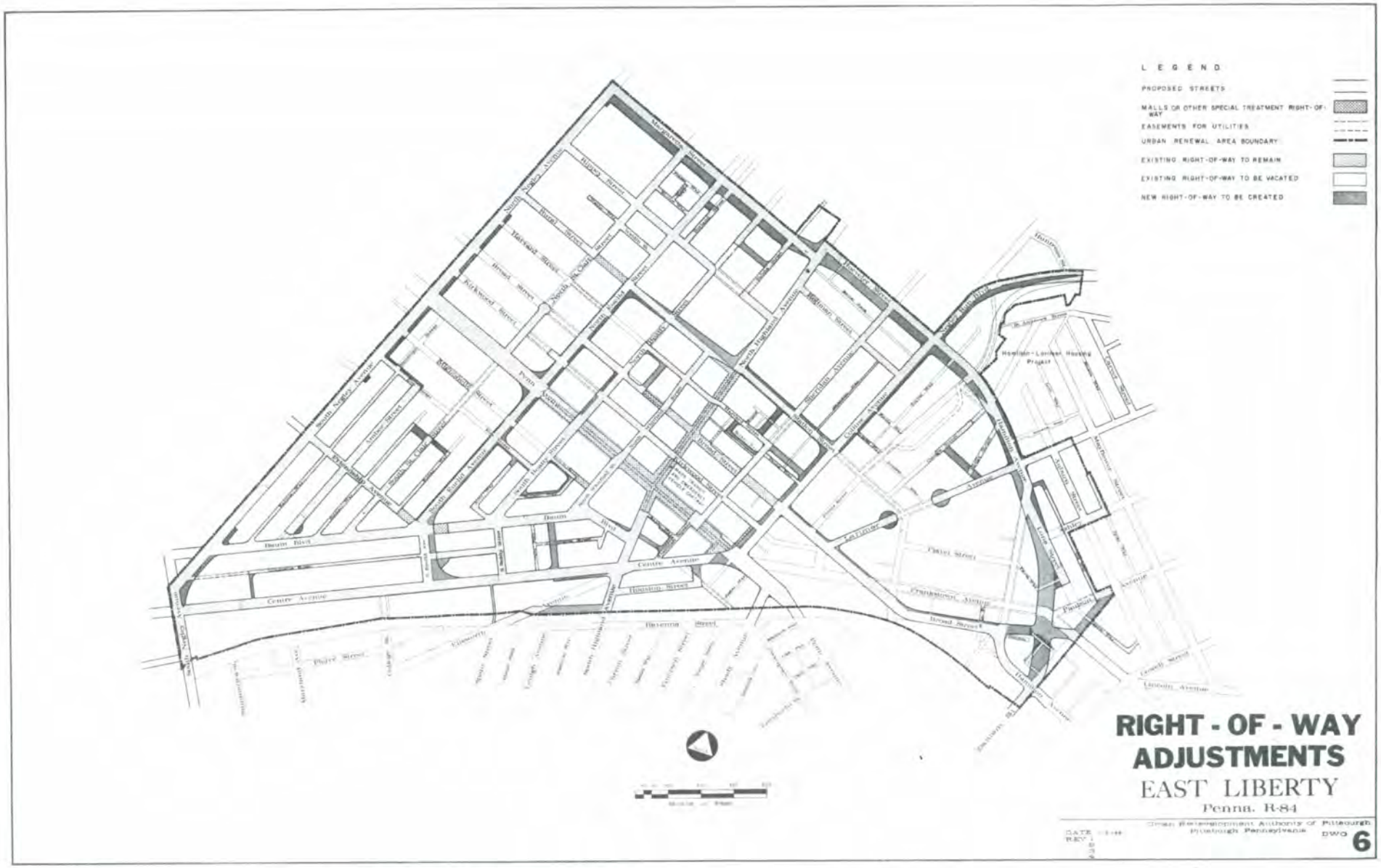


Image 5.3: Revised plan for East Liberty Project. Right-of-Way Adjustiments, 1966.
Source : Urban Redevelopment Authority of Pittsburgh. "Proposal for the Redevelopment of Redevelopment Area No. 10 in the seventh, eighth, eleventh, and twelfth wards of the City of Pittsburgh, County of Allegheny, Pennsylvania." 1966

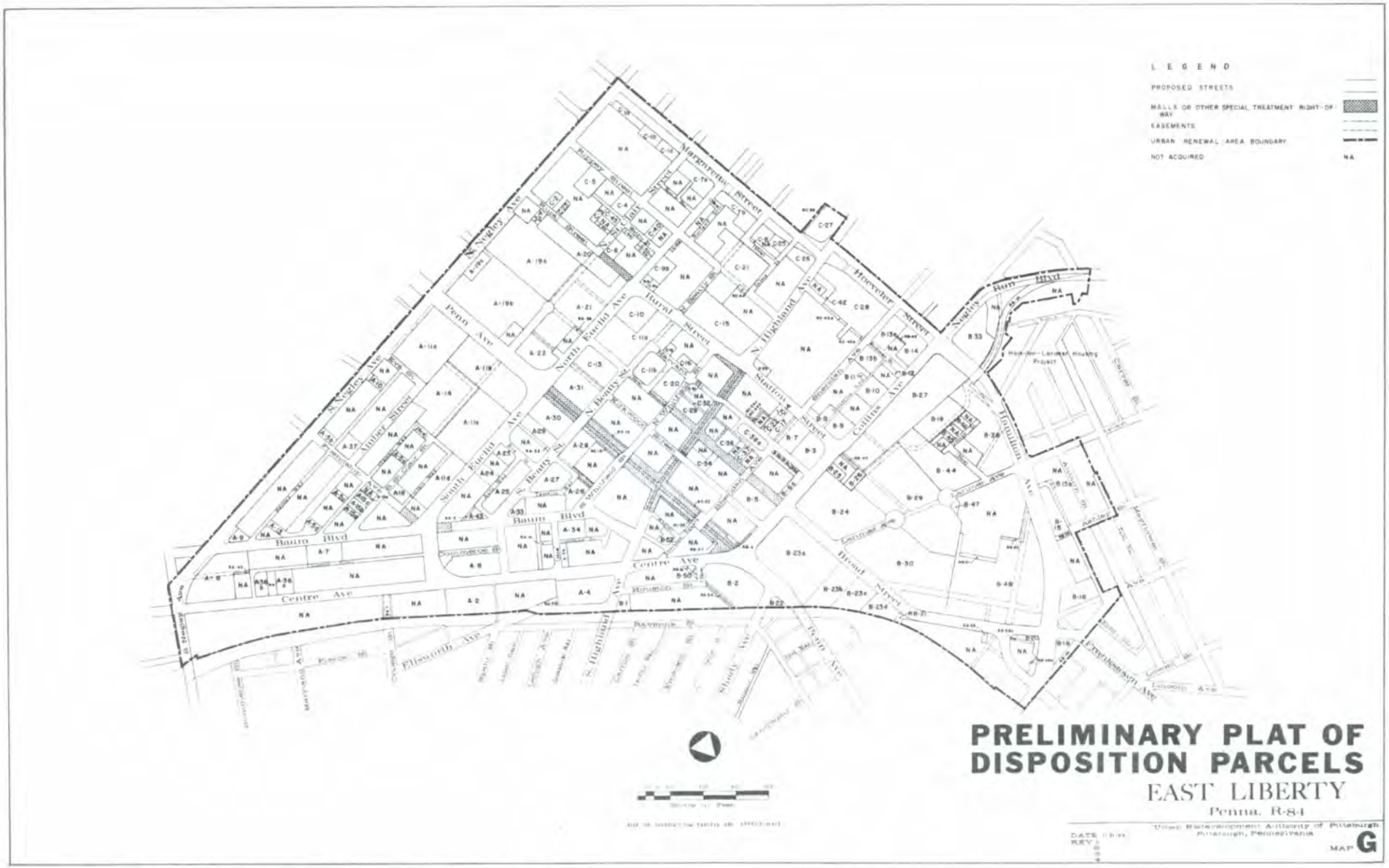


Image 5.4: Revised plan for East Liberty Project. Preliminary Plats of Disposition Parcels, 1966.
Source : Urban Redevelopment Authority of Pittsburgh. "Proposal for the Redevelopment of Redevelopment Area No. 10 in the seventh, eighth, eleventh, and twelfth wards of the City of Pittsburgh, County of Allegheny, Pennsylvania." 1966

Image 5.5: Toledo's Shoppers' See-way, 1955
Source : Associated Press Photograph. Author's Personal Collection

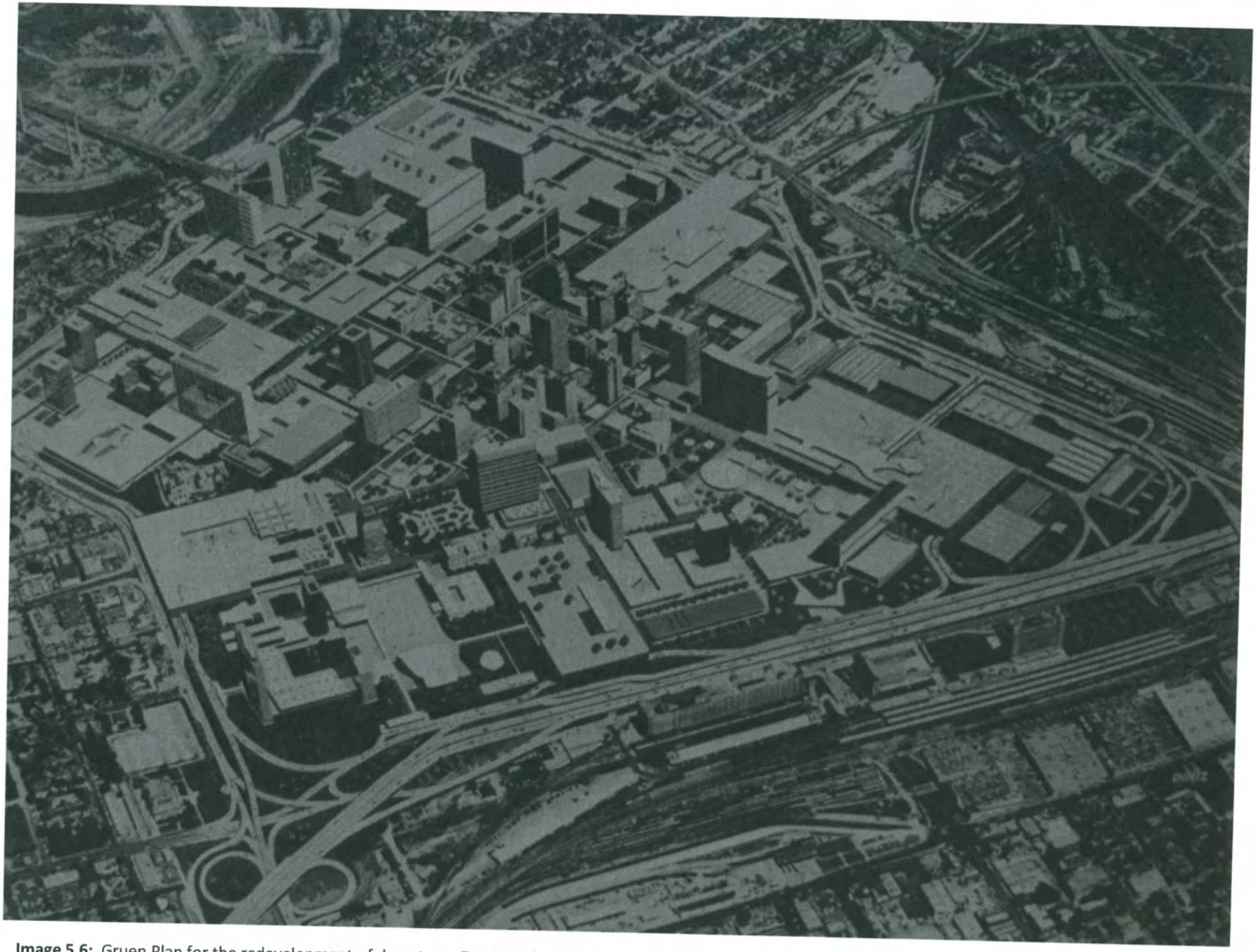


Image 5.6: Gruen Plan for the redevelopment of downtown Fort Worth, Texas
Source: Gruen, Victor. The heart of our cities; the urban crisis: diagnosis and cure. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1964)

Image 5.7: Omega Street houses.
Source: Justin Greenawalt

"x" denotes location of photo.

