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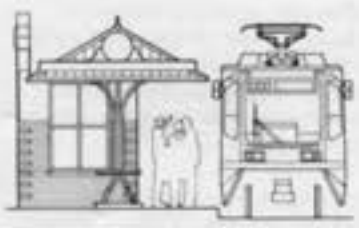
Cite

Planning in Houston: Is There a Future?

Historical Overview

Incremental Plans

Transit Issues



Plus:

El Mercado del Sol

Photographs of Houston Architecture

Cite

Cover: *Residents of Southgate, a neighborhood located near the Texas Medical Center, recently renewed their deed restrictions, but could not prevent the 18-story Travis Centre, a hotel and office complex, from being built across the street (Photo by Paul Hester)*

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Cite welcomes unsolicited manuscripts. Authors take full responsibility for securing required consents and releases and for the authenticity of their articles. All manuscripts will be considered by the Editorial Board. Suggestions for topics are also welcome. Address correspondence to: Editor, *Cite*, Rice Design Alliance, P. O. Box 1892, Houston, Texas 77251.

Notes on Contributors

Philip Arcidi has a master's degree in art history from Tufts University, and is now a student of architecture at Rice University.

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Beth Beloff is president of Beloff Interests, a real estate development company, and is a marketing and management associate of Phillips & Brown.

Peter Brown is a principal in the firm of Phillips & Brown, and is involved in major urban design and planning projects in Houston, Miami, Atlanta, Dallas, and Sante Fe.

David Dillon is the architecture critic for the Dallas Morning News.

Stephen Fox is a Fellow of the Anchorage Foundation of Texas.

Mark A. Hewitt is a Houston architect and assistant professor of architecture at Rice University.

John Kaliski, former professor of architecture at the University of Houston College of Architecture, is an architect with Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, Los Angeles.

Jan O'Brien is a Houston architect. She was managing editor of the first issue of *Threshold*, the journal of the School of Architecture at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

Jeffrey Karl Ochsner is a lecturer at the School of Architecture at Rice University and has an architecture and design firm. He is the author of *H.H. Richardson: Complete Architectural Works.*

Peter C. Papademetriou is a Houston architect and associate professor of architecture at Rice University. He is editor of *The Journal of Architectural Education* and southwest regional correspondent for *Progressive Architecture.*

Barrie Scardino, a preservation consultant, writes and lectures on local architectural history.

David Todd is a research assistant with Environmental Planning and Design and a volunteer for the Buffalo Bayou Coalition and the Bayou Preservation Association.

Letters

My House is Your House

To the editor:
I loved the piece by An Architect's Wife ("Our House the Bauhaus, or, Life Without Laura Ashley," *Cite*, Summer 1985). Even though my husband is not an architect, her article described our relationship perfectly. I definitely could use some of her sense of humor, especially concerning the drapes. Thanks for a fun article.

Beth Cook

Cover Shock

To the editor:
Today I received the Summer 1985 issue of *Cite* and was shocked - its cover is disgusting. It is unfortunate that such a cover was chosen to enclose the very good material inside.

I fail to see how this cover could properly relate to architecture and design in Houston. You should know that many of us find billboards and portable signs to be extremely objectionable. Fortunately, some of these are now being removed.

David B. Morris, AIA

Can Kaufman Paint?

To the editor:
I hope the occupants of Mark Kaufman's dream homes ("The Stuff of Dreams: New Housing Outside the Loop," *Cite*, Summer 1985) have had a dream reflecting properly on the cost of maintenance and painting of the vast amounts of wood and offsets in his post-Victorian details. They will undoubtedly regret the result of the Gulf Coast climate on such architectural materials and details, the same as I have with my "great redwood experience" in my own house.

Allan James, AIA

Big Cité Beat

☛ *Wedding Bells are Ringing: On 27 July* **Peter C. Papademetriou** *married* Newsweek's **Tessa Namuth** *at St. Andrew's Dune Church, Southampton, L.I. Officiating was Houston's Father Jeffrey H. Walker. Among the guests were the bride's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Hans Namuth, and Simone Swan. The newlyweds spent a working honeymoon in Finland, where Papademetriou continued research for his forthcoming book on the life and work of Eero Saarinen. On the same afternoon,* Cite *contributor* **Paul W. Schieffer** *married Margaret Louise Cartingham in Dallas.*

☛ **Lorraine S. Wild** *has retired as* Cite *graphic design chief to take up new duties as director of the Visual Communications Program at the California Institute of the Arts in Valencia. Hubby* **John Kaliski,** *former chairman of the Editorial Committee of* Cite, *will work for the LA office of SOM. Wild recently completed design of a monograph of the work of John Hejduk, to be published by Rizzoli this fall. Succeeding Wild as designer of* Cite *is* **Alisa Bales.**

☛ *Austin architect and designer* **Herman Dyal, Jr.** *will design an architectural guidebook to San Antonio, to be edited by* **Larry Paul Fuller.** *The guidebook is being published by the San Antonio Chapter of the American Institute of Architects in conjunction with the AIA's 1986 national convention, to be held in San Antonio.*

☛ *Will Houston be at safe from flooding in the future as it has been for the last 40 years downstream from the Addicks and Barker reservoirs? In April, in a little heralded move, the county passed a resolution sponsored by Bob Eckels seeking to have the Harris County Flood Control District take over the reservoirs from the Army Corps of Engineers, but opposition to the move has since developed. On 23 July 1985, the Bayou Preservation Association (BPA) board passed a resolution stating that the transfer was not in the best interests of the public. In its discussion, BPA board members argued that the Flood Control District had made no provisions to pay for reservoir management. Furthermore, because the district has no ecologically trained staff members, it would not recognize the inherent value in the reservoirs and streams in their current condition. Some board members even suggested the county planned to dredge the reservoirs to accommodate more run off from the burgeoning developments such as Cinco Ranch to the west. Watch for more on this developing controversy.*

☛ *The* **Rice Design Alliance** and **Central Houston, Inc.** *are sponsoring an open, two-stage, national design competition for* **Sesquicentennial Park.** *10 acres of public open space along Buffalo Bayou in the downtown Civic Center. Deadline for registration is 25 November 1985.* **Theodore Liebman** *is professional adviser. First prize:* **$20,000.**

Michael Pollack believes "architectural embellishments" such as these attract upscale people to his Colonial House Apartments (Photo by Paul Hester)

☛ *Where do people who work in Philip Johnson's buildings want to live? The answer, according to* **Michael Pollack** *in an article in the May 1985 issue of Southwest Airlines's* **Spirit** *magazine, is his Colonial House Apartments. He remodeled the 1,838-unit complex, adding the "architectural embellishments" (pitched roofs and gargoyles) that he believes attract up-scale people. What's free furniture got to do with it?*

Citelines

A New House for Sam Houston Park

Sam Houston Park, with its groves of trees and grassy slopes that roll towards Buffalo Bayou, is the only large green space in downtown Houston. Since 1954, when the Harris County Heritage Society was established, it also has been a repository for the city's oldest buildings. However, the historic houses, which the Heritage Society acquired incrementally, do not conform to any master plan, and they do not outline a perceivable volume of space. Presently, the park seems to be an interstitial zone between an elevated interstate highway structure to the west and the wall of downtown skyscrapers to the east.

Within six months, however, Sam Houston Park will become a more memorable place to visit. A new master plan by the SWA Group will create a "village green" to unite the presently scattered houses around a coherent outdoor space. Visitors to the park will encounter a much broader range of history than the earliest years of Houston, for they will find a house built in Westmoreland Place in 1905 as well as a new building that contains an exhibition spanning the entire history of Texas.

The Staiti House, a 20th-century complement to the 19th-century houses presently in the park, will be moved this fall from Westmoreland Avenue. It was built by Henry Thomas Staiti, a petroleum geologist and businessman. The son of an Italian immigrant, Staiti was involved in Spindletop and other oil fields in the early years of the petroleum industry; as a member of Houston's affluent middle class, he settled in Westmoreland Place, the first private-place type neighborhood to be developed in Houston.

Staiti House, 1905, attributed to Olle J. Lorehn, architect (Photo courtesy of the Harris County Heritage Society)

The Staiti House was probably designed by Olle J. Lorehn, but was remodelled by Alfred C. Finn, one of Houston's most prolific architects, following the Storm of 1915. Over the subsequent 65 years members of the Staiti family lived there. Because they barely changed Finn's design, it will be fairly simple for Barry Moore Architects to reconstruct and restore the house in the park.

Fortunately, the Heritage Society has an exceptional collection of photographs and measured drawings of the Staiti House, which had been deposited in the society's archives. These provide excellent documentation of Houston family life during the early years of the 20th century. This year, the Staiti heirs donated the house to the society, and the Robert W. Knox, Sr. and Pearl Wallis Knox Foundation provided the funds for its dismantling, moving, and reconstruction. Once it is relocated in Sam Houston Park, the Staiti House will serve as the interim administrative office of the Heritage Society. In a few years, the inside will be fully restored and open for tours. The exterior will be restored immediately to its appearance shortly after Finn's remodelling.

The Staiti House will occupy a site in Sam Houston Park that replicates the solar orientation it had on Westmoreland. It also will be surrounded by a representative sample of the extensive gardens designed in 1917 by Edward Dewson, one of Houston's first known professional landscape architects. The Staiti House, together with five other Heritage Society houses, will mark the perimeter of a circular brick walkway, shaded by a ring of trees. The SWA Group's plan of contiguous paths and trees will create a space which will provide a datum for the historic houses, and visitors will perceive Sam Houston Park as a village, rather than a series of randomly distributed buildings.

On 22 March 1986, the 150th anniversary of Texas's independence, the Heritage Society will open a new museum building on the corner of Bagby and Lamar, adjacent to the Long Row. The exhibit inside will survey four centuries of Texas history. The society envisions this building as intermediary, for within a few years it plans to build a large, permanent museum on another site in the park. The Mayor's Committee on the Sesquicentennial has endorsed the project and a capital funds drive is well underway.

Philip Arcidi

Buffalo Bayou And City Planning

In August, 1984, Mayor Kathryn Whitmire created the Buffalo Bayou Task Force. The mayor asked the task force to devise a plan for redeveloping Buffalo Bayou in order to make it a civic and commercial asset to the city. On 18 April 1985, the task force released its preliminary report, which focuses on three major issues - flood control, water quality, and park development. In each of these areas, the study suggests specific, practical improvements. The improvements are good examples of effective city planning: they are long-term, flexible solutions to problems that affect large and varied parts of the city.

The proposals offered for flood control include the building of detention ponds in the upper parts of the Buffalo and White Oak basins to protect against downstream flooding. The ponds will collect and store floodwaters, allowing releases only when there is capacity in downstream sections of the bayou. In addition, flooding in these streams is seen as both a problem of upstream runoff and downstream limits in stream capacity. The task force tried to deal with both problems by suggesting not only the detention ponds in the upper watershed but also de-snagging and anti-erosion work in the downstream sections of the stream. Furthermore, by requiring detention ponds as part of new developments, the city should be able to protect against future flooding.

The task force also suggests an enduring solution to the problems of water quality in Buffalo and White Oak bayous. The group endorses the new instream water-quality standards for Buffalo Bayou, and urged consideration of similar standards for White Oak. By specifying water-quality standards for these receiving streams, the authorities recognize that a stream can only dilute and degrade a certain amount of waste before the stream's water quality begins to fall. By setting a water-quality standard for the bayous, a cap is put on the total amount of waste that can enter the stream.

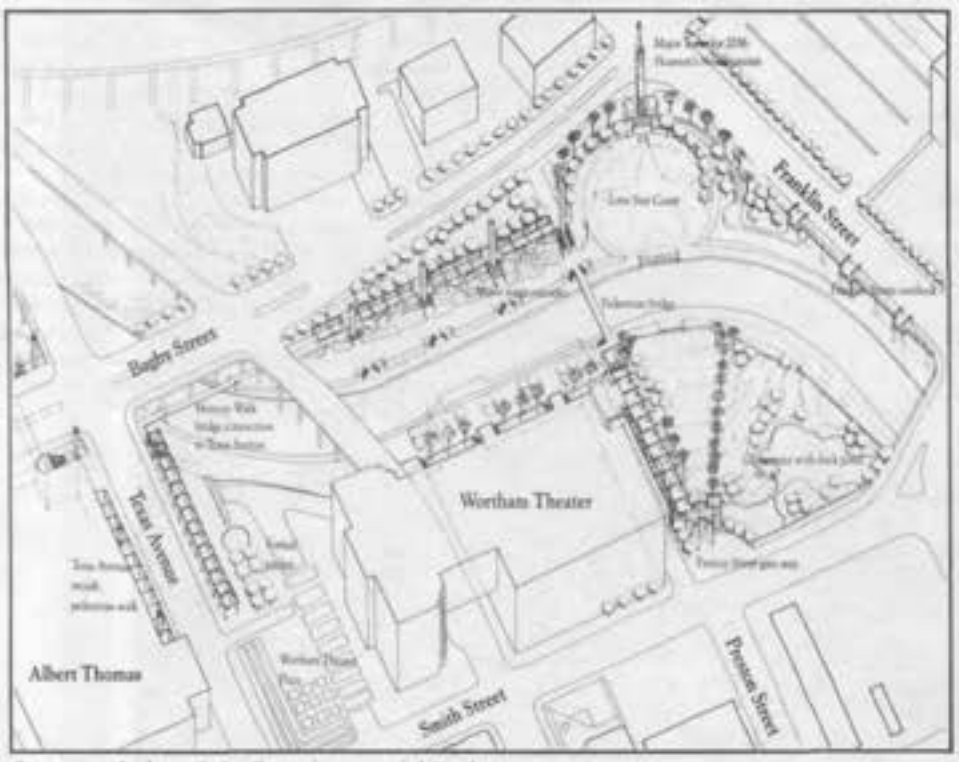
The task force report also offers water-quality recommendations that could affect widespread parts of the city. The report recommends regionalization of sewage-treatment plants in the upper watershed and correction of pump-station overflows and treatment-plant bypasses in the lower watershed. The two-pronged suggestion makes sense. In the upper watershed of Buffalo Bayou, the principal problem was the construction of many small, "package" sewage-treatment plants. The package plants suffered from little or no supervision and from inadequate design. By a policy of regionalization, the city and developers can build large, cost-efficient, sophisticated, well-supervised sewage-treatment plants that should have much better effluent than the package plants. On the other hand, the problem and the solution in the lower part of the watershed are different. There, the pump stations and treatment plants are old and over-capacity. The facilities need to be repaired, modernized, and expanded. The pairing of different solutions for separate areas of the city should improve the water quality of the bayou throughout Houston.

The study offers far-sighted recommendations for parks along Buffalo Bayou, emphasizing development along the west sector (Shepherd to Sabine), the downtown sector (Sabine to Allen's Landing), and the east sector (Allen's Landing to the Turning Basin). In the west sector, the report suggests improved access, lighting, and paths. On the east side, parks at McKee Street, Clayton Homes, and El Mercado del Sol are recommended. While the report is focused on the immediate development of a Sesquicentennial Park adjoining Wortham Theater in the downtown sector, it also suggests that plans be pursued for redevelopment of areas at Allen's Landing, Commerce Street, the University of Houston Plaza, Holcombe Square, the Public Works Yard, and Sam Houston Park. By mentioning these other areas as potential projects, the task force has set up the machinery for the long process of developing specific plans and raising adequate funds.

The task force report offers schemes that might be used in a variety of areas along the bayou. For example, the bayou might be protected from further construction along its banks and other forms of encroachment by a "bayou easement." Also, roads along the bayou, such as Bagby, Franklin, and Navigation, might be given "scenic right-of-way" and improved with plantings and billboard controls. With green spaces and parkways strung along the bayou, it could become a public place that would be used by people from all parts of the city.

The Buffalo Bayou Task Force has produced a good report. Their recommendations fit in with existing government policies. For example, inclusion of detention ponds is already a requirement for plat approval in the White Oak watershed, while regionalization of sewage-treatment plants is already underway at the Turkey Creek facility. Also, the recommendations use laws that are already on the books. Water-quality standards have already been issued for Buffalo Bayou by the state. The idea of a scenic right-of-way is supported by Section 4610 of the Houston Building Code. Finally, they use existing funding mechanisms and, at the same time, attract new donors. Regionalization and construction of detention ponds are on-going programs supported by joint-venture agreements between the city and private developers. The proposal for a Sesquicentennial Park has appealed to several private donors, and has already enlisted the support of Tenneco. In conclusion, the task force should be congratulated. They have provided good ideas that should be workable solutions. The task force itself has offered private support and guidance to city policies and finances. Together, the task force and its study have made a significant contribution to planning for Houston's growth and for improving its quality of life.

David Todd



Conceptual plan of the Sesquicentennial Park

A Survey Of Dallas Street Life

In November 1984, William H. Whyte, widely respected urban analyst and author of The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces, *spoke to the Downtown Houston Association on how to make our urban centers more vital, active, and livable places. In March 1985, Whyte conducted a survey of downtown street life in Dallas, followed by a two-day seminar there. As we thought the survey might offer lessons for Houston, we requested this special report from David Dillon.* (JKO)

Dallasites may talk a lot about street crime and street people, but many of them believe that downtown streets are safe. And despite the city's reputation as a stuffy, puritanical burg, there is a hearty appetite for vendors, outdoor cafes, street performers, and other heretical Mediterranean pleasures. These are two of the more tantalizing conclusions to be drawn from William H. Whyte's survey of downtown street life in Dallas, which garnered nearly 700 responses and was the subject of two lively public seminars at the Central Dallas Library. "There was great enthusiasm for what I'd call grace notes," Whyte said. "The results confirmed my feeling that these things will go in Dallas if given half a chance."

Whyte has been making regular visits to Dallas since the late 1970s, usually in conjunction with seminars sponsored by the Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture. In 1984 the city commissioned him to study its barren City Hall Plaza in hopes of making it something other than a grand setting for a piece of architectural sculpture. Whyte made a number of his familiar recommendations: moveable tables and chairs, food kiosks, windbreaks, and more and larger trees. His report was lukewarmly received by local architects, who thought his proposals would compromise the integrity of I.M. Pei's design, but city officials were sufficiently impressed to hire him to conduct a survey of downtown street life.

Whyte's questionnaire, published in the daily newspapers, was intended to measure habits ("Do you use buses regularly?") as well as impressions and assumptions ("Where is the center of Dallas?"). On the latter issue, 178 people said that the center is the central business district, with Thanks-Giving Square the hub of choice; 52 people thought the center is the intersection of the LBJ Freeway and Dallas Parkway at the Galleria; 44 people said Dallas has no center; and 6 were convinced it is somewhere in the NorthPark shopping center. One person wrote testily, "I don't identify with downtown Dallas at all. Very few do. Why don't you pay attention to where 90 percent of the rest of us live?"

DART (Dallas Area Rapid Transit) got good grades for service from those who use the buses regularly (about 20 percent), and the downtown Hop-A-Buses are a smash. But the city's bus shelters were almost universally condemned as poorly located and badly maintained. Some people wrote that the shelters, especially the lack of them, was the main reason they don't ride the bus. On a related issue, 62 percent believed that the underground concourses should be extended, while 58 percent felt similarly about the skyways. Whyte noted, however, that those who were opposed to extending the systems were strongly so ("lots of exclamation points in the margins") while those in favor believed that since the city had already spent some $12 million on the systems it might as well go the rest of the way. Many people felt that downtown parking is inadequate, despite the presence of 66,000 spaces. "That has to be a record," Whyte gasped. Many people also mentioned housing as an essential ingredient of a lively downtown, though few said that they would actually move downtown themselves.

On more architectual matters, Plaza of the America's was chosen as the friendliest office building, followed by LTV Center and Lincoln Plaza. Thanks-Giving Tower was named the least friendly, with InterFirst II and ARCO Tower closing fast. Thanks-Giving Square was the most popular public space by a wide margin. There were also numerous mentions of the new tables and chairs on City Hall Plaza, accompanied by pleas for more of everything.

The most significant missing grace note in downtown Dallas, according to the survey, is shopping. People wrote comments such as "Few interesting stores. Downtown looks beat." It was the main reason given for the low pedestrian count on downtown streets. "That was the one thing that came through in all the questions," Whyte said. "People in Dallas feel very strongly about it, which of course delights me." This may explain the annointing of Plaza of the America's as downtown Dallas's friendliest building. From the outside it is a chilling monolith, first cousin to Renaissance Center in Detroit and Bonaventure Center in Los Angeles. It makes every critic's hit list, Whyte's included. Yet it has shopping - 100,000 square feet of it, much of it expensive and all wrapped around an ice skating rink.

Whyte said that he was far less interested in the statistical validity of the survey than in what people said and how they said it. For this reason he did all the tabulations himself, sifting through stacks of forms in search of a penetrating aside or a revealing squiggle. His general conclusion was that downtown Dallas is a livelier and more interesting place than it was a few years ago, when he first began visiting the city. "If I were a member of the City Council with an interest in downtown, I'd be very encouraged by the results of this survey," he said. "It wouldn't take a whole hell of a lot to change things for the better . . . . There is an energy there, a drive to be number one, that you don't find in a lot of cities. I've recently spent a lot of time in Topeka, Kansas. What is there to say about Topeka?"

David Dillon

Rebirth for Root Square Park

Root Square Park may soon symbolize hope for an expanded vital and humane central Houston. The 1.42-acre park covers one full city block, bounded by Austin, Clay, LaBranch, and Bell streets. After it was donated to the city in 1925 by A.P. and Laura Root, it enjoyed a heyday as "one of the thrilling sights of the city, with its lighted play areas and its modernistic white brick building with blue trim, where daily large crowds of children and adults meet for all types of sports and recreation." However, by the 1960s the demography of the city center had changed and park programs failed to attract enough participation to justify upkeep on the recreation center with its two handball courts and restrooms. In 1972, the badly deteriorated facilities were demolished, leaving only the large live oak and pecan trees that line Bell and Austin streets.