Image 5.8: East Liberty Boulevard looking west, February 2010. Map at left illustrates path of boulevard, "x" denotes location of photo.
Source: Justin Greenawalt

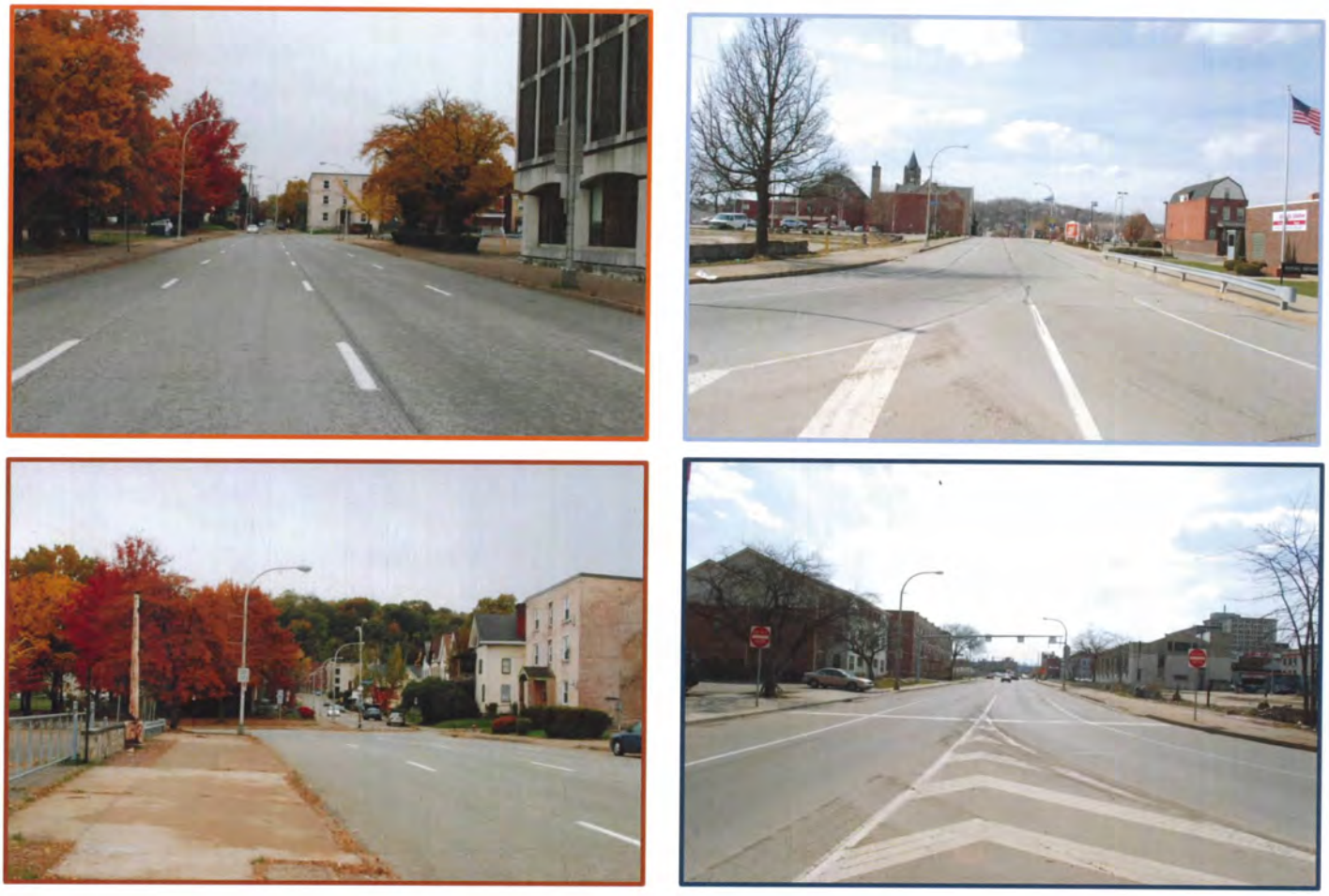


Image 5.9: Penn Circle, Fall 2009 and Spring 2010. Map at left illustrates path of boulevard, "x" denotes location of photo.
Source: Justin Greenawalt

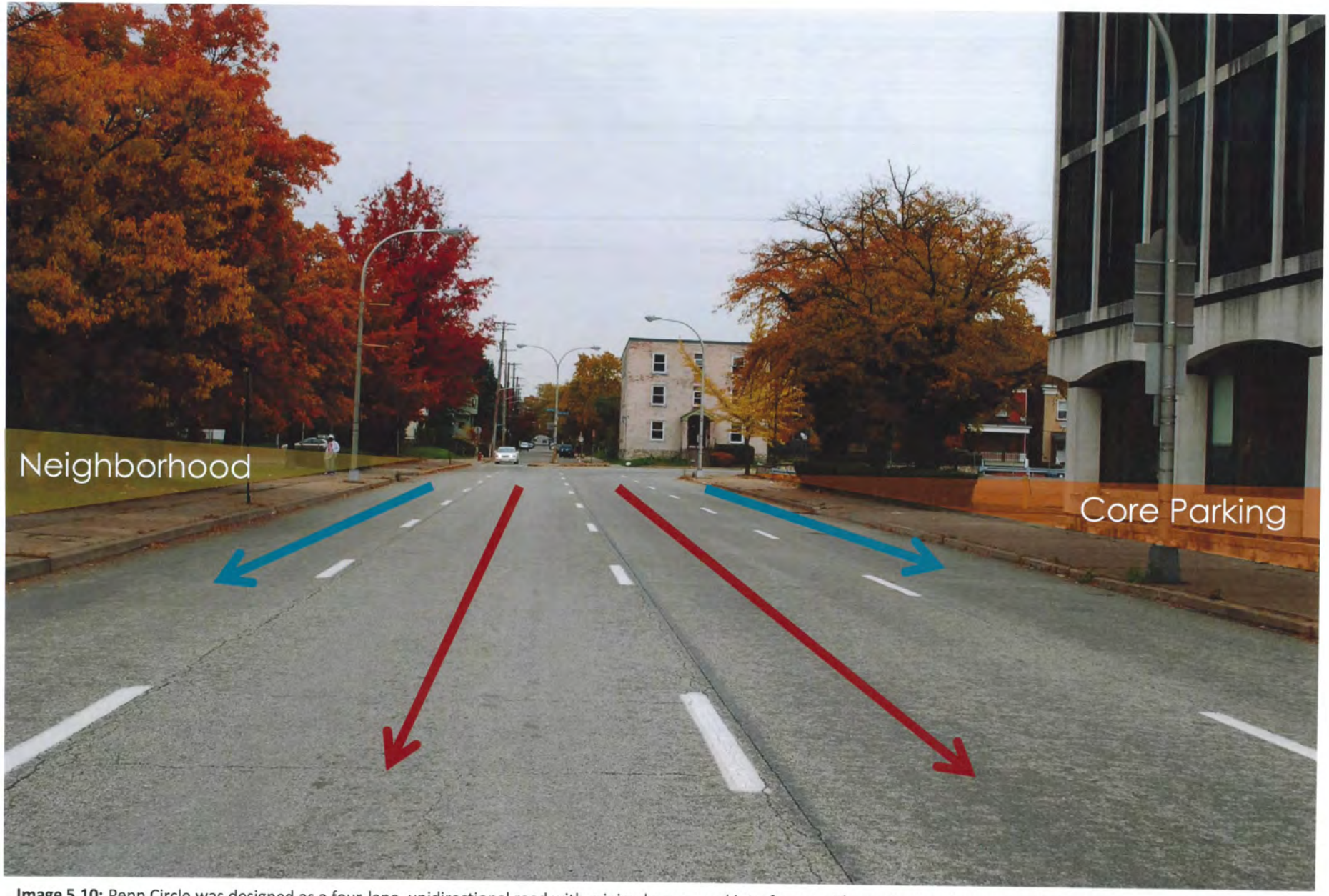


Image 5.10: Penn Circle was designed as a four-lane, unidirectional road with minimal cross-road interference. The center two lanes were dedicated lanes for those wishing to circumnavigate the district The outer most lane was dedicated to exiting the loop and entering the surrounding residential neighborhood and the inner most lane allowed those who wished to patronize the commercial core to access the parking areas.
Source: Justin Greenawalt

Image 5.11: (Clockwise starting below)

Penn Plaza, Katselas
Source: Justin Greenawalt

Pennley Park, Katselas (partially demolished)
Source: Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania

East Mall, Apartments Katselas (demolished)
Source: Flickr – werejellyfish

Liberty Park, Apartments, Katselas (demolished)
Source: Flickr – werejellyfish

Penn Circle Apartments, Katselas (demolished)
Source: Flickr - Leanne Michelle

Image 5.12: Mellon Square, Simonds and Simonds with Mitchell and Ritchey
Source: Justin Greenawalt