When attention again was focused on Root Square Park in the 1980s, Burdette Keeland, chairman of the board of the Park People, dreamed of a limited international competition for its redesign. Four architects - Michael Graves, Arata Isozaki, James Stirling, and Ricardo Legorreta - would be paid for a scheme, and the three designs not used for the park would be held for future full-block city parks. Though the architects showed interest, the idea was dropped as too expensive, and a very localized competition was held in a fifth-year architecture studio at the University of Houston in 1983.

City Parks Director Don Olson and Burdette Keeland taught the design studio, stressing the need to design for the area's future. Their 50-year vision included not only the convention center now under construction, but a forest of skyscrapers. The students were told to design an urban park that would be for office workers both a respite from the hot city streets and interesting to view from above. The existing trees had to be protected, redwood "California issue" benches avoided, and the idea of a place, not an expanse to walk across, was emphasized.

City Council member Eleanor Tinsley and City Planning Commission Chairman Burdette Keeland view model of Root Square Park, Richard Profitt, designer, and Vernon Henry and Associates, landscape architects

First place was awarded to UH student Richard Profitt's design. The new "strolling" park will have a soft greenbelt around a hard center. The entrance comes diagonally from the northwest corner of the block, responding to a perceived axis from the future convention center. The pavement is gridded accordingly, loosely forming a rotated square within a square. Five-foot walls around the park, proposed by the winning designer, were seen as too restrictive a way of creating a "space" and replaced by gentle berms that can be crossed on foot. Yet the park is presented as a cul-de-sac. So why should the park - bounded by streets, not sandwiched in between buildings as is Paley Park in New York City - be so emphatically directional? Is it impossible to have a "place" that also permits passage? One hopes that the dated berm approach to directing people, so unsuccessful at Market Square, will be a minor gesture.

The heart of the square should be worth discovering. The grid sinks in colored-tile steps to form hard-edged pools with deepening hues of magenta to light purple, marking slight increases in depth. While wading is not officially sanctioned, the pools will not be cordoned off, and will be tempting. The grid also will be raised randomly to form seating. Beds of azaleas are planned and crepe myrtles will further delineate the space and add seasonal color.

The rebirth of Root Square Park as an urban amenity is being coordinated by the Park People and the Houston Parks and Recreation Department. This exemplary collaboration of the public and private sectors is spearheaded on the private side by Texas Eastern Corporation's Gloria Pierpont who is working to raise the $750,000 needed to rebuild the park - $200,000 has already been donated by Texas Eastern, and another $50,000 has been pledged since the fund-raising effort began last May.

Jan O'Brien

Arquitectonica At Blaffer

Taggart Townhouses, 1984, Arquitectonica, architect (Photo by Paul Hester)

The Sarah Campbell Blaffer Gallery at the University of Houston will present "Arquitectonica - Yesterday Today Tomorrow," an exhibition documenting the work of the Miami architectural firm, Arquitectonica, between 10 November and 15 December 1985. Forty-nine projects that the firm produced between 1977 and 1984 will be displayed in drawings, models, and photographs. Included are buildings and designs in Houston, Austin, Dallas, San Antonio, and Corpus Christi, as well as in Florida, California, New York, Peru, and Ecuador. The exhibition was organized by Jan van der Marck for the Center for the Fine Arts in Miami. A catalogue by Frederick Koepper will be available at the gallery. In conjunction with the exhibition, the Blaffer Gallery will sponsor a tour of Arquitectonica's Houston buildings and a talk by Laurinda Spear and Bernardo Fort-Brescia. The Blaffer Gallery is open Monday through Friday from 10 AM to 5 PM and on Sunday from 1 PM to 5 PM. It is located on the central campus of the University of Houston. For more information, telephone the gallery at 713/749-1329.

Young Architects Forum Takes Off

Although organized only last spring, the Young Architects Forum, a task force of the Houston Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, has already planned a full season of diversified activities.

Soirées will continue to be held at the Driscoll Street Cafe (1834 Westheimer), where drawings shows will rotate on a six-week cycle. According to Natalye Appel, one of the 12 members of the forum's steering committee, the evening events have attracted between 75 and 100 young architects and other design professionals and artists.

Beginning on Tuesday, 1 October, the forum will launch a four-part lecture series called "Emerging Architects: Architecture in Houston." Appearing will be Val Glitsch (1 October), Chelsea Architects (15 October), Compendium (29 October), and Makover-Levy (12 November). All lectures will be held at the Houston Design Center beginning at 8 PM. A spring series is planned also; it will highlight new architectural talent from other Texas cities. For more information on the lectures, telephone John Rogers at 713/520-5082.

Long-range plans being formulated by the steering committee include a possible super-studio, composed of students from area architecture schools, focused on a Houston urban design problem to be worked out with the Houston Chapter AIA Urban Design Committee.

Participation in the Young Architects Forum is open to all interested individuals. For more information, telephone steering committee chairman Matt Starr at 713/524-2155.

Citesurvey

El Mercado del Sol

Wolde-Ghiorghis Ayele

Atrium, El Mercado del Sol, 1985, PDR, architects (Photo by Paul Hester)

El Mercado del Sol, Houston's first large, Mexican-style shopping center, opened its doors to the public on 2 June 1985. Housed in a complex of rehabilitated warehouses located at the intersection of Navigation Boulevard and Jensen Drive in the near East End, the Mercado is slated to become upon completion the largest adaptive-reuse retail development in the United States. The complex eventually will occupy 15 acres and will offer 407,000 square feet of retail and office space; a 3-acre public park and plaza for music and folkloric performances; three 525-seat movie theaters; market stands for fresh fruit, vegetables, and meats; food vendors; push-cart merchants; three restaurants; a private dinner club; and meeting space for conventions as well as banquet halls for social gatherings. The plaza itself will feature an amphitheater and a *zócalo*, a staple item of Hispanic urban culture, which here will be surrounded by greenery and sport a kiosk as well as a three-tiered fountain. The culminating touch of this ambitious scheme is the park's principal promenade, which when finished will serve as a dramatic link between the developer's vision and the picturesque neighborhood church of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

Located in a predominantly lower-income Hispanic neighborhood, the Mercado might appear misplaced were it not for its ethnic affinity with the area. Though falling within the shadow of downtown, the area does not share any of the vitality and optimistic verve characteristic of most of Houston. Instead, it is eclipsed by a peripheral uneasiness typical of a warehouse district that is hardly alleviated by the convivial spirit of the new Mercado. Also, the Mercado's formidable size might seem out of scale in a neighborhood where single-family dwellings, small retail centers, abandoned lots, and junkyards comprise a significant portion of the urban fabric. These seeming disparities, however, might be explained upon consideration of its developers' intentions. The entire project is a joint venture of the City of Houston and Arnold Development Company, and one its goals is to stir the neighborhood from its lackadaisical stupor and provide an incentive for urban renewal.

The back side of the Mercado, a long, almost windowless expanse of wall five-stories high, is visible from U.S. Highway 59 just where the freeway circumvents downtown. The Mercado rises up out of a sea of low-income public housing units, making it seem somewhat like an oasis. The buildings fall on an east-west axis, with the prominent entrance façade facing towards the Houston Ship Channel. Buffalo Bayou, sluggish and low at this point, skirts the northern edge of the premises.

When approaching the Mercado on Navigation, the unstimulating and abject domesticity of the neighborhood camouflages the developer's intentions. At the intersection of Navigation and Jensen no "Mexican marketplace" comes into view. What is immediately visible, aside from the little church that figures prominently in the developer's vision of the finished project, is a large, low brick structure, painstakingly restored by what one might assume to have been a philan-

Model showing east elevation of El Mercado del Sol (Photo by Paul Hester)

thropic effort, and whose dignity of line and form suggest an austerity reminiscent of Dominican convents. This is the earliest portion of what originally was the Lottman-Myers Manufacturing Company factory, built in 1903. Its understated elegance hardly disrupts the peaceful lethargy of the area. This edifice, in fact, forms the south face of the Mercado. One is only convinced of it after reading the sign and seeing the accompanying logo (a stylized version of that ubiquitous Mexican sun, prominently displayed above the entrance porch). Half expecting to see the results of a cross between a Fiesta supermarket and the Alamo, wrapped around with De Chirico-like arcades, and incorporating every conceivable purchasable item of Hispanic culture, one is pleasantly surprised that the architects, PDR, avoided most of the predictable "Mexicanisms" and opted for a more restrained approach.

Driving into the parking lot, it becomes obvious that two distinct groups of buildings comprise the main body of the Mercado. There are, in fact, six existing industrial loft buildings, but because of stylistic similarities and approximate age it is more convenient to consider the first four as belonging to one phase and the last two, built in the late 1920s, to another.

The main entrance to the marketplace occurs where the two disparate wings collide, and a large, covered porch which partially obscures the unfortunate resolution is only marginally successful in uniting the two. The porch itself consists of a metal roof painted a sienna to match the intense terra-cotta color of the old bricks, and it is supported by thin, steel pipe columns painted bottle-green. The central portion is raised into a triangular, pediment-like form, marking the main entrance into the Mercado. The space beneath this porch is ample enough to accommodate a variety of activities. Immediately in front of it, and verging on the parking lot, is a small plaza that serves as an extension of the covered porch area. Black wrought-iron chairs have been placed beneath Sauza Tequila umbrellas, creating the necessary intimacy and continental ambiance desirable for successful outdoor cafes.

Beneath the porch are two entrances, at right angles to one another, that lead into the Mercado. The entrance that is aligned with the outdoor plaza space leads into what appropriately has been dubbed the food court. One stumbles unceremoniously into a space filled with dozens of eateries, mostly of the fast-food variety encountered in malls, here interpreted with a Mexican flair. Chairs and tables occupy the main circulation space, which is divided into several levels by short series of steps and ramps. Stuccoed walls, decorative ceramic tile, as well as other paraphernalia that do not interfere with the homogeneity of the exterior, have all been incorporated into the interior, giving it that unmistakable, feigned exuberance and often misleading South-of-the-Border look. The stalls seem to have been lifted straight out of some amusement park where "Mexican villages" are placed next to "Swiss chalets," all with the same degree of unconvincing exactitude.

The second entry leads into the most congenial space in the entire complex. The narrow, rectangular, residual space between the three older warehouses and the newer two has been roofed over, resulting in an atrium space that reaches the full height of the buildings flanking it. Clerestory windows provide ample light. The space, despite its high and narrow configuration, is not at all confining due to the transparency of the adjoining walls which provide visual as well as physical access to other parts of the Mercado. The brick walls of the older warehouses have been left intact, except where replacement has been mandatory. The aged condition of these walls lends the space an authentic rusticity. Windows and balconies overlook the atrium from different levels. Concrete stairs flanked by wrought-iron railings lead to open retail areas half a floor level below, as well as to restaurant and other shops half a floor level or more above this space. The floor is paved with stone tiles of a dark, volcanic color.

In sharp contrast to the brick walls of the older warehouses which line two walls of the atrium space, the walls of the newer warehouses that form the remaining sides have been heavily remodelled. One wall is now dressed in a series of arched openings, composing the entire five-story façade. The structure supporting these openings is hidden behind a thick appliqué of stucco, painted off-white. Cookie-like medallions, done in the same paste, and intended as decoration, adorn the walls at various intervals, imparting a cheap, overworked aspect to this otherwise pleasant enclave.

The open retail space in the basement area, with its concrete floor and chain-link partitions, remains very Spartan. But the vaguely confusing layout of the stalls, which is a welcome change from the severe linearity of most malls (and which encourages lingering), and of Mexican *artesanía* easily suggest a partially modernized marketplace in Mexico. Similarly, outside across the parking lot, but still within the premises, the outdoor fruit market that is set up beneath the shade of the existing trees exudes such provincial charm that were it not for the peeping downtown skyline, the illusion would be complete.

The upper floors of the Mercado eventually will be occupied by offices as well as house the banquet and meeting facilities. The rooftop Tortuga Bay Nightclub will offer a privileged view of the surrounding neighborhood, once the eye traverses the vast expanse of parking lot. A lot of work, especially landscaping, remains to be done. Workers are busy plastering interiors, patching exteriors, and in the process, covering what ought to remain exposed. The stunning, heavy-timber structural members of the old warehouses soon may be hidden behind acres of drywall (partially to satisy fire-rating requirements), and the original floorboards concealed beneath tiles that are easier to maintain.

The effort involved in transforming a defunct structure into one capable of sustaining a successful commercial enterprise is considerable and commendable, especially in an area which is socio-economically unattractive to most investors. The risks of attempting urban renewal in such an area are relatively high. Precedents for urban revitalization abound, especially in older, northeastern cities, and perhaps it is an indication of Houston's coming of age that such a project was conceived for a city which so far has been largely deaf to the pleas of preservationists. The opening of El Mercado in a restored complex of old warehouses brings hope that the preservation of our architectural heritage is under way, and is definitely a step in the right direction. However, the mixed cultural heritage of the area, the immense scope of the project, and the lack of any successful precedents within Houston are bound to pose certain problems that might interfere with its projected success. There is also the ever-present danger of it lapsing into yet another shopping center, albeit with ethnic overtones, if care is not taken to cultivate the unique qualities of the neighborhood as well as the buildings themselves. ■

Detail of south elevation, El Mercado del Sol (Photo by Paul Hester)

ForeCite

A Paradox

Jeffrey Karl Ochsner

The primary focus of this issue of *Cite* is planning. Planning has become a topic of frequent discussion among architects, real estate investors, planners, developers, government officials, political candidates, and the general public in Houston and Harris County.

In this issue we first trace the general history of planning in Houston and then focus in detail on two major areas of current planning interest: the city's proposed Compendium of Plans process, and the planning of METRO's regional transit system. The approaches in these two plans are very different - the first incremental, seeking to create a city plan by compiling a series of area plans; the second seeking first a broad regional consensus, then focusing in detail on specific areas.

It is important to recognize that these are only two of the many on-going planning processes which deserve attention. Other areas of significant plan development now underway in Harris County include infrastructure (water supply, including subsidence; sewage, including regionalization of treatment; and flooding and storm drainage, focusing on detention ponds), streets and thoroughfares (thoroughfare plans and mobility plans for Houston, Harris County, and several surrounding counties), and major highway planning (both improving the existing freeway network and adding new freeways). The City of Houston and the METRO planning processes have received the most attention, but plans for infrastructure, for streets and thoroughfares, and for highways may ultimately have the greatest impact on the shape of the future urban form of the region.

But beyond these areas of planning, and perhaps beyond the scope of this issue of *Cite*, many in our city are asking: Has the time come to reconsider the role of land-use controls? For more than 20 years, the city has grown without controls and to this day, as a result of the bitter 1962 referendum, the word "zoning" remains unacceptable in Houston. But clearly a consensus is emerging that some land-use controls are necessary. Initially these controls have taken the form of a scenic-district ordinance, a development ordinance, a billboard ordinance, and similar ordinances, but concern already has arisen over the inability of such blanket ordinances to differentiate among the new and old neighborhoods making up the city.

(Photo by Paul Hester)

Land-use controls may be conceived in two ways - conservative and visionary. Conservative controls are implemented to protect (to conserve) existing assets. Controls which provide for buffer zones between incompatible uses (such as parking garages and cooling towers backing up to residential neighborhoods) or which reinforce existing deed restrictions (thereby protecting existing residential neighborhoods), or similar types of controls are essentially conservative. Visionary controls go further and actually attempt to shape the city or region by directing or limiting uses or other features such as height, floor area, or density of structures or developments. Such controls must begin from a consensus about a desirable future shape of the city and then regulate future development to guide it in that direction.

While traditional forms of zoning may be inappropriate for Houston, a broad consensus of public opinion (even including a range of development and real estate interests) appears to agree on the need for some types of controls, if only the conservative, protective type. The consensus necessary for visionary, city-shaping controls does not yet exist - perhaps it must wait for a visionary, but as yet undefined, "Goals for Houston" process which will bring citizens together to address the kind of future we want for our city.

Still, even now, real estate and development interests, government officials, and others are coming to recognize the paradox of planning and controls - that the preservation of land values and of existing buildings and areas, as well as the full development of the city, may actually depend on the implementation of some restrictions. Indeed, what urban theorist Nathan Lewis wrote over 70 years ago in *The Planning of the Modern City* may be paradoxical, but it is nonetheless true:

. . .that a policy of restrictions tends to fuller utilization of land than a policy of no restriction. The reasons lie in the greater safety and security of investment secured by definite restrictions. The restrictions tend to fix the character of the neighborhood. The owner therefore feels that if he is to secure the maximum returns from his land, he must promptly improve it in conformity with the established restrictions.

While this issue of *Cite* is only about planning, and not about controls, perhaps we need to ask ourselves, is planning enough? ■

Planning in Houston:

Stephen Fox

Like so many characteristics imputed to Houston, its reputation as an unplanned city is the result of selective and uncritical historical reflection. It is more accurate to say that Houston is a partially planned city in which successive episodes of rapid expansion have outstripped whatever planning progress might theretofore have been achieved. The notion of planning Houston's urban growth and development is not new. But support for constructing a public policy of planned development has been sporadic and inconsistent, dependent upon the personal commitment of individual citizens or public officials rather than institutionalized city policy.

Houston's engagement with city planning began as a result of local interest in developing a park and boulevard system tied to the regional network of bayous. Between 1910 and 1917, during the reform administrations of Mayor H. Baldwin Rice and his successor, Ben Campbell, a city plan document, *Houston: Tentative Plans for It's Development* (1913), was prepared and published by the Cambridge, Massachusetts landscape architect, Arthur Coleman Comey, and the first increments of a city-wide park and parkway system were completed. This latter task was carried out under the direction of the St. Louis landscape architect and planner, George E. Kessler; its centerpiece was the development of Hermann Park and Main Boulevard. Comey's recommendations, although received with interest, must have seemed too ambitious, both politically and administratively, to be implemented. Comey addressed not only the development of a city-wide park system (his report was commissioned by the Board of Park Commissioners), but also the compilation and use of data, traffic and transportation planning, control and regulation of housing and building construction, and legal measures that might be taken to establish a "Metropolitan Improvement Commission" to plan, regulate, and coordinate the city's and county's public-works projects.

The enthusiasm that sustained Houston's forays into public and private planned development in the 1910s ran its course by the end of the first world war. The subsequent revitalization of the cause of planning during the 1920s at first may appear as a logical - and even more successful - sequel to the achievements of the previous decade. Yet this revitalization masked the radical weaknesses that eventually retarded efforts to establish public planning as a normative procedure in Houston: an exclusive dependence on individual citizens committed to planning; the apathy, if not hostility, of the general public to the purpose and mechanisms of public planning; and the ambivalence of public officials, who supported the "progressive" appearance of planning while only reluctantly according statutory authority and financial support to public planning agencies.

Achievement and Failure

From the 1920s, three individuals stand out prominently in the history of Houston planning: Will C. Hogg, the rich, mercurial, impulsive lawyer who made public planning his personal cause; Oscar F. Holcombe, who, between 1921 and 1957, would serve 11 non-consecutive terms as mayor; and S. Herbert Hare, who, from the time of Kessler's death in 1923 until his own death in 1960, was the city's professional planning consultant.

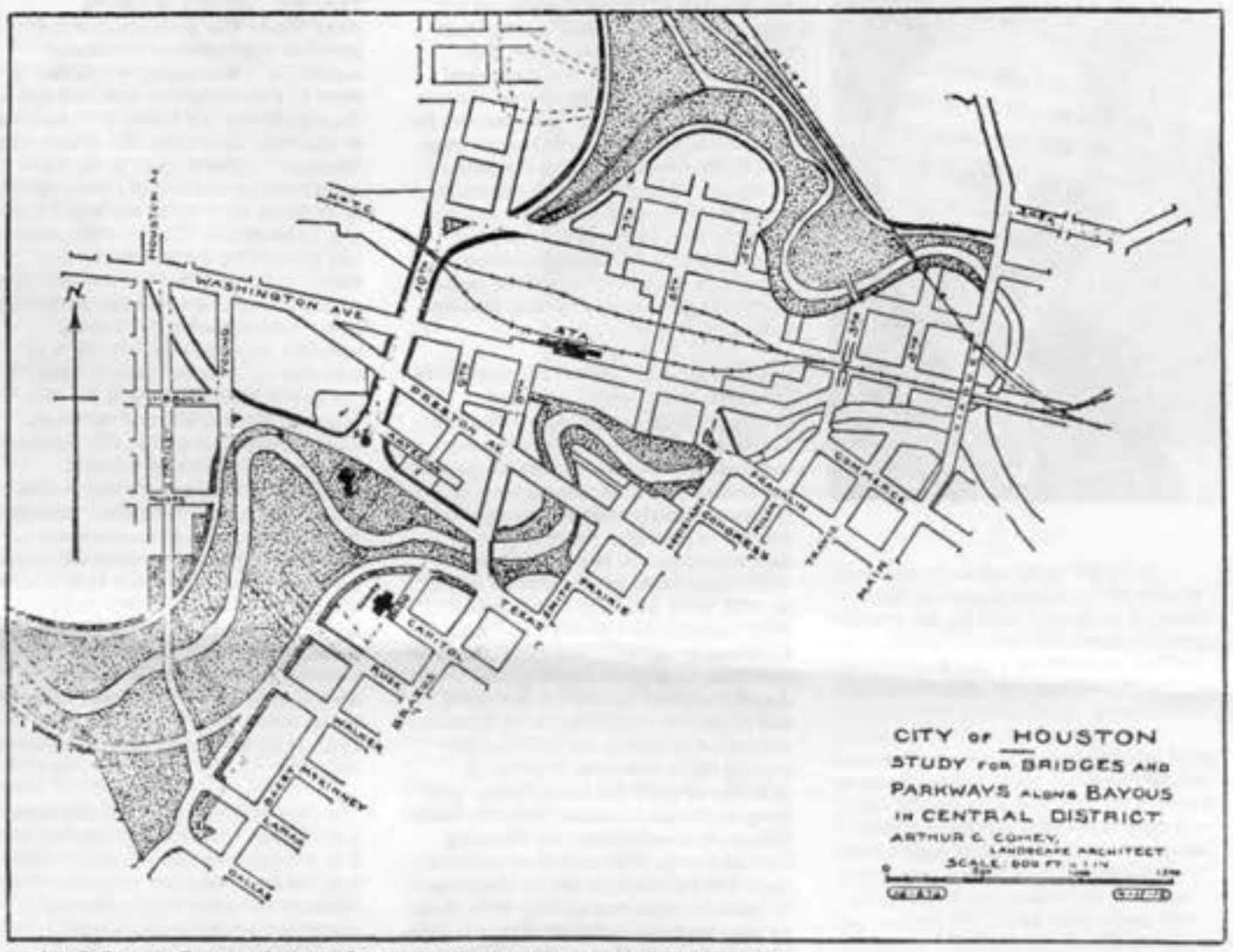
In terms of achievements, the record of the 1920s was impressive: the creation of a City Planning Commission, the acquisition of Memorial Park and smaller parks, creation of the Buffalo Bayou and Brays Bayou parkways and of a downtown Civic Center, the preparation of a major street and thoroughfare plan, and the publication of a second city-plan document, *The Report of the City Planning Commission* (1929), issued as a record of the commission's recommendations and achievements. Moreover, the effects of public planning were adumbrated by those of private planning, especially in the development of planned garden subdivisions. The largest and most comprehensively developed of these was Will Hogg's River Oaks, begun in 1923 and carried out by Hogg, his brother and sister, Mike and Ima Hogg, and his associate Hugh Potter as a model of the benefits of planned community development.