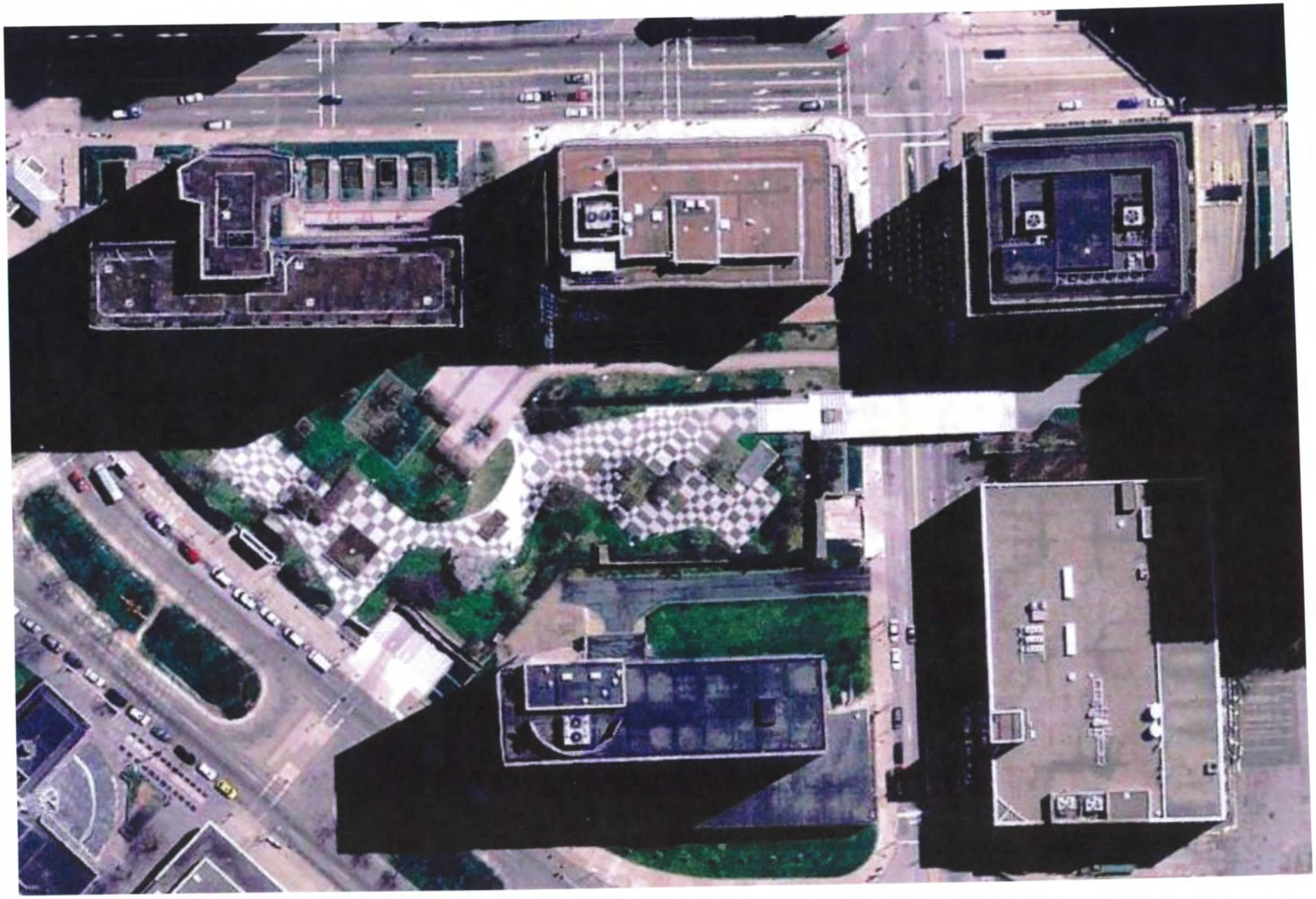
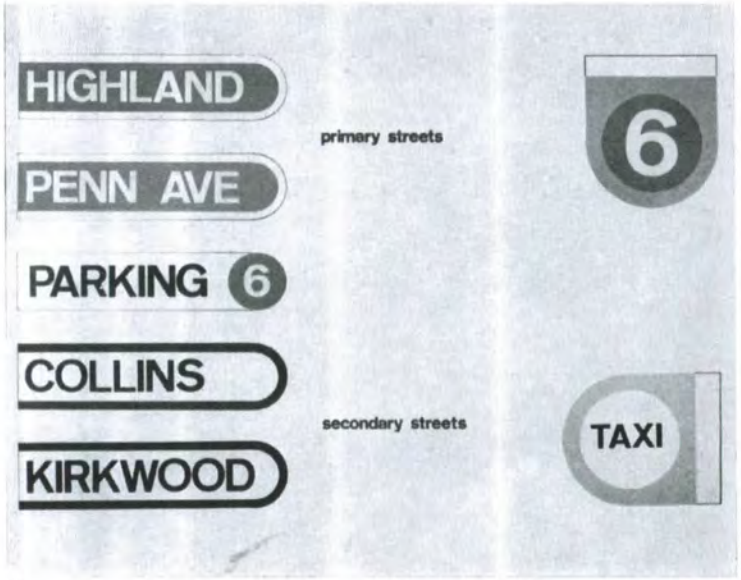


Image 5.13: Gateway Center Plaza, Simonds and Simonds
Source: Google Earth



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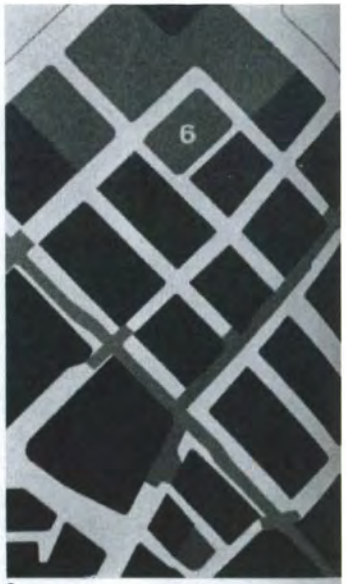

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Image 5.14: Simonds and Simonds/Peter Muller-Munk Associates collaborative aesthetic vision for East Liberty Pedestrian Mall. (Building in rendering sits at Whitfield and Penn Avenues)
Source: "At last! You can get there from here."*Industrial Design* v.15 n. 4 May 1968. p. 55

Image 5.15: Penn Mall looking west, 1971
Source: Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation

Image 5.16: Infrastructure changes to Penn Avenue, February 1969
Source: Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation

Image 5.17: Demolition for East Liberty Project. Penn Avenue at Euclid Street (Penn Circle West)
Source: Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation

Chapter 6:

Decline of the East Liberty Project

Misunderstood and Unforeseeable Circumstances

The East Liberty Project enjoyed a moderate level of success early in its development. The pedestrian malls were popular as a gathering place for elderly residents of East Liberty. Students from nearby Peabody High School would gather in the area after classes had been dismissed for the day.[103] Initially, the investment in the area caused property values to remain steady and in some instances increase.[104] But the early success was to be short lived. A prolonged construction schedule of nearly seven years put undue strain on the already over-stressed base of businesses. Not wishing to encounter ongoing construction, many consumers took their business elsewhere and even longtime anchors in the area found it difficult to compete. It is also important to consider anchor retailers' difficulties in competing with one another. When the commercial district was made denser with the demolition of peripheral commercial buildings, major retailers in those areas were given a chance to relocate to the new commercial core on the pedestrian malls. This resulted in the pedestrian malls being dominated by three furniture stores, no less than six banks and savings institutions, numerous five and dime stores, and several department stores. The diversity of businesses was limited.

Compounding the issues of the construction schedule, once the pedestrian malls had been finished, a poor plan for management and maintenance made the malls aesthetically unappealing **(image 6.1)**. "A mall must be maintained at a higher level of service than the conventional street it replaces... Consumers expect a mall to be clean, snow to be removed and grass to be cut because the facility is designed to include an

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[103] Carl Apone. "The Fight to Save East Liberty." Roto Magazine: The Pittsburgh Press. October 28, 1979

[104] "Property Values Helped By East Liberty Project." Pittsburgh Press. 25 August 1968. Section 6, Page 1.

aesthetic function."[105] With no effective plan for increased police presence, graffiti and vandalism became an issue. The popularity of the area was significantly compromised by maintenance issues that were ineffectively addressed.

A transportation problem was also created within the East Liberty Project. East Liberty had been a hub for trolley traffic, but with the execution of the project, the trolley was omitted from the plans for mass transit in favor of the bus. This decision was made due to the nationwide trend of phasing-out the trolley as a mass transit option. Whereas other American cities had completely dismantled their trolley systems by the time of the East Liberty Project's implementation, Pittsburgh would not completely abandon its trolley system until the early 1980s.[106] This left East Liberty at a distinct disadvantage as concerned public transportation.

The proliferation of suburban retail centers gave Pittsburghers a convenient and attractive alternative to East Liberty. Opening in 1963 during the planning phase for the East Liberty Project, Eastland Mall was built in North Versailles, Pennsylvania. The mall was easily accessible from Pittsburgh at its site along U.S. Route 30 (Lincoln Highway). In 1969, at the height of the construction of the East Liberty Project, Monroeville Mall opened. The mall contained 1,418,700 square feet of leasable space and was sited along U.S. Route 22 (William Penn Highway); making it a short drive from Pittsburgh proper.

It is also important to note a psychological change that was beginning to occur as a result of the suburbanization of the American population. As people moved to less dense, less ethnically diverse areas and began living in private cul-de-sac communities, social isolation became a societal norm. Automobile culture spread resulting in less interest in pedestrian spaces as Americans stopped walking.[107] Suburban retail centers offered large, enclosed spaces with security guards and bountiful free parking. Pedestrian malls were not only in the city, but were often in areas that had already been

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[105] Rosner, 77
[106] This is evident in a Final Environmental Impact Study for a Light Rail System dating from 1979.
[107] Robertson, 271

labeled undesirable. They were also not restrictive concerning who could use them. That meant that "street people" could often be found using the malls; an undesirable aspect to middle-class suburban consumers.[108] These unforeseen issues are merely a few of things that caused the pedestrian mall component of the East Liberty Project—indeed, pedestrian malls everywhere—to become an abandoned commercial oasis. But the scope of the East Liberty Project meant that, in addition to these issues, it had to cope with many circumstances that other pedestrian malls did not.

Issues of Race and Class

The residential high-rises that were constructed on the periphery of the commercial core had originally been intended to house middle-income residents, but were converted to low-income housing early in their life. This was due to the passage of the United States Housing and Community Development Act. This change affected the East Liberty Development in two different ways. First, the economic base for the pedestrian mall was reduced. Middle-income residents could afford to shop at the businesses within the mall, low-income residents could not.[109] Second, the social stigma that became associated with the residential high-rises and the poor management of the buildings kept potential clientele outside of the district from shopping there. This contributed significantly to the inability of the project to profitably succeed.

In addition to the influx of low-income residents to the area, tension was created as former residents of the predominantly black community of the Hill District moved eastward.[110] Racial tensions in the 1960s had been more subdued in Pittsburgh than in many other cities; even as many lost their homes in the Hill District and elsewhere to renewal activities. But in April 1968, following the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., Pittsburgh's black community responded to the issue of social inequity with violence.

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[108] Ibid.
[109] "Liberating East Liberty" Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. April 15, 1986.p. 8.
[110] The Civic Arena project had caused the displacement of nearly 1,800 families and the recent decline of the East End communities had made the relatively good housing stock affordable.

Hill District residents set fire to white-owned businesses and looted local markets. In the Hill District, nearly 400 businesses were destroyed. One particularly vivid account states:

> *...[U]ncontrollable mobs pillaged parts of the city, sirens were heard day and night, free movement was suppressed and the military was summoned to seal the bridges and to patrol the streets. ...[F]urious protesters were confronted with guns and naked bayonets. The sounds and smells of fear, arson, and riot spread through the city's triangular heart, up its hilly backdrop of gradual decay, and across its rivers. Overall, a cloud of acrid smoke again hung heavy.*[111]

Much of the riot activity was confined to predominantly black communities of Pittsburgh, but more subdued demonstrations did take place elsewhere.