A Historic Overview

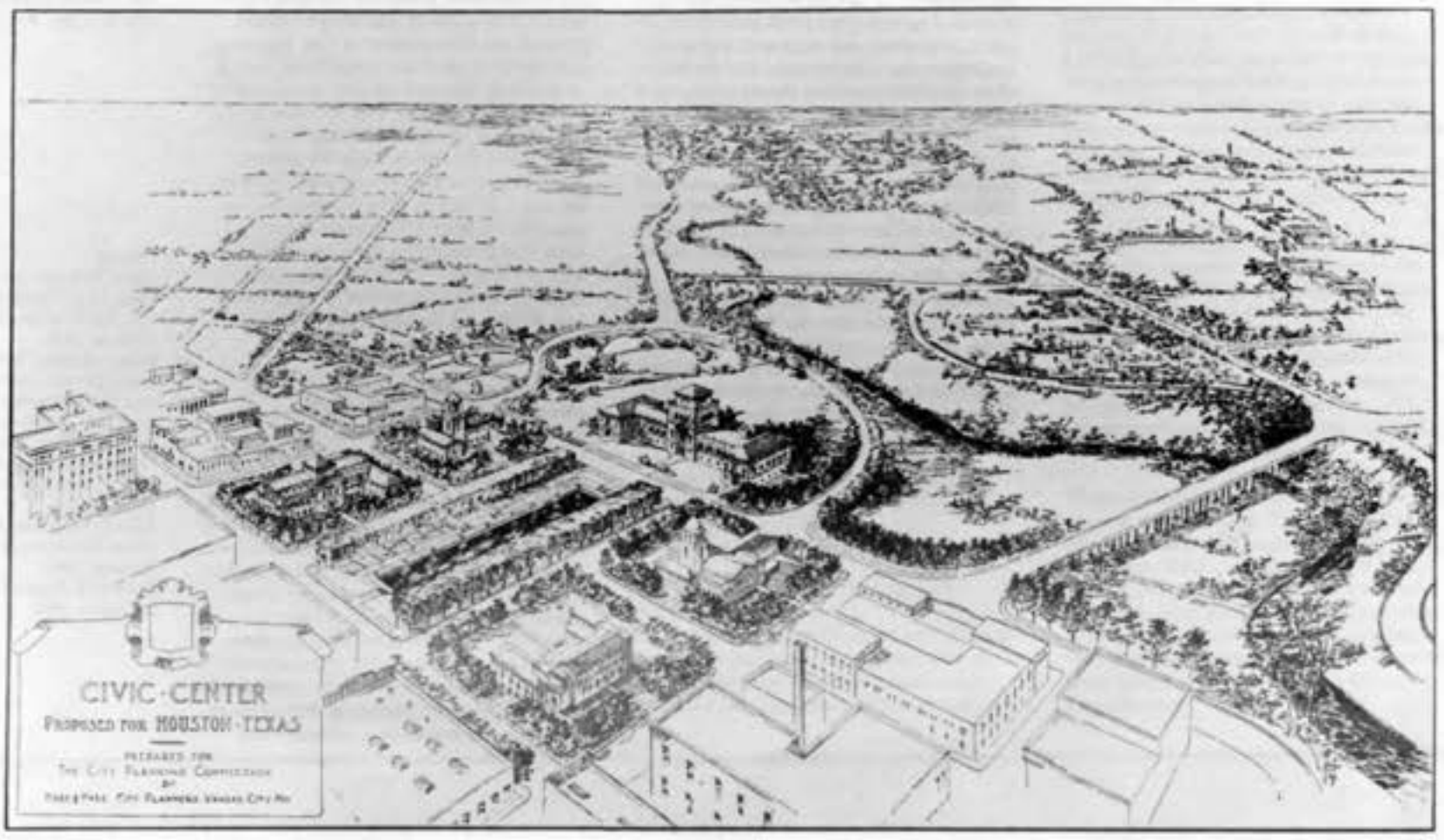
George E. Keisler (Photo by D.P. Thompson, The American Magazine, *January 1912)*

However, when these achievements are balanced against the shaky course of planning as public policy, the complete dissolution of public planning in Houston in 1930, during the first attempt to adopt a zoning plan, becomes comprehensible. Mayor Holcombe appointed the first City Planning Commission in 1922, but the City Council neither established it by ordinance nor authorized any funds to suppor its work. The members quickly ceased meeting and in 1924 Holcombe had to appoint a second commission, one established by ordinance and provided with a budget and a charge by the City Council. Hare and Hare were retained by the new commission to prepare a zoning plan, a Civic Center plan, a park plan, a major street and thoroughfare plan, and plans for beautifying the city's bayous. By 1926 Hare and Hare had produced a series of proposals for physical improvements, particularly for the Buffalo Bayou Parkway and for the Civic Center. However, when the commission's appropriation was depleted, its work ended and the commission members again ceased meeting. It was due to Will Hogg's intervention and his willingness to spend his own money for a cause that he supported which enabled property to be acquired for the parkway between downtown and River Oaks and for the Civic Center.

In acknowledgment of Hogg's work (which included securing passage of legislation by the Texas State Legislature in 1927 enabling cities to adopt zoning laws and to control the platting of subdivisions), Holcombe appointed him to chair a third City Planning Commission in 1927. But Hogg resigned in 1929, the year



Arthur C. Comey's diagram of proposed parkways along Buffalo and White Oak bayous in central Houston (Houston, Tentative Plans for Its Development, *1913*)



Hare and Hare's perspective of a proposed civic center organized around Hermann Square at the head of a proposed Buffalo Bayou Parkway, 1925 (Report of the City Planning Commission, *1929*)

Right: *Mayor Oscar F. Holcombe (left), City Planning Director Ralph S. Ellifrit (center), and Planning Commission Vice Chairman M.E. Walter (right) reviewing Houston zoning map, 1947 (Photo courtesy Ralph S. Ellifrit).* Below: *S. Herbert Hare (Photo courtesy of Ochsner, Hare & Hare)*

before his death, in part because he felt that local political support was so inadequate. In 1928 he helped defeat Holcombe's re-election after he discovered that the mayor had profited from the sale of property that the city was to acquire for the Civic Center. Following Hogg's resignation, the City Council and Holcombe's successor as mayor, Walter E. Monteith, began hearings on the zoning ordinance and plan drawn up by Hare and Hare. Taken aback by a display of concerted opposition, the council tabled the proposal and once again allowed the City Planning Commission to lapse.

In reaction to the laissez-faire attitudes of the 1920s, public planning gained temendously in prestige during the 1930s. In Houston, however, it remained dormant until, as Barry J. Kaplan has pointed out in his study of the zoning issue in Houston, a single crisis renewed public interest in planning: the expiration of deed restrictions in Montrose Place in 1937. Oscar Holcombe, re-elected mayor in 1932, 1934, and 1936 - and again in 1939 - established a fourth City Planning Commission in 1937, with Hugh Potter as chairman, to prepare a zoning plan. Again, concerted opposition developed and Holcombe's successor, R. H. Fonville, responded by tabling the issue and permitting the commission to go out of existence in 1939. But immediately upon being re-elected to succeed Fonville, Oscar Holcombe re-established the Planning Commission in 1940 as well as constituting a new Department of City Planning. To head the department, Holcombe chose a young landscape architect, Ralph S. Ellifrit, who came to Houston in 1939 as Hare and Hare's local representative.

Ellifrit retained the position of director of the Department of City Planning for 23 years and he brought to this position a sense of professional responsibility and continuity that compensated for the lack of an effective planning constitutency in Houston. During the war years Ellifrit and Herbert Hare revised the park plan of 1929 and the Major Street and Thoroughfare Plan of 1929. At the same time, Ellifrit began planning for a freeway network that became the basis for the Texas Highway Department's eventual Houston system. Ellifrit was responsible for the westward extension of the Brays Bayou Parkway, the creation of a White Oak Bayou Parkway, and the addition of many neighborhood parks. He set standards for subdivision planning and produced a new Civic Center plan in 1957 that led to the renewal of the Civic Center district.

Post-War Attempts at Zoning

After World War II Houston entered a period of unprecedented territorial expansion. It was during this period, as Peter C. Papademetriou demonstrated in *Transportation and Urban Development in Houston, 1830-1980,* that streets - and freeways - replaced parks as the basic infrastructural element of public planning in Houston. As a result, the Major Street and Thoroughfare Plan of 1943, enforced and periodically updated by the City Planning Commission, became the city's *de-facto* comprehensive plan. At the same time a fragmentation in planning authority began to become evident as planning agencies not directly subject to the City of Houston, such as the State Highway Department and the Harris County Flood Control District, emerged. However, the symbol of planned municipal development in the United States - the zoning ordinance - continued to occasion tremendous controversy in Houston, despite the considerable support it received from established local interests. Mayor Otis Massey, in 1946, and Mayor Lewis W. Cutrer, in 1959, initiated public planning and hearing procedures to draft a zoning plan. In each instance, after several years' work, a plan was submitted to the voters, first in 1948 and again in 1962, and both times zoning was soundly rejected.

The year following the 1962 referendum, Louis Welch was elected to the first of five consecutive terms as mayor of Houston. During these years - 1964 to 1973 - Houston continued to expand rapidly, eclipsing even the dramatic growth periods of the 1920s and 1950s. Welch replaced Ralph Ellifrit as director of the Department of City Planning with Roscoe H. Jones, who retained the post from 1964 until 1983. Jones did not adopt Ellifrit's role as a public planning advocate. Instead, the Department of City Planning concentrated upon documentation, trying to maintain accurate records in the face of Houston's expansion. The function of the City Planning Commission also was limited strictly during these 20 years to the approval of subdivision plats. Welch's successor as mayor, Fred Hofheinz, even created divisions of Economic Development and Community Development within the mayor's office to carry out many of the functions that in most American cities were the responsibility of a planning department.