Speaking directly to the issues of racial tension and inequity, Virgil Cantini's 1969 public art piece entitled "Joy of Life" was positioned at the intersection of Penn Mall and Highland Mall in the East Liberty Project. The sculpture was the most highly visible piece of public art in East Liberty and served as a lesson in unity **(image 6.2)**. Speaking of the underlying meaning of the piece, Cantini said:

> *No one lives to himself and what our divided society needs is an increasing sense of our oneness, our mutual dependence. These men with their arms locked together [represent] the strong and the weak; the affluent and the poor; the educated and the under privileged; this is one society one community.*[112]

Cantini's piece should have served as an inspiration to those who interacted with it, but some failed to share Cantini's vision of "oneness." East Liberty was not immune from the types of attacks associated with racially motivated violence. Newspaper accounts speak

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[111] "The city and its problems: Pittsburgh." *Industrial Design* v.15 n. 4 May 1968. p. 56
[112] Evert, Marilyn. Discovering Pittsburgh's Sculpture. University of Pittsburgh Press. 1983. p.283.

to an increasing tension between white and black youth in East Liberty in the late 1960s. Demonstrations occurred at nearby Peabody High School demanding that the curriculum be changed to incorporate events pertinent to black history. May 18, 1970, however, signaled the first physical attack in East Liberty. On the evening of May 18th, the Emory United Methodist Church located on Highland Avenue was the target of arson **(image 6.3)**. In the same night, Rodman Street Baptist Church located on Rodman Street was also burned **(image 6.4)**. The buildings of both Emory, a white congregation, and Rodman, a black congregation, were completely destroyed. The following year, the Liberty Bank Building on Penn Avenue (then Penn Mall) was the victim of an arson attack in which the first floor shop of the building was destroyed **(image 6.5)**.

These arsons marred the calm of the East Liberty neighborhood and had a significant impact on the community. Already understood as depressed by those living outside the area, the East Liberty district began to be viewed as unsafe. Newspaper reports of crime in the area made a pronounced escalation during the late 1960s and early 1970s; only exacerbating the ill effects on the new retail center. The youths who frequented the malls were pegged as hoodlums. But the negativity associated with East Liberty went far beyond mere stigma. The buildings and renovations dating from the era demonstrate the fear and uncertainty inherent in the community. Peabody High School, which had sat at the intersection of Margaretta Street (East Liberty Boulevard) and Highland Avenue since 1902, was given a new façade in 1975 **(image 6.6)**. Encased in brick and concrete, the haste and abandon with which the façade was constructed was taken as a response to the recent arson attacks. The former Beaux-Arts building was rendered virtually windowless and what had once been a source of scholastic pride in the East Liberty community was made a fortification.

Undoing Urban Renewal

For nearly a decade following the completion of the East Liberty Project, efforts were made to draw back the consumers and residents who had been deterred. The first

public acknowledgement of the project's "failure" came from Mayor Richard Caliguiri following his election in 1977. After $100 million in public and private funding had been expended in the 1960s to execute the mall, an additional $330,000 of city funds was expended in 1979 to begin addressing its problems. This entailed the increased police presence in the district, a promotional campaign, and the removal of select attributes of the mall. In Roto Magazine, a publication of the *Pittsburgh Press*, Carl Apone wrote of the corrective measures undertaken in the district. He wrote: "Last April [1979] the mayor met with 150 members of the chamber, and the same day a fountain which was obstructing traffic was removed. He talked about opening Baum Boulevard, and by golly, the next day they were out surveying. The work was done so fast, it almost looked like political action."[113]

By the 1980s, East Liberty had become a repository for "those generally not wanted" as East Liberty resident, Mr. Peter A. Ciancione, wrote in a *Pittsburgh Press* editorial.[114] He says of the area: "East Liberty has more drug rehab centers, homes for special citizens, half-way houses, homes for unwed mothers, senior citizen homes, housing for low-income, housing for elderly and nursing homes per square mile of area than the remainder of Allegheny County."[115] The blame for all of these perceived ills was placed on the East Liberty Project. But where some saw failure, others saw opportunity. Despite the negativity associated with many of the government and non-profit organizations located in East Liberty, by fostering these organizations it functioned as an incubator for its own change. In 1983, the climate was right for the formation of East Liberty Development, Inc. (ELDI). ELDI was founded with the goal of bringing the district's problems to light and focusing energy on bringing about change. The approach was to be of the grass-roots, bottom-up variety. This new movement to re-revitalize

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[113] Carl Apone. "The Fight to Save East Liberty." Roto Magazine: The Pittsburgh Press. October 28, 1979
[114] Peter A. Ciancione. "East Liberty for all." Pittsburgh Press. 21 July 1984. B3
[115] Ibid.

East Liberty called for the reintegration of small business and supported aesthetic improvement. But in accomplishing its goals, many of the elements of the urban renewal era would be sacrificed.

The pedestrian malls were the first target of re-redevelopment. The bus lanes running through the mall had been open to vehicular traffic for several years in an attempt to attract business. To accommodate more cars and parking, the bus lane was widened, thus removing the mall. Broad Street and Highland Avenue were the first of the malls to be officially reopened to automobile traffic in the early 1980s. With Virgil Cantini's fountain "Joy of Life" relegated to a back street in 1979, work to reopen Penn Avenue began. Penn Avenue was reopened to automobile traffic in October of 1986.[116] **(figure 6.7)** By the late 1990s, the commercial core had been reverted back to a typical streetscape with some small vestiges of the pedestrian malls allowed to remain out of convenience for the city. Although no statement has been issued that overtly declares renewal-era elements as the targets for demolition, recent actions and proposed development plans reflect a sentiment of ridding East Liberty of its urban renewal past.

What is wrong with current redevelopment practices in East Liberty?

In December 2003, the East Mall Apartments (a Katselas-designed building) was emptied of its residents and in 2005 was demolished **(image 6.8)**. Liberty Park and Penn Circle Apartments **(image 6.9)**, also high-rise, Katselas-designed buildings, were subsequently demolished in 2005 and 2009 respectively. "The world has changed, and so have urban planners' visions of what makes a good home. ...[R]ooms with views turned out to be part of a big mistake."[117] In a *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* interview, Alethea Simms, a resident of the East Mall Apartments, said of the building, "We had

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[116] "East Liberty's new life." *The Pittsburgh Press.* October 25, 1986. C2.
[117] Diana Nelson Jones. "What urban planners vilified, people once called home." *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. 17 July 2005.*

windows on both sides. There was lots of ventilation. From my bedroom... I could see as far as Wilkinsburg."[118] But the buildings were not loved by all.

Many East Liberty residents and development professionals viewed the building as an eyesore. Some saw it as a liability to the future viability of East Liberty, citing its history as a den of violence, crime, and illicit substance abuse. [119] But this view concerning mid-century, low-income residential buildings is not unique to Pittsburgh, nor is the razing of renewal-era projects. Undoing urban renewal is as much a nationwide, often government-funded phenomenon as was urban renewal. This is due to the perception that these projects have in some way failed. In the case of housing projects, indeed, many have a reputation of being unsavory places to live, but demolition is an expensive and ill-conceived solution. In most instances, the buildings are not to blame. Poor management and inadequate security measures often foster illicit practices in these places. Large families are placed in too-small accommodations. Subsidized living accommodations do little to promote pride-of-ownership. The buildings, though, become the targets of outside aggression. They are the tangible embodiment of crime and poverty. Following a regrettable but familiar chain of events, these buildings are demolished. No real issues are resolved with demolition. Families in need, some of our cities' most vulnerable citizens, are taken from their homes and relocated. And in the end, perfectly viable, potentially income-producing buildings are lost along with an established sense of place.

In East Liberty, since the demolition of the residential high-rises, focus has been placed on the smaller buildings of the urban renewal era situated in the commercial core. Where the older buildings that were initially preserved by the East Liberty Project are being restored, the master plan for East Liberty developed by ELDI indicates that

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[118] Ibid.
[119] Justin Greenawalt. Interview with Eric Jester and Nathan Wildfire. January 7, 2010.

nearly every building that is less than 50 years of age is a candidate for alteration or demolition.

Friendship Plaza **(image 6.10)** is one of the buildings that has been marred by a careless campaign of alteration and modernization. Built for Friendship Federal Savings and Loan to a design of Howard, Burt & Hill, the building dates from 1966.[120] The building is unique in its siting and design. It has two commercial facades: one on the former Highland Mall (now Highland Avenue) and another on Highland Plaza, one of the grand public spaces designed by Simonds and Simonds **(image 6.11)**.[121] A portion of the Highland Plaza is the only remaining part of the East Liberty pedestrian mall. This imparts a unique quality to Friendship Plaza in that much of its original context remains. Friendship Plaza was also in active dialog with its surroundings. A portion of its original cladding was made of the same white, pebbled concrete that was used by Simonds and Simonds in the paving of the pedestrian mall. This created a visual harmony unparalleled by other buildings constructed on the mall.

Friendship Plaza was one of the only buildings from the urban renewal era to maintain both its 1960s aesthetic and a significant portion of its context. But in the late summer of 2009, Friendship Plaza had its façade modernized, effectively severing the dialog between the building and its surroundings. The original façade of vertical steel louvers, rubble stone, and white, pebbled concrete panels was replaced with metallic orange panels and blue translucent glass. An out-of-context cornice **(image 6.12)** was placed over a section of the building, imparting an awkward visual tension to the once balanced composition. The only positive aspects of this modernization are that the less visible rear of the building **(image 6.13)** has not been changed and the façade of a 1940s era building (seen in image 6.12 as the grey portion below the cornice) that had

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[120] A portion of the building fronting onto Highland Avenue and Harvard Square actually dates to 20 years earlier, but was significantly expanded by the Howard, Burt & Hill design.
[121] Building Fever Grips East Liberty. *Pittsburgh Press*. October 17, 1965

been incorporated into Friendship Plaza was exposed (but not handled well in the redesign).

The restoration of Friendship Plaza and Highland Plaza could have strengthened the visual composition of Highland Avenue and preserved a rare and unique piece of the East Liberty Project. Developers have instead decided to cheapen the visual *parti* with materials that are already beginning to show wear and will most likely not stand the test of time. The fate of Highland Plaza is uncertain at present, but its restoration is of great importance.

Another example of façade modernization (or modern historicization in this particular instance) is Pennley Park **(image 6.14)**. Pennley Park and Penn Plaza once framed the western entrance to East Liberty on Penn Avenue. Both were the work of architect Tasso Katselas and are low-rise residential buildings set within an open, landscaped setting. The open space characteristic of these developments have made them targets for redevelopment and infill construction. Pennley Park was partially demolished in the late 1990s and early 2000s as part of the nationwide phenomenon of demolishing renewal-era housing projects. Additional housing was built on the site. The buildings that replaced Pennley Park are uninspired in their design. They fail to draw inspiration from their context. Although the new buildings provide much-needed housing, this goal could have been accomplished without the demolition of a significant portion of Pennley Park.