After the zoning referendum of 1962, planning subsided as a public issue in Houston. Yet, in the middle 1960s, it began to re-emerge as a factor in commercial real-estate development. Master plans of development, restrictive covenants, and legal associations charged with maintaining these covenants had been commonplace in Houston residential development since the 1920s. With the advent of suburban office and industrial parks, regional shopping centers, and massive garden-apartment and townhouse communities, these mechanisms began to be employed by developers of commercial real estate to establish and maintain standards - and property values. The co-existence of private planning and public laissez-faire was sustained by the belief that unceasing economic growth would result in the correction of disfunctional conditions, once they had become apparent, on an ad-hoc basis. Indeed, the real-estate lawyer Bernard H. Siegan used Houston as the model of an economically self-regulating city in his book, *Land Use Without Zoning* (1972).

The imposition of a moratorium on new construction in many parts of Houston in 1974 due to the city's insufficient sewage-treatment capacity indicated, however, that even without a zoning ordinance the municipal government had to play more than a passive role in urban planning. The dizzying intensity of growth and development that lasted until 1982 demonstrated that even the most far-sighted and comprehensive private planning could not address the sort of issues that were becoming more and more problematic: traffic congestion, flood control, air and water pollution, and uncertain public services. Symbolic of a cautious shift in official attitudes toward public planning were a series of actions by the Houston City Council and by a new mayor, Kathryn J. Whitmire, who was elected in 1981. Passage of the Development Ordinance in 1982, authored by council member Eleanor Tinsley, marked a tentative first step toward defining a public planning policy. This was followed by Mayor Whitmire's revitalization of the City Planning Commission, chaired by Burdette Keeland, and the appointment of Efraim S. Garcia as director of City Planning in 1983 to succeed Roscoe Jones.

Yet for Houston the critical issue remains one of public understanding of, and support for, a public planning policy. This was true in 1913 and it remains no less true in 1985. ■

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Incremental City Planning for Houston

Peter Brown

City planning is a long-established civic institution in America, starting with the early city plans of the 18th and 19th centuries and continuing through the "City Beautiful" movement of the turn of the century and the functional and central-business-district comprehensive plans of the 1960s and 1970s. In some states, such as New Jersey, comprehensive plans are required of every municipality by law. However, it has been many years since the City of Houston has undertaken a serious, comprehensive planning effort. During the past year, through the initiatives of Mayor Kathryn Whitmire and her director of Planning and Development, Efraim Garcia, the city has started a new and ambitious planning process, currently referred to as the Compendium of Plans. The objective is to create over the next three to four years what most cities refer to as a comprehensive plan.

The encroachment of commercial structures on residential neighborhoods has forced many to reconsider the need for planning in Houston (Photo by Paul Hester)

The basic approach in this current planning effort is to assemble or piece together (as in a compendium) a series of area-association and neighborhood-area plans, either recently completed, or to be undertaken in the future, which, when welded into a composite document, will constitute a new plan for the city. Area-association plans representing larger suburban growth areas will be funded and prepared by groups (primarily formed by the real-estate community) such as the West Houston Association and the City Post Oak Association, while neighborhood-area plans are those for established, inner-city neighborhoods such as the Fifth Ward. Garcia's Department of Planning and Development will be responsible for coordinating the entire effort, and in-house staff will prepare some 27 neighborhood-area plans. All of the plans will be prepared according to guidelines already established by the department.

The city, therefore, will provide the overall framework for incorporation of the various sub-area plans into a comprehensive document and will coordinate the various metropolitan plans for transportation, drainage and storm-water management, water and waste-treatment systems. It is expected that the process will be sanctioned by approval of City Council resolutions authorizing the director of Planning and Development and the City Planning Commission to proceed with the plans.

The purposes of the Compendium of Plans are stated in the City Council resolutions: "The existence of a planning process will have a positive effect on the city's bond rating;" "The City Council wishes to initiate a planning process that includes substantive participation by citizens and by neighborhoods, civic and area associations . . .;" "The city wishes to establish as a part of the planning process the development of a long-range redevelopment strategy for certain eligible neighborhoods of the city;" and the plans developed in this process "will also be used in establishing priorities in the capital improvements planning process." More specifically, the council resolutions state that the plans will be used as a guide in selecting projects for the capital improvements plan, selecting capital projects for funding from the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program, designating Tax Reinvestment Zones (Tax Abatement Districts), and identifying target areas for assisted housing and private-public development projects.

Efraim Garcia emphasizes this new planning effort is a way to "plan for growth, rather than reacting to growth," and his goal is to "turn the process around." Traffic and public services are key issues, as well as the revitalization of inner-city neighborhoods. Garcia says the plans will also serve as a tool to coordinate now-disparate plans and projects, determine major development opportunities, "deal with" high-growth areas, rationalize the relationship of living and employment areas, and provide statistical input to the major thoroughfare planning process. Yet he clearly stops short of seeing the plan as a normative "vision of the future" for Houston, and thinks that urban design, although important, is not a critical issue. Garcia underscores the wording of the resolutions that state that the plan is in no way intended to be used as criteria or guidelines for approving or denying development approvals. Therefore, every effort is being taken to assure detractors that this is not a back-door step toward additional development controls or zoning. But, he does note that through previously adopted ordinances and the City Charter, the Planning Commission is already fully empowered to prepare a comprehensive plan for Houston and its extra-territorial jurisdiction areas.

The Department of Planning and Development Process

The planning process begins with a designation of the geographic boundaries of each of the area associations and neighborhood planning areas. During this process, Garcia's department works out a contract or basic agreement with each of the area associations to prepare the plans and utilizes neighborhood input on inner-city plans. Garcia is establishing an Oversight Committee composed of businessmen, professionals, government officials, and civic representatives to review the various plans as they are being prepared, and to make recommendations to the Planning Commission for approval. In addition, there is the Capital Improvement Program (CIP) Committee, and an interagency coordinating committee (composed of representatives from the city, county, HISD and other school districts, and METRO) which will handle metropolitan or regional issues such as major thoroughfares and drainage. The CIP Committee also will be involved in the review process, especially in terms of evaluating and prioritizing capital improvements projects, as well as the CDBG Committee composed of the Community Development Program commissioners and representatives. In addition, committees from other groups such as the Chamber of Commerce and the Greater Houston Builders Association are taking a strong interest in this planning process.

In three to four years, Garcia envisions a practical composite document which he suggests the City Council might formally adopt. Projects and areas with adopted plans would be given priority in allocating CIP funds and possibly utility and other permits. This is an approach apparently advocated by council member Jim Greenwood and others who are inclined toward "growth management."

Three public hearings are involved in the process for each plan. There will be a major initial public hearing to solicit citizen input. When the final draft of the plan is complete, there will be a second public hearing. After final revisions, the plan is ready for adoption and incorporation into the compendium, based upon the third public hearing before the Planning Commission.

The Compendium of Plans Format
The Department of Planning and Development has prepared two formats: one for the inner-city neighborhood plans, to be prepared largely by city staff, and the other for "growth-sector" area plans, to be prepared largely by private consultants working for area associations. In addition, there are specific planning standards (such as for schools and fire stations) already drafted by the planning department.

Neighborhood plans will be prepared using maps, statistics, and text. After determination of area boundaries, existing conditions - land use, structural building conditions, services (educational, shopping, governmental), traffic and transportation, utilities, existing and redevelopment sites, proposed projects, prior expenditures of public funds - will be mapped. In addition, demographic data such as household size, housing conditions, employment, crime, health statistics, area businesses, trends, will be documented for each planning area. Then, ten-year (1990-2000) goals and objectives and "conditions requiring correction" will be determined. The next step, "activity-area determination," will involve subdividing the neighborhood into activity areas, defining quickly attainable goals, and preparing a ten-year schedule for implementation of specific-action plans or projects. The final step will involve preparation of detailed activity-area plans, such as housing or retail renovation projects.

The exhibits of the neighborhood plan will include a boundary map, an existing land-use map, a structural conditions and ownership map, a public-services map, a transportation map, an activity-area plan, and other items as needed.

The area-association plans format is somewhat similar to that of the neighborhood plan format, beginning with a definition of the planning area boundaries, and compilation of a detailed data base. However, more-detailed existing data on land use, traffic and transportation, public services such as police and fire, and utilities and drainage information will be required. Environmental concerns such as flooding, subsidence, air, water, pollution, and land contamination will be emphasized. Using this data, short-term (1990) and long-term (2000 and beyond) assumptions and projections will be made for population and employment; land use and new development by type; transportation, including METRO and public transit considerations, state highways, and county facilities; and utilities and public facilities. Specific maps are not listed; however, it is assumed that existing and future land use, transportation, utilities, public facilities, and major new development opportunities will be included.

The Department of Planning and Development has drafted standards, some rather specific, to be used by neighborhood groups and area associations in preparing their plan. Emphasis is given to parks and recreation facilities, libraries, health centers, water consumption and waste-water generation, traffic generation and roadway capacities, roadway standards, off-street parking requirements, and fire and police protection. The draft standards are typical of those found in reference texts and in master plans of major cities. However, the issue of standards is quite complex and different standards should apply to different parts of the city, such as the inner-city Montrose neighborhood as contrasted with large, mixed-use planned developments in the far suburbs. Most areas of the city do not meet commonly accepted standards, and funds are not available to overcome this gap.

In addition, several city departments have spent years developing their own standards. Libraries and fire stations are good examples. (The Houston Fire Department's manual of standards is well over 100 pages long.) Standards should be realistic, up-to-date, flexible, and attainable. Sound municipal management suggests that Garcia's Department of Planning and Development should be responsible for at least coordinating, if not preparing, standards for most municipal and area-wide functions. Leaving this important function solely up to departments may lead to inconsistencies in the levels of public services provided. Houston, like Austin and other high-growth cities, faces the critical issue of provision of balanced, comprehensive metropolitan services, optimizing the use of tax dollars without significant (politically unacceptable) tax increases. This is a very difficult task. An effective, coordinated set of urban standards can be a valuable tool in optimizing (and de-politicizing) this process.

Status of Plans to Date
Currently, seven neighborhood plans are in progress: Harrisburg/Wayside, Heights/North Main, Manchester, Second Ward, Third Ward, Fourth Ward, Fifth Ward, and Sunnyside/Palm Center. Other neighborhood planning areas include Acres Homes, Bordersville, Carverdale, Carvercrest, Denver Harbor/Port Houston, Fidelity/Pleasantville, First/Sixth Ward, Foster Place, Kashmere, MacGregor, Magnolia, Moody, Navigation, Near Northside, Riceville, Settegast, South Park, Studewood, Tidwell/Jensen, Trinity Gardens, and West End. Base data for many of these communities has already been assembled. In some cases, this planning process has breathed new life into once passive, issueless civic groups, and has caused new groups to come into being.

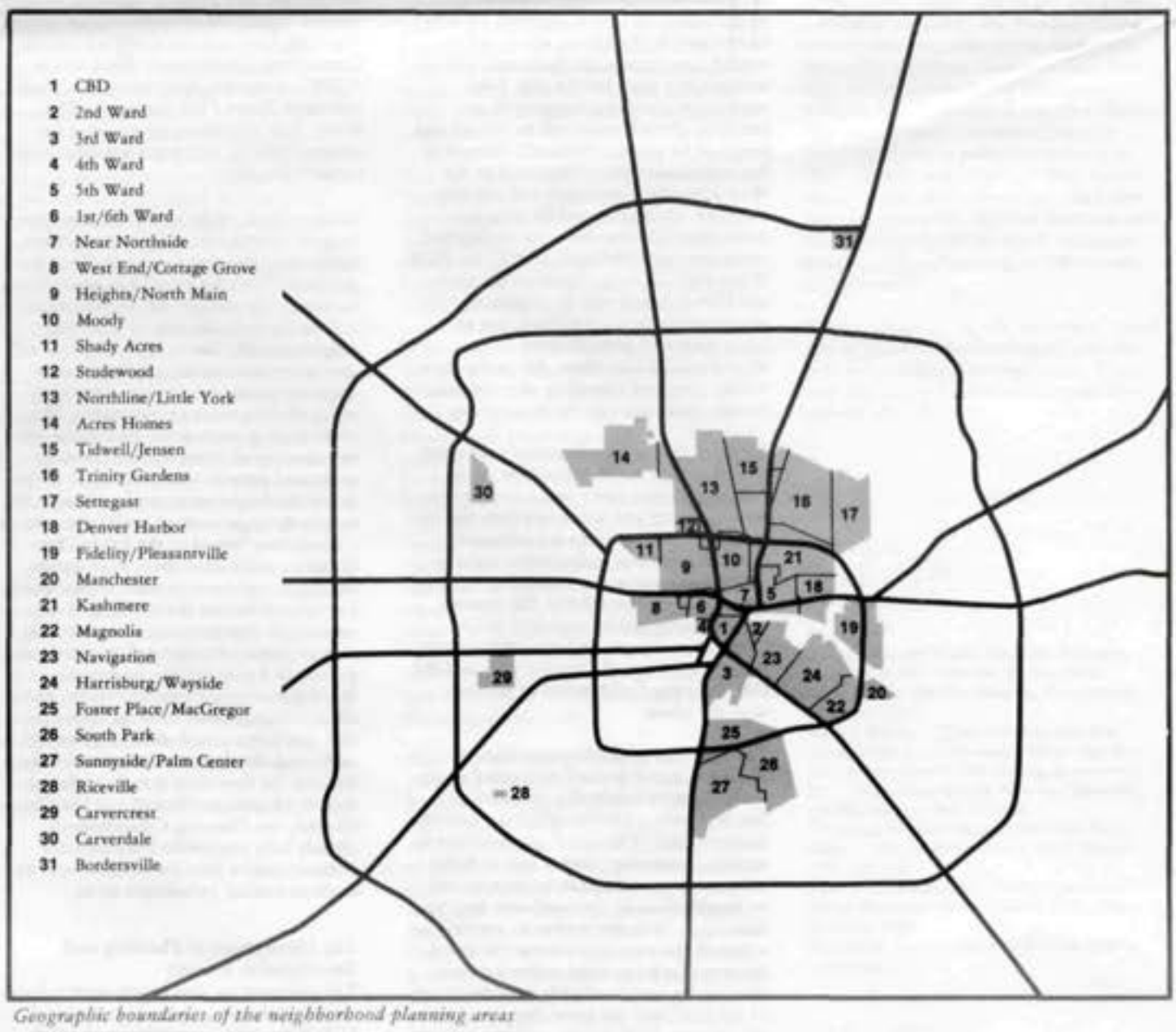
The Department of Planning and Development assigns an in-house neighborhood planner to each of the groups, and this staff person works directly with local leaders and citizens in developing neighborhood plans. These areas are in part made up of boundaries already established for the CDBG program, and limited funds are available for community renewal projects, such as housing, infrastructure replacement, redevelopment of blighted areas, and community facilities. The neighborhood groups have an opportunity to influence where and on which projects limited funds should be spent.

The emphasis of these neighborhood plans seem to be in four main areas: attracting city and federal dollars for basic improvements such as streets, utilities, drainage; identifying redevelopment projects which are doable, taking advantage of CDBG and other subsidies and funds; identifying new and rehabilitation housing opportunities; and identifying projects which can interest a public-private partnership funding.

The focus seems to be on projects, and not on major urban systems. This may be politically appropriate for these older, often neglected and disadvantaged areas and possibly reflects the recent shift in Houston's voting patterns, where the coalition of minorities, students, blue-collar, and non-establishment groups have been a significant factor in Mayor Whitmire's political support. These older neighborhoods are not so concerned about regional traffic systems, sewer permits, billboards, sidewalk cafes, and subsidence. Their concerns are more basic - shopping, services, potholes, deteriorated buildings, decent housing, and jobs.

The area-association plans involve primarily the more rapidly developing areas of the city. They are larger geographically and generally represent the interests of the development and real-estate community. (Please see box.) All of the area associations, except the East End Progress Association, have reached a basic agreement to proceed with a plan. However, issues of content, the degree of detail, and funding still remain. But other issues may limit the effectiveness of the area-association planning efforts. The associations may not have the funds (or staff) necessary to hire consultants to complete the work as outlined. In addition, the large geographic areas of some of the associations are not appropriate for specific planning of this type. There is not unanimity among area-association members, so key decisions on land use and streets may be difficult to achieve. Furthermore, most of the area associations represent parochial (developer) interests and do not necessarily reflect the desires of adjacent residential neighborhoods. The broader regional interests which should be represented in a major comprehensive plan can come, perhaps, from the city - not from developer associations. Finally, many areas of southwest, west, and north Houston are not included in the geographic areas represented by the associations.

Conclusions
The Compendium of Plans is a much-needed effort in Houston. The city deserves a workable, comprehensive plan which also contains a vision for the future of this great urban region. The plan will not be a static document, but a process that continually examines and encourages the positive growth and development of the city in a deliberate manner. The making of the plan will require coordination between major governmental units such



Geographic boundaries of the neighborhood planning areas

as the county, METRO, HISD, and the State Highway Department. The plan will assist in assigning rational priorities for the expenditure of limited dollars. It should result in the least-cost approach for the city to repair the deficiencies in its public infrastructure, and will give much-needed attention to disadvantaged inner-city areas. The plan should also help to counter the negative image of Houston outside of Texas and to spur economic growth, diversification, and job formation. Overall, it will make Houston a more functional, efficient city. The taxpayer should get a "bigger bang for the buck," and, as in most cities, the planning process will cause the political system to be more responsive to legitimate interest groups.

This dual purpose - first functional and bottom-line oriented, and second, normative and perhaps visionary - should be reflected in the current planning process. However, planning has been neglected in Houston for so long, including an unfortunate association with zoning, that Garcia's approach clearly stresses the practical. This is, in part, due to the lack of adequate staff (Houston has the lowest per-capita funding for the Planning Department of any major U.S. city). Area associations are also lacking in funds to prepare plans in sufficient detail and to continue the planning process.

The Department of Planning and Development approach, however, has many commendable aspects. Garcia has begun the process with great practicality, enthusiasm, and confidence. Citizen participation, a key to the success of any planning effort, has received a strong emphasis and the public-private partnership approach is a good one for Houston. But as the process matures, it should become more complex and responsive to diverse citizen interests. There may be greater concern with "quality of life" and "city beautiful" issues among the voters than the current approach assumes. If this is true, the process will begin to encompass new issues, such as urban design for critical areas and corridors of the city, a "goals for Houston" process, the impact and opportunities presented by METRO, and strengthening of the ordinances to include (possibly) some form of land-use intensity standards, and broadening of the scenic-district concept.

The ultimate results of the process remain in some doubt. Without some form of land-use control (not necessarily zoning), the city is lacking in the traditional tools to carry out its plans. The "patchwork quilt" approach is too fragmented, and will tend to result in watered-down plans or plans which favor the interest group with available funds for planning. The entire effort needs the strong, visible support of the mayor, City Council, Planning Commission, Houston Economic Development Council, the Chamber of Commerce, and various business and civic groups. Finally, greater coordination is needed with other governmental units, such as West University Place, Bellaire, Pasadena, Katy, as well as the county and state.

Overall, a well-conceived planning process will generate the very tools necessary to implement the plans created by the process. However, for this to occur, the business and political leadership must come to recognize that the Compendium of Plans for the year 2000 is a singular civic opportunity of extraordinary dimensions. ■

Peter Brown was assisted by Beth Beloff, planner and development consultant, and O'Neil Gregory, AIA, a member of the Executive Committee of the Houston Chapter, American Institute of Architects.

Area Associations and Their Plans

1 **Central Houston, Inc.** A coalition of downtown businessmen, companies, and property owners has funded an initial master-plan concept for downtown Houston. Key-opportunity areas, such as an arts district and a historic district, are identified. Services have been volunteered by several major architectural firms; however, an outside consultant will be selected soon. The issues here are pedestrian movement systems; urban parks, open space, and landscaping; traffic circulation and parking; treatment of buildings at the street level; night-time activity; public transit; housing; historic preservation; and, perhaps most important, creating a sound urban-design concept for our somewhat formless downtown grid.

2 **City Post Oak Association (CPOA).** The CPOA is composed of major developers, tenants, real-estate people, and landowners in the Galleria area. A master plan was prepared in October 1984 by a group from the Houston Chapter, American Institute of Architects. It contains the basic plan elements for Houston's "other downtown," which has more office space and employment concentration than the central business districts of most American cities. The issues here are consistent development standards, including landscaping and signage; pedestrian linkages; traffic and public transit corridors; housing, parks, and open space; interface with surrounding neighborhoods; and utility capacity. The AIA plan will require revisions to meet the Department of Planning and Development format and standards.