The section of Pennley Park that was not demolished had its façade removed and modernized. Unlike Friendship Plaza, modernization took a historicist approach; replacing modular glass, deep red brick, and concrete walls with a faux second-empire aesthetic complete with pink brick and a stylized mansard roof.

Whereas the redesign of Friendship Plaza and Pennley Park has allowed the buildings to retain some (however minimal) original character, the East Liberty Branch of the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh has been altered to the extent of having no

resemblance to its original design **(image 6.15)**. Built in 1970, the building exhibited a staid permanence befitting of a community institution. The library's relocation from its former structure on Larimer Avenue to the commercial core also symbolized the importance of the institution being at the center of the new East Liberty. The original building was a steel and concrete construction not dissimilar to Le Corbusier's Domino concept. **(image 6.16)** The exterior aesthetic was characterized by a brown brick second story mass supported over a glass-enclosed first story.

The new 2009 design by Pittsburgh firm Edge Studio has demolished the building to its internal supports and cloaked the structure in an amorphous metallic skin. The ostentatious new design does little to complement its surroundings: the Beaux-Arts former YMCA building, the polychromatic terracotta storefronts, and the neo-gothic, Ralph Adams Cram-designed East Liberty Presbyterian church. As demonstrated by the reuse of its internal structure, the original building was sound. If additional space was needed by the institution, it had the option of expanding into any one of the vacant buildings in its immediate vicinity. The preservation of the 1970 structure could have served as a symbol of the endurance of the institution in East Liberty, but instead, it has opted for a flashy, new aesthetic. The treatment of the East Liberty Branch of the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh only further asserts the library's notorious track-record of abandoning or marring its historic buildings in favor of the latest architectural trend. Libraries are supposed to be enduring institutions. This contemporary redesign for the East Liberty branch fails that test.

A campaign of demolition and alteration is being undertaken in East Liberty; not due to necessity, but due to misunderstanding and a general failure to see the potential in renewal-era buildings. Vast, potentially profit bearing buildings are being demolished because of stigma. Non-descript buildings that draw no inspiration from their surroundings are being built in their place. Contemporary aesthetic trends are being implemented to make the area more visually appealing and unique opportunities are

being lost. The current approach to revitalization in East Liberty may appear to have advanced from its controversial urban renewal forerunner, but upon closer examination, little has changed.

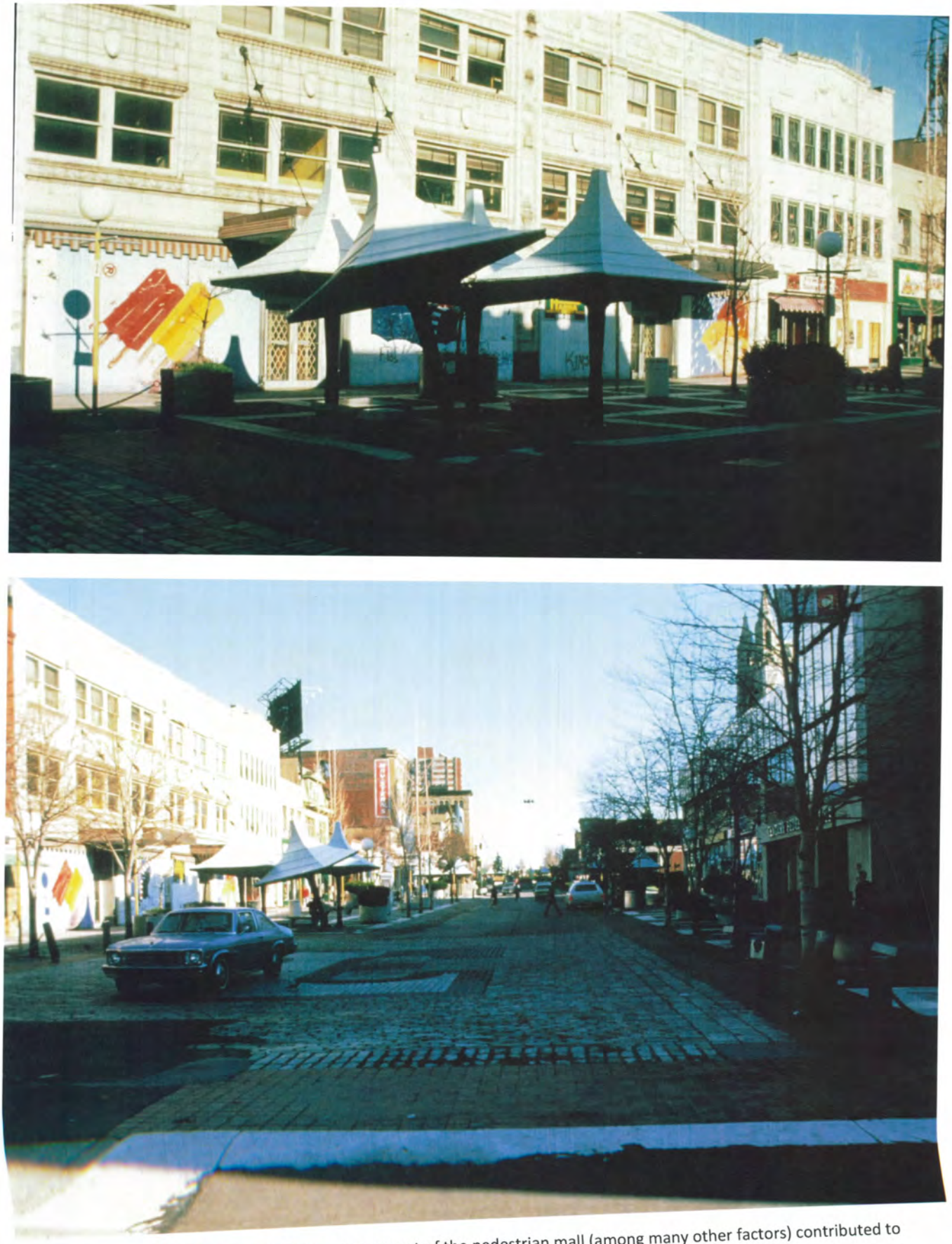

Image 6.1: Penn Mall looking east. Poor management of the pedestrian mall (among many other factors) contributed to the decline of the commercial core.
Source: Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation

Image 6.2: Virgil Cantini's "Joy of Life"
Source: Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation

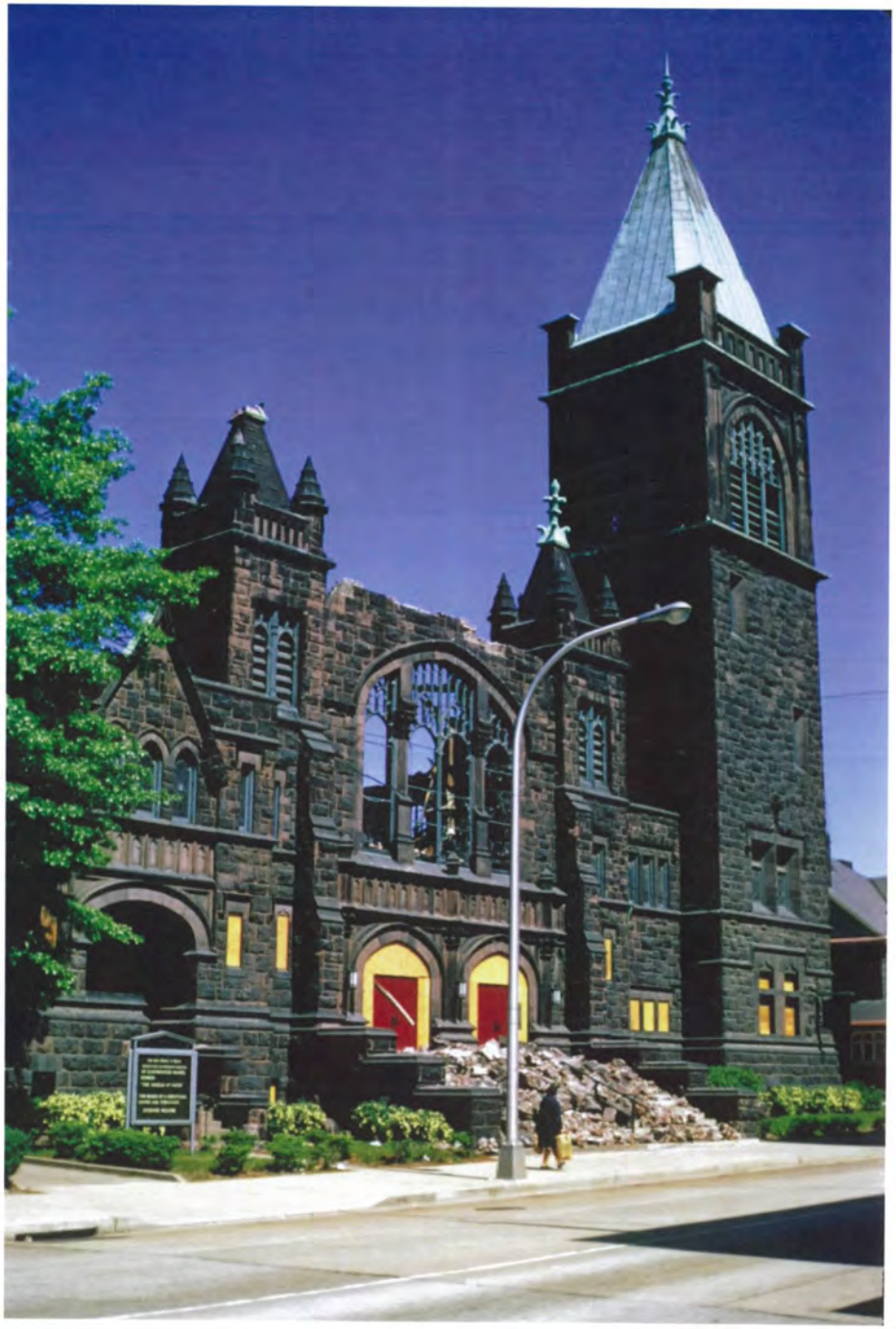

Image 6.3: (left) Emory United Methodist Church, burned May 18, 1971. **(above)** Replacement for Emory United Methodist.
Source: Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation

Image 6.4: (above) Rodman Street Baptist Church, burned May 18, 1971. **(below)** Replacement for Rodman Street Baptist.
Source: (above) Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation (below) Justin Greenawalt

Image 6.5: Liberty Building shop damaged by arson, 1971 (in red)
Source: Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation

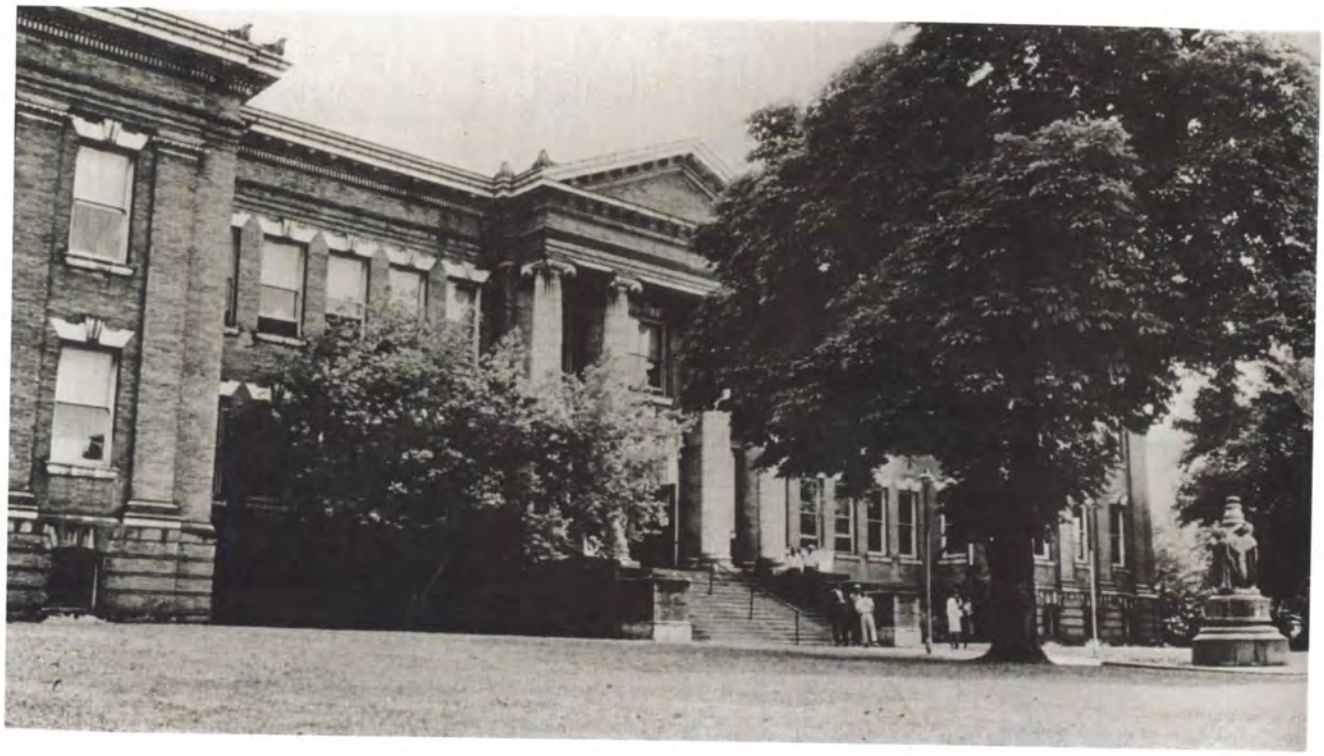

Image 6.6: (above) Peabody High School prior to 1975 façade renovation. **(below)** Peabody High School after façade renovation.
Source: (above) John Fulton Stuart Collins, Jr. Stringtown on the Pike. Michigan: Edwards Brothers. p. 165 (below) Justin Greenawalt

Image 6.7: Penn Avenue looking east after the removal of the pedestrian mall in 1986.
Source: Arthur G. Smith Pittsburgh: Then and Now. University of Pittsburgh Press, 1990. p. 191

Image 6.8: Demolition of East Mall Apartments in 2005
Source: Flickr – juliekaffa
URL: http://www.flickr.com/photos/juliekaffe/27600802/

Image 6.9: Implosion of Penn Circle Apartments, May 2009
Source: Still from video by Douglas Roesch
URL: http://vimeo.com/4698172

Image 6.10: (above) Friendship Plaza prior to façade renovation. **(below)** Friendship Plaza after façade renovation.
October 2009
Source: (above) Google Earth Streetview (below) Justin Greenawalt

Image 6.11:

(Top and Bottom Left): Highland Plaza 2009
Source: Justin Greenawalt

(Above): Highland Plaza, 1971
Source Pittsburgh history & Landmarks Foundation

Image 6.12: Out-of-context-cornice on Friendship Plaza. Gray portion of building is 1940s building concealed in original 1965 Friendship Plaza design
Source: Justin Greenawalt

Image 6.13: Original aesthetic remains on rear façade of Friendship Plaza
Source: Justin Greenawalt

Image 6.14: Buildings are located across Penn Avenue from one another, but were once identical in terms of aesthetics. Façade alterations on the bottom building occurred c. 2005
Source: Justin Greenawalt

Image 6.15: Progression of façade alteration of Carnegie Library East Liberty Branch

(top) Rendering for Library c. 1970
Source: John Fulton Stuart Collins, Jr. Stringtown on the Pike. Michigan: Edwards Brothers

(middle) Structure with façade removed October 2009
Source: Justin Greenawalt

(bottom) Rendering of new façade
Source: Edge Studio, Pittsburgh

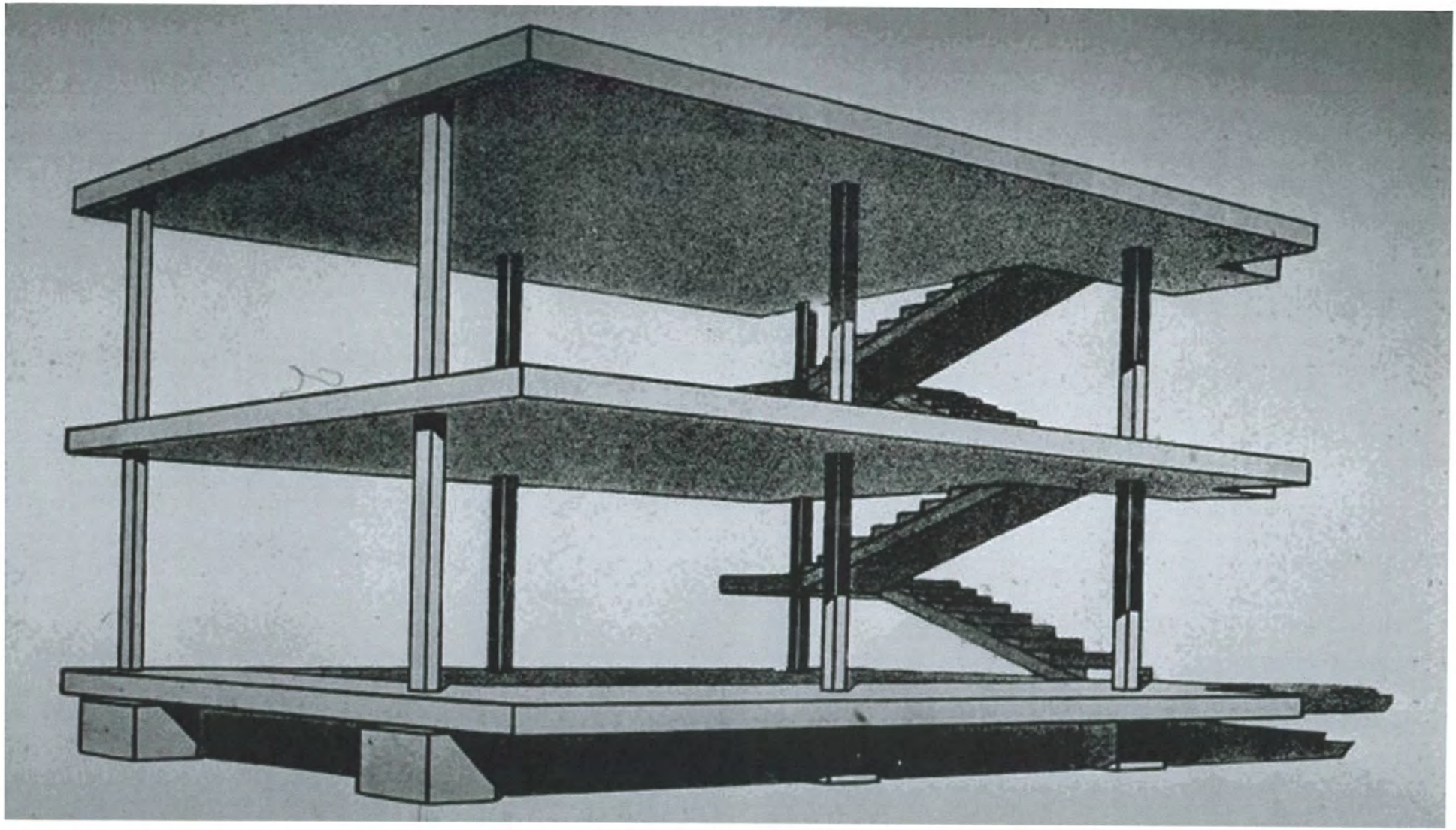

Image 6.16: Le Corbusier – Dom-ino House (1914-15)
Source: Le Corbusier. The City of To-morrow and Its Planning. p. 227

Chapter 7:

An argument for Preservation: Saving the Remnants of the East Liberty Project

> *Our architecture reflects us, as truly as a mirror, even if we consider it apart from us... I don't want you to look at it in books or photographs. I want you to see it* in situ *with all its intimacy of surroundings, uses and associations. I want you to see it growing, breathing, living, however morbidly, and with however much of hectic flush, turgid opulence and internal decay.*
>
> - *Louis Sullivan, Kindergarten Chats*

The Stigma of the Recent Past and What It Means for East Liberty

For decades, urban renewal has been a contentious subject for urban planners, historic preservationists, architects, real estate developers, and the average urbanite alike. Arguments for the preservation of buildings of the recent past often fall upon deaf ears.

> ...[B]*uildings from the recent past are highly vulnerable to aesthetic ridicule. Not old enough to be regarded as venerable or even quaint, such buildings are frequently regarded as awkward and obsolete: as examples of the funny bad taste that prevailed the day before yesterday. Try to save almost any... building from the past few decades and... you will hear derisive objections that the building in question is "ugly," or is simply "junk."*[122]

This quote by scholar Richard Striner illustrates the contemporary disdain for the artifacts of the recent past. But quietly allowing an entire era of architecture and urban planning to disappear is not an option. Confronting the question of preserving the urban renewal movement will be difficult and fraught with justifiable dissent and opposition,

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[122] Striner, Richard. Scholarship, Strategy, and Activism in Preserving the Recent Past. *Forum Journal.* Vol. 10, No.1. Fall 1995.

but this is a question that cannot wait for the future. The preservation of the urban renewal movement—of the remaining elements of the East Liberty Project—must be addressed now. The elements of the East Liberty Project have come to define the district and give it a sense of place and, to those who live there, a sense of home. "The fact that a society builds makes its world *habitable*; what a society builds—and what it preserves—makes its world *home*, giving a foothold in space and time. 'Home,' as a sense of pride of place, is captured in the concept of the *genus loci*: 'the cluster of associations identified with a place: a pervading spirit.'"[123] It is necessary then to preserve the elements of the urban renewal movement; if not for their historical significance, then for their active role in defining place.

The continued negative attitude toward the urban renewal era attributes of East Liberty—and elsewhere—will only result in the further erosion of the place identity and the erosion of the identity of the people who live there. However, there exist two main arguments against the preservation of the urban renewal movement: the idea that the movement is not yet old enough to preserve and the unintended negative consequences of the movement disqualify it for preservation.

The Idea of Age Value

Age value is the idea that an artifact derives a large portion of its historical value and importance from its age; the older or rarer the artifact, the better. For decades, the most noteworthy manifestations of the urban renewal movement have been omitted from discussion. These monuments have been left to decay or worse: allowed to be altered or demolished due to the convenient reasoning that they were not old enough to be considered "historic". This is no longer the case. Many of the projects of the urban renewal era have reached or are quickly approaching their semicentennial; meaning that the elements of urban renewal are now old enough have valid reason to be preserved.

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[123] John F. Nivala. "Saving the Spirit of Our Places: A View on Our Built Environment" *UCLA Journal of Environmental Law and Policy* (1997)

This milestone must force urban America to address urban renewal in new ways; ways other than alteration and demolition. But how does urban America preserve something that so many people view negatively?

The preservation of urban renewal will begin with a concrete understanding of the movement; its positives, its negatives, and its significance. One of the most important components of preservation is public education. Education about the urban renewal movement must begin within the professional spheres that have expressed distaste for it: urban planning, architecture, historic preservation, and real estate development.

Richard Striner in his work *Scholarship, Strategy, and Activism in Preserving the Recent Past*, suggests that the negative stigma associated with the urban renewal movement may not have originated within the professional spheres, but it has certainly been validated and perpetuated by them. Government has looked to them to determine what can be done to improve the urban condition. Striner states that the average lay-person looks to the expert individual to understand what in the realm of architecture is good and what is not. He postulates that saving the artifacts of the recent past can only begin when professional spheres begin to consider and understand their significance.

This is not an insurmountable or unrealistic goal. Aesthetic underappreciation has a way of correcting itself as buildings age. The Queen Anne mode was loathed for its ostentatious fussiness in the 1940s. Any argument for preserving the Art Deco or Art Moderne period was regarded as ludicrous in the 1970s. But today, a building exhibiting any of these stylistic modes is given much deserved reverence. There has been a critical shift in the way these periods are perceived. The architecture of urban renewal must be considered with this type of foresight. The careless demolition of the buildings associated with the urban renewal movement must stop. However, if the architecture of urban renewal is to be preserved, it will be necessary to confront and surmount issues greater than mere aesthetic vocabulary. It will involve the social issues from which the stigma of urban renewal is truly derived.

The Negative Implications of Urban Renewal

The negative aspects associated with urban renewal are: government policy and civic pride; inequality as pertains to race, civil rights, and dignity; class division, poverty, and wealth; and social theory, urban planning theory, and architecture theory. The stigma of urban renewal does not derive itself necessarily from the architecture, but from any and all of the aforementioned issues. The architecture becomes a target for demolition or alteration because it is the physical manifestation of these ideas. Urban America is, understandably, not comfortable with the idea of urban renewal and its changes to the urban environment, let alone preserving it. The question then arises: how does one preserve urban renewal without also preserving the negative implications and associations? The answer is simple: one does not and cannot.

To circumnavigate the negative associations of urban renewal in order to preserve it is to ignore one of the most visceral qualities of the movement; a quality that, in some regards, contributes to its significance. Preserving only what is good or successful or non-offensive is *not* a path that should be pursued. The story of urban America is fraught with success and failure and social inequity. Urban renewal—with all of its positives and negatives—is a part of that story.

Significance and Justification for Recognition and Preservation of the East Liberty Project

Ultimately, the integrity of the East Liberty Project has been compromised. Stigma, misunderstanding, and strong development pressures have resulted in many of the defining characteristics of the East Liberty Project being relegated to the landfill. But a sense of place, though depleted, is still discernable and worth the effort to preserve. Regardless of whether the East Liberty Project is viewed in a positive or negative light, the remaining elements derive their significance from the following points:

1) The East Liberty Project was part of a greater urban renewal movement in America and marked a change in the way Pittsburgh executed urban renewal.

The East Liberty Project was a significant manifestation of the greater urban renewal movement in America and was the solution to a systemic problem affecting large parts of the City of Pittsburgh. The remaining elements of the project serve as a built record of the top-down approach that was a hallmark of the urban renewal era. Although the approach taken in East Liberty is not one that would be considered wise by contemporary standards, it is important to acknowledge the project as an attempt to stop the decline of the East Liberty area.

The standard course of reinvestment in East Liberty was not considered possible at the time. "Under the normal process, a developer could not afford to buy the property, relocate the people into safe, decent and sanitary housing, demolish the structures, provide the public improvements that are necessary and perform all of that within the profit making role in which he would want to function."[124] Urban renewal was one of the only tested methods of revitalization the administrators had at their disposal. As tax bases shrank and vacancy rates skyrocketed, it was understood to be in the best interests of the city to attempt to halt further deterioration of the urban fabric. With government programs offering funding for nearly two-thirds of the cost of urban renewal projects, the prospect of performing surgery on blighted communities was not only feasible, but was an attractive solution.

It is important to be mindful that mid-century administrators were witnessing communities on the cusp of failure. One can readily see today the cost of inaction in communities that have been completely abandoned. As upwardly mobile citizens moved to the suburbs, the number and variety of businesses that had existed in Pittsburgh prior

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[124] Sheinberg, 25

to suburbanization was unsustainable. Other neighborhoods in Pittsburgh's East End like Larimer and Homewood-Brushton began to decline at the same time as East Liberty, but no intervention was undertaken. These areas did not have the strong support of community leaders nor were they important as major commercial centers like East Liberty. Today, not only have communities like Larimer and Homewood-Brushton lost their traditional character, but they have also lost much of their built fabric to abandonment and demolition. Those who implemented the East Liberty Project have openly admitted to the fact that the project was a gamble, but maintain that the neighborhood may be far worse today if nothing had been done.[125]

The project also has the distinction of being among the first in Pittsburgh where urban planners began to understand and promote different ideas about how a renewed neighborhood should look. Among the most important innovations in the district were the building of varied types of housing and the implementation of parks. Prior to the project "...there were absolutely no open spaces in all the 254-acres area that was ultimately delineated for renewal, no park for either passive or active recreation."[126] In all prior renewal projects, the ultimate goal was to benefit industry or provide the city with amenities. The East Liberty Project attempted to address the needs of its community.

2) Retaining over 50% of East Liberty's built fabric, the East Liberty Project served as an early preservation effort in Pittsburgh.

Like any other urban renewal project, the East Liberty Project entailed substantial demolition, the construction of large residential towers in an open setting, and the implementation of untested urban planning principles in an attempt to stem widespread and uncontrollable decline. But the East Liberty project went beyond the *tabula rasa* approach that was typical of urban renewal. In East Liberty, 52% of the extant built

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[125] Dan Fitzpatrick. "East Liberty Then: Initial makeover had dismal results." Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. May 23, 2000.
[126] Sheinberg, 21

fabric was retained and rehabilitated.[127] This number is comparatively low with regard to current standards, but it is important to be cognizant of the fact that in the Lower Hill District and Civic Arena Project in the late 1950s, absolutely nothing was spared. Even the street grid was demolished. The East Liberty of today is the only urban renewal project ever executed in Pittsburgh where vernacular nineteenth century built fabric mingles with mid-century modern buildings at the core of the project.

It is debatable if the planners of the East Liberty Project saw the benefit of retaining historic fabric in the same light that one would today, but it demonstrates a transitioning in the urban planning ideology of the era away from approaches that favored new construction to ones geared toward community rehabilitation.

3) The revitalization of East Liberty has the potential to educate architects, urban planners, and historic preservationists about the importance for saving the artifacts of the urban renewal era.

It is undeniable that the East Liberty Project, over its nearly 50 years of existence, has been compromised with regard to its integrity and design. Today, very little from the urban renewal era remains *in situ*. Key features of the project have been moved, altered, or destroyed. Speaking of the current path of redevelopment, Eric Jester of East Liberty Development Inc. poignantly stated, "There is something egotistical about thinking that we can build something better."[128] And yet, careless demolitions and alterations are allowed to move forward in the name of progress. At this important juncture, East Liberty has the potential to become one of two things: 1) a revitalized commercial district that has accounted for its past and has incorporated that past into its future, or 2) a commercial district that has no history and has been heavily edited and rebuilt. Even the East Liberty Project did not pursue the latter of the two. From the retention, preservation, and reincorporation of the remaining elements of the

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[127] "East Liberty 'Rebirth' Spotlighted" Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. 1 February 1969. 19.
[128] Justin Greenawalt. Interview with Eric Jester and Nathan Wildfire. January 7, 2010.

East Liberty Project, East Liberty has the potential to serve as a national model for dealing with an often uncomfortable urban renewal past. The undoing of the East Liberty Project and the revitalization of the East Liberty district creates a distinct opportunity to study how stigma, misinformation, and misunderstanding can destroy an important historic resource. But it also has the potential to illustrate the fact that cities across the United States can and should save their urban renewal legacies.

Chapter 8:
Preservation Recommendations and Conclusion

Recommendations

There are a variety of ways to preserve the extant elements of the East Liberty Project while working toward the goal of a revitalized East Liberty. Incorporating existing fabric into new design ideas will result in a product that is not only more sensitive to the history of the area, but ultimately more visually dynamic. The East Liberty Project imparted a new sense of place to the East Liberty District. It broke from the past while incorporating many of the familiar elements that imparted a quality of place to the area. The following recommendations seek to identify means by which the East Liberty district can be improved while recognizing, celebrating, and incorporating the past.

Public Education

The general public is the most important player in the revitalization and preservation of East Liberty. The general public is comprised of the people who inhabit and interact with the space. East Liberty is the backdrop for their memory. The public should be actively engaged in the redevelopment of their community, but beyond that, the public should be involved in a renewed East Liberty through advocacy and education initiatives. Many of the contributing elements of the East Liberty Project have been lost due to misinformation and a misunderstanding of the East Liberty Project's intent, goals, and reasons for decline. The resulting stigma has been cited as the reason for the demolition of renewal era attributes of East Liberty. However insurmountable the stigma of East Liberty may seem, the means of overcoming it must not be the demolition of the urban renewal era past. But this raises the question: How can one preserve the urban renewal past without preserving the unintended negative consequences of urban renewal? One cannot. The unintended negative consequences of urban renewal are an uncomfortable and inconvenient fact. Public advocacy and education initiatives must serve as a forum for discussion; the consequences of urban renewal must be openly and

actively addressed. This is the only means of changing the perception of the East Liberty district, lessening the tension over the preservation of elements previously perceived as "bad or wrongheaded," and ensuring the area's future viability.

A passive, unintimidating means of engaging the general public in East Liberty would be through the implementation a program of informational plaques to inform the public of the mid-twentieth century events that transpired there. Ideally, informational plaques would inform readers about the character of East Liberty prior to urban renewal, how the East Liberty Project altered the neighborhood in the 1960s and 70s, how the project impacted the district, and how contemporary efforts are being made to revitalize the community once again. Plaques could be located along Penn and Highland Avenues as well as Broad Street and could include personal narratives (audio or written) of people who witnessed East Liberty's urban renewal and interacted with the space over the years. However, plaques must not contain a biased point-of-view either in favor or in opposition to the East Liberty Project. The general public should be presented with the facts, balanced commentary, and then be allowed to draw their own conclusions. It is important to honestly showcase the East Liberty Project as it was: an unprecedented urban renewal effort in Pittsburgh that—for better or for worse—shaped East Liberty as one finds it today.

One way of actively engaging the public would be through the implementation of a program of walking tours. The Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation has utilized walking tours as a central component of its education program for many years. The foundation has found that the walking tour is an effective way of communicating information, reaffirming regional culture and values, and instilling a sense of understanding and pride of place within a group of individuals. If the current revitalization of East Liberty and the preservation of the remaining elements of the East Liberty Project are to be successful, the public must possess a sense of ownership, understanding, and pride in their community. By physically experiencing the built

environment and learning the history of the neighborhood, walking tours will help residents to develop a sense of ownership and pride of place. They could also serve as a forum for addressing the negative effects of urban renewal and function to collect community input about the direction of redevelopment. If the current revitalization of East Liberty is to be successful, the public must feel that they hold a stake in the success of the neighborhood revitalization. Walking tours are one way to accomplish that goal.

On a regional or national scale, engaging the public through a museum is a viable course of action. From a purely developmental standpoint, the East Liberty district could benefit from an institution—such as a museum—regardless of its focus. The East Liberty district currently has very little to attract the average outsider. Whole Foods, Trader Joe's, Home Depot, a few ethnic cuisine restaurants, and a branch of the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh do draw outsiders into the district, but many never actually get to *experience* East Liberty. If East Liberty is to become a vibrant center in Pittsburgh's East End, it will need to appeal to a wide array of people from within the community, within the city, and from outside the city. As is evidenced by the Children's Museum of Pittsburgh in Allegheny Center, a museum sited within an urban renewal era setting can not only be immensely successful, but impart a sense of vibrancy to a part of the city that would otherwise be forgotten.

Regarding a potential focus for a museum, that nation-wide phenomenon of urban renewal is no small historical occurrence. There is no institution on a local or national level that is devoted to studying the subject. In Pittsburgh, the renaissance was a paradigm shift that allowed for the continued viability of the city and region and both physically and psychologically transformed the cityscape. During the era of urban renewal, Pittsburgh was understood to be at the forefront of redefining its image and restructuring its urban form. It was renowned for its advancement of urban planning principles and the sheer size and scale of the projects that it undertook. Pittsburgh is the

ideal place for an institution geared toward promoting the understanding of an often misunderstood era while fostering a dialogue about its successes and shortcomings. Such an institution could also serve to commemorate the individuals, families, and communities who rescinded their homes, businesses, social bonds, and livelihoods during the urban renewal era. It could serve to tell the human story of urban renewal as well as studying the architectural and urban planning ideas of the day. Citing a lack of a community organization other than ELDI, whose primary focus is development, public education initiatives could be implemented by the museum. Ultimately, educating the public through such a venue would be a major step in the direction of fostering an appreciation for both urban renewal and mid-twentieth century Pittsburgh.

Information Collection

Under the auspices of a museum, university, or other institution, an archive (either physical or digital) should be established to acquire and maintain resources related to the urban renewal movement in Pittsburgh and nation-wide. Resources are currently spread throughout the country in numerous public, private, and personal repositories. The practices of curating these artifacts vary according to the institutions that own them. But until the significant resources pertaining to the era can be assembled in one place, scholarship of the urban renewal era will continue to be hindered.

Similar to collecting and archiving physical artifacts of the urban renewal era, a campaign of oral history interviews should be conducted. The urban renewal era is now old enough to be considered an historical event or era, but recent enough that many of the people who witnessed it or were affected by it are still alive. The most useful information regarding urban renewal projects often cannot be found in printed documents, but in the memories of the people who lived or worked in or near urban renewal project areas. Often, widespread opinion on the successes or failures of the urban renewal era is based on the observations of very few, resulting in inaccurate and

incomplete scholarship. Through the implementation of an oral history campaign, a more accurate, whole representation of the urban renewal era can be drawn.

Documentation and Repatriation

Thorough documentation of all remaining artifacts of the East Liberty Project is needed. This thesis has identified a select few elements, but an effective plan for preservation cannot be developed until all urban renewal era elements are located and categorized. An inventory should include but not be limited to: buildings, street furniture, public art, lighting fixtures, urban spaces, paving materials, street configurations, and signage. A moratorium on demolition and significant exterior alteration should be implemented within the original boundaries of the East Liberty Project while the inventory is performed. The completed inventory should not be made public until some method of protection from demolition, alteration, or disposal of the listed elements is attained.

With regard to the elements of the East Liberty Project that are assumed to be missing, past practices of the City of Pittsburgh suggest that public installations (fountains, street furniture, etc.), once removed from an historic location, are often repurposed or used as landfill elsewhere in the city. This has proven to be the case with several sites in the city: 1) a fountain from the Allegheny Commons was recently located in the Riverview Park and 2) a shelter from the East Liberty Project served as a picnic shelter in Highland Park until as recently as 2002 **(image 8.1)**.[129] A program must be developed to identify, locate, and secure the elements of the East Liberty Project that have been displaced and repurposed. Displaced elements should be returned to the East Liberty neighborhood and incorporated into plans for revitalization.

Policy

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[129] Minutes, Art Commission. December 9, 2009. Accessed: 3 April 2010. http://www.city.pittsburgh.pa.us/cp/assets/art_commission/2009/12-09-09-minutes.pdf

The recent trend in façade demolition and replacement of urban renewal era buildings has become a detriment to the East Liberty community. Façade "updates" have destroyed at least three urban renewal era buildings in the district and are currently slated to alter others. Friendship Plaza was stripped of its façade, Pennley Park was partially demolished and then underwent a façade update, and the East Liberty Branch of the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh has suffered the indignity of having its façade completely destroyed and replaced with an updated design that draws no inspiration from the original building or its surroundings.

The argument can be made that the East Liberty Project altered and replaced many façades in an attempt to modernize the district. Whereas this is true, the way by which façades were replaced during urban renewal was an entirely different process from the one used today. In 1960s façade replacement, the original façade was often left intact to varying degrees. This practice has facilitated the restoration of many historic façades today. However, contemporary façade replacement often entails the complete removal of the existing façade and the replacement with new materials.

The façades of the urban renewal era impart a character to the area that defines East Liberty. The change that the East Liberty Project exacted on the district was so all-encompassing that the architectural vocabulary of urban renewal redefined the district. The modern aesthetic imparts a sense of place to the East Liberty commercial district.

One way of preserving the character of East Liberty would be designating the area a local historic district. Local historic designation has proven to be the most effect way of regulating and preserving significant places, buildings, structures, and objects. The East Liberty core would benefit from the protection afforded by the City of Pittsburgh's historic preservation ordinance and the oversight of the city's Historic Review Commission.

Assuming that federal funding is being used in some capacity to fund the revitalization efforts currently underway in East Liberty, such efforts would already

require the completion of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The district could benefit from being placed on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), because NRHP designation would require further review by the staff of the State Historic Preservation Officer under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. This would provide all historic resources, not merely renewal-era resources, in the district with oversight from a state agency. The benefit of such oversight would be that any potentially historic building, space, or object would be granted unbiased review to determine that no Major Federal Action Significantly Affecting the Quality of the Human Environment (MFASAQHE) existed. NRHP designation has the ability to positively direct the redevelopment of the area while also potentially opening the revitalization efforts to grant money for preservation and redevelopment.

Regarding redevelopment, the lost elements of the East Liberty Project should not be recreated. Whereas elements of the East Liberty Project should be preserved and incorporated into the plan for a revitalized district, East Liberty must not be frozen in time. The East Liberty district has an opportunity to be a vibrant community and efforts to re-establish the community as a functioning commercial destination must be undertaken. As with any other historic resource, new construction should complement, not dominate the existing urban fabric. Design principles must be established for East Liberty so as to foster smart and sustainable growth while acknowledging the district's rich and varied history.

Conclusion

Now is the time to preserve the artifacts of the East Liberty Project. Given its immense role in reshaping the East End community, defining an era of transformation for the City of Pittsburgh, and contributing to a nationwide movement of urban regeneration, the East Liberty Project and all of its associated buildings, structures, and objects deserve recognition and preservation as part of Pittsburgh's broader cultural and historical landscape.

East Liberty and communities like it nationwide are quickly approaching an important impasse: purge the landscape of its urban renewal elements and build anew, or reincorporate what exists and be forced to address the sometimes inconvenient aspects of urban renewal. Although either method is considered a viable approach in many cities, one thing is certain: by demolishing the renewal-era past in East Liberty—by demolishing the renewal-era past in cities across the nation—the urban fabric is being edited of what is, perhaps, one of the most important, poignant, and historically rich and fascinating eras in urban history.

The poor stewardship of the renewal-era built fabric in East Liberty is not a viable model for redevelopment and revitalization. By voiding the East Liberty district of its renewal-era elements, the area is purged of its place identity and its chances at future viability. Misunderstanding and indifference is not an appropriate means of confronting uncomfortable or inconvenient aspects of a community's history. Urban renewal *happened*. It is how we choose to deal with it in the twenty-first century that will define us and the curatorial management of our urban legacy.

Today, an air of possibility exists in East Liberty. Artifacts of the East Liberty Project still exist. The tools for preserving them are available. The case for their preservation has been made. The drive and initiative to preserve them must be fostered. There is no doubt that a revival of East Liberty is possible, but a true renaissance of East

Liberty will incorporate its past into present plans to form a stable, viable, vibrant future.

Image 8.1: East Liberty Mall shelter being used in Highland Park as picnic shelter c. 2002
Source: Flickr: werejellyfish http://www.flickr.com/photos/werejellyfish/2912188875/

Appendix: Interviewees

Mr. Arthur Ziegler

Mr. Ziegler is co-founder and president of Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation. The non-profit foundation, formed in 1964, was Pittsburgh's first historic preservation oriented organization and was created in response to the city's urban renewal activities. Mr. Ziegler's work has been instrumental in proving the benefit of historic preservation as a means of economic revitalization. The work of Pittsburgh History & Landmarks has helped to foster an appreciation and understanding for historic buildings in Pittsburgh and Allegheny County.

Dr. Allan B. Jacobs

Dr. Jacobs is Professor Emeritus of City & Regional Planning and Urban Design at the University of California Berkeley. Jacobs received his Bachelor of Architecture degree from Miami University. He studied at the Graduate School of Design at Harvard University and received his master's degree in city planning from the University of Pennsylvania. Jacobs came to Pittsburgh in the mid-1950s to work with the city's Urban Redevelopment Authority. He was instrumental in the design of the East Liberty Project and was one of the major players in its implementation before his departure from Pittsburgh in 1965.

Mr. Eric Jester and Mr. Nathan Wildfire

Mr. Jester and Mr. Wildfire both work with East Liberty Development, Inc. Both were instrumental to my understanding of the current issues facing East Liberty and the steps that are being taken to ensure the district's future viability.

Mr. Salvatore Belmonte

Mr. Belmonte is life-long resident of East Liberty, living in the area since the early 1930s. He has the very distinct experience of having lived through five different historical phases of the neighborhood. He witnessed the height of the community's popularity in the 1930s and 40s, its decline after World War II, its renewal in the 1960s,

its decline following renewal, and its rebirth in the 21st century. An audio recording of the interview with Mr. Belmonte is available in the Oral History Archive of Columbia University.

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