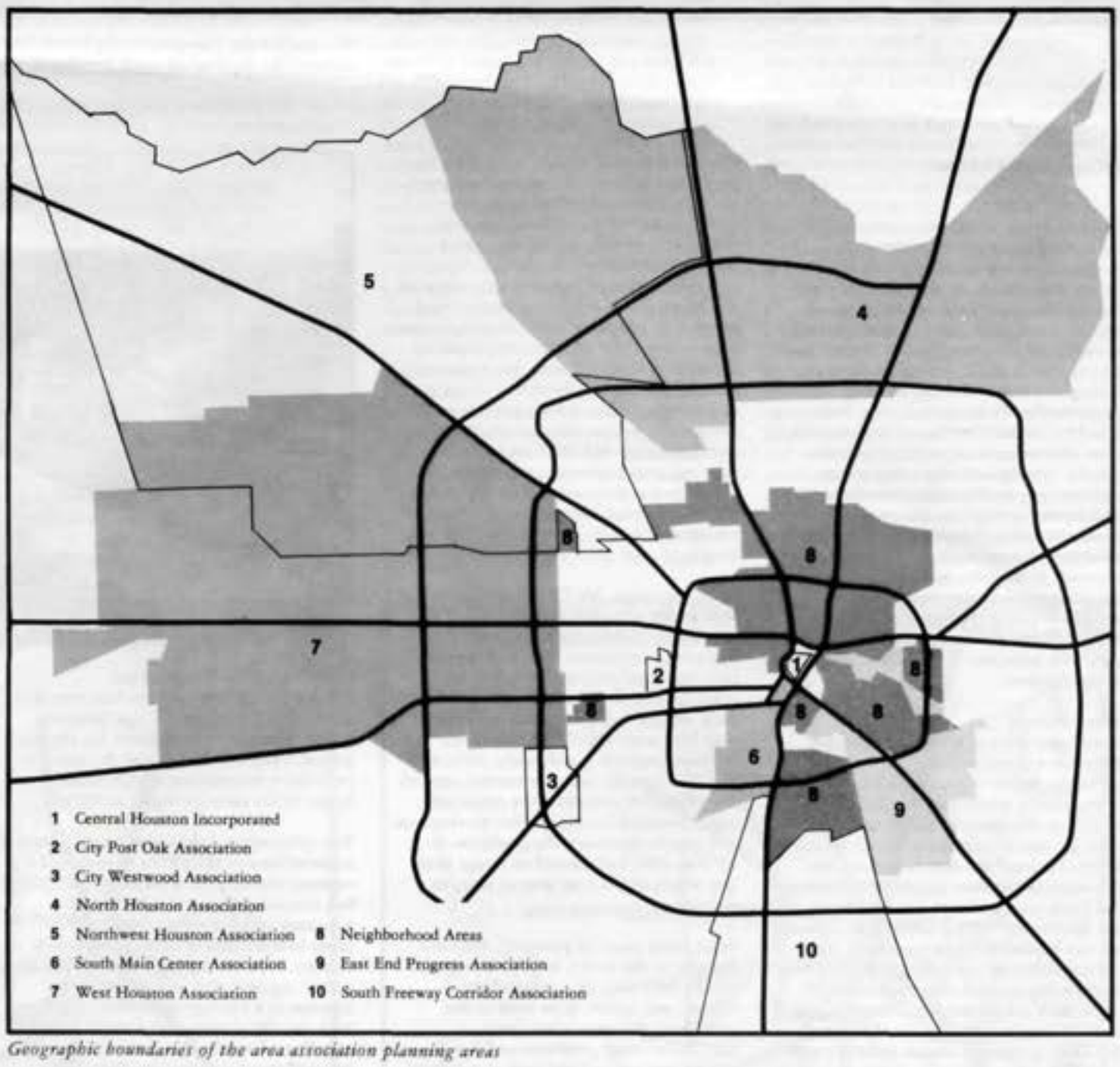
3 **City Westwood Association.** This smaller area adjacent to Bissonnet between West Belt and U.S. Highway 59 has the first plan completed in compliance with the city's format. It was prepared by Charles Tapley Associates in 1984. The key issues represented in the plan for the year 2000 are transportation, future land use, open space and landscaping, area identity and "entrances," beautification, and sign control. This plan is described by Garcia's office as a "prototype."

4 **North Houston Association.** North Belt, Kingwood, and The Woodlands fall within this area. To date, the association, representing an area of 626 square miles, is trying to utilize the volunteer services of professional members. Key issues are transportation, including the growth and impact of the Houston Intercontinental Airport; parks and recreation facilities; the drainage, storm-water management, and water quality of Lake Houston; housing; and economic growth.

5 **North West Houston Association.** This area overlaps with the West Houston boundaries on the east side of Route 149, but the boundaries are not yet precisely established. The association has only a part-time staff and will not proceed with a serious planning effort until the membership has substantially increased. Key issues appear to be economic development, transportation, environmental concerns, and future land use.

6 **South Main Center Association (SMCA).** SMCA encompasses Rice University, the Museum/Montrose area, and the Texas Medical Cener. A draft plan for this area has been completed encompassing 20 square miles. The key issues have been conflicting objectives between developers and residents and neighborhood preservation. Specific plans completed include the Binz area and the critical midtown area (south of the central business district along Main Street). The Medical Center is currently working on its own plan. This is the only area association besides the East End Progress Association to represent non-developer interests.

7 **West Houston Association.** This vast west Houston area of 200 square miles largely represents the city's major developers and is clearly the fastest growing area of any planning district in Houston. The West Houston Association over the past seven years has been very effective in coordinating development efforts between individual developers, the city and the county; in promoting quality standards; and in assembling important demographic and economic data. To date, there has been no real effort in starting the area plan and the association has not yet determined the contents of the plan, although there is agreement with the Department of Planning and Development to proceed. ■



Geographic boundaries of the area association planning areas

The METRO Regional Plan 1985

The median bus/van lane in the North Freeway (I-45) carried as many passengers as automobiles in three adjacent freeway lanes in peak periods (Photos by Paul Hetter)

Jeffrey Karl Ochsner

In 1986, voters in Houston and west Harris County again will have the opportunity to determine the future of public transportation in Houston. At that time they will be asked to approve bonds, to be issued against future sales-tax revenues (the tax already being in place), to aid in the construction of a regional transit system consisting of a mix of busway and rail technologies. This regional plan, developed by the METRO board in June 1985, after nine months of publicity and community involvement regarding transit options, may be Houston's last chance to address major regional transportation problems and to develop a modern, convenient, balanced regional transportation network. It may also be Houston's last chance to take the necessary steps to create a regional transportation system so necessary to support the on-going campaign for economic development and diversification.

Some History

Public operation of transit services in Houston was not initiated until 1974 (after the failure of the HARTA transit referendum), when the City of Houston took over the assets of the virtually bankrupt, private bus company Rapid Transit Lines. Through the next five years, the city managed to keep transit in operation, but made no significant improvements in the system and did not attempt to expand service beyond the area covered by the private company even though the city was undergoing an incredible expansion. By 1978, with the system beginning to disintegrate, voters approved the creation of METRO, a regional transit authority supported by a one-cent sales tax, to operate public transit. METRO took over the city's bus operations on 1 January 1979 and began the task of creating a regional transit network.

The Interim METRO board, in 1978, had prepared a general plan of improvement which it presented to Harris County voters as part of the referendum campaign. This plan called for a range of improvements, from bus-service expansion, to creation of park-and-ride, vanpool, and paratransit services, to the eventual creation of a regional network of exflusive transitways. (The plan was developed to serve all of Harris County, but voters in the east portions of the county chose not to participate, thus reducing by about 25 percent the service area and the population covered by METRO. As a result, sales-tax revenues were proportionately lower than anticipated and capital expenditures also have been lower as a result of the smaller area to serve and smaller tax base.)

In its first years, METRO's service was, at best, barely adequate as it operated a system which had deteriorated under city ownership. Improved maintenance facilities, expanded park-and-ride lots, and other promised programs took time to plan, design, build, and place into operation. Not until 1981-1982 did service begin to improve significantly. Although METRO actually met or exceeded most of the 1978-plan goals by 1984 (especially when prorated for the smaller service area and population base), the problems in 1979 to 1981 had created an image problem which would take several years to overcome.

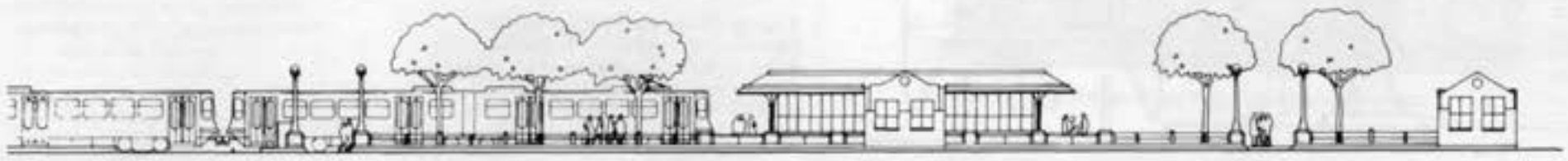
After many years of planning, METRO brought to the voters in 1983 a proposal for the first stage of a regional rapid (heavy) rail system to be built in the southwest and near-north areas. METRO's image problems and a well-funded opposition combined to convince voters that the proposed system offered too little service and cost too much money. A bond referendum to support the system was defeated in June 1983.

Creating a New Transit Plan

The loss of the 1983 referendum was shattering. The rail-system design program was terminated, federal grants for the rail project were withdrawn, and the national perception became one that Houston might never solve its traffic problems.

The referendum failure also forced a total reassessment of METRO's approach to a regional transit plan. Previously, METRO had focused on a corridor-by-corridor approach and had tried to develop its plans independent of other government entities. Now the agency began to look at a total regional plan and joined in the creation of a joint governmental task force with the city, county, and state to consider coordinated approaches to resolving regional transportation problems. This joint task-force approach allowed sharing of base data and cross-checking of project plans, cost estimates, and the like. Although policy decisions might still be made on an individual-agency basis, at least the data on which those decisions were based could be jointly verified. Finally, METRO initiated a program to solicit community views on improving transit service to learn what kind of transit plan the community wanted.

The result of this 15-month process was the development of a "generic" regional transit plan and three implementation options within the plan. The basis for the generic plan was a determination of the area requiring transit service and the identification of corridors in which service could be routed. The three options for implementation included Option A, involving only busways; Option B, a light-rail loop and radial busways; and Option C, light rail and some busways. In addition, an immediate action or five-year plan was developed which would be similar under all the options, with freeway median busways in five corridors.



Zimmer Gunsul Frasca Partnership received a Progressive Architecture *Design Award in 1984 for their work in developing the urban design and architecture of the Banfield Transitway in Portland, Oregon, scheduled to open in 1986 (Illustration courtesy of Zimmer Gunsul Frasca Partnership)*

Presenting the Options

In October 1984, METRO announced the regional plan and the three options and began a nine-month community-involvement campaign. In order to publicize the plan, METRO developed a newsprint tabloid that was distributed in the *Houston Post* and *Houston Chronicle*, prepared a small brochure that was mailed to every voter in the 1983 referendum (Spanish-language versions were also distributed), and initiated an extensive series of community meetings. From October 1984 to May 1985 approximately 250 meetings were held and over 8,000 citizens attended. The effort culminated in a series of 11 meetings attended by the full METRO board. These meetings offered an opportunity for citizens to speak directly to the METRO board, which had traveled to their sector of the city to present the regional plans and to hear public comment. METRO staff also met with many area associations and neighborhood groups in workshop-style meetings to try to focus on specific planning issues in particular areas. Overall, the program probably developed a higher level of response than any previous effort of this type in Harris County.

Through the tabloid, the brochures and the meetings, METRO also solicited written responses. About 4,200 responses were received and responders overwhelmingly favored Option C (82.3 percent), followed by Option A (8.9 percent), and Option B (5.1 percent). The responses favoring some sort of rail totaled almost 90 percent. Whether this was representative of the public-at-large was uncertain, but METRO analysis by geographic sector showed responses favoring Option C were the vast majority in every area. Option C was also endorsed by a number of area organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce, the Houston Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, Central Houston Inc., South Main Center Association, and Houston Northwest Chamber of Commerce. With all these responses collected, and after fact-finding trips to transit systems in North America and Europe, the METRO board went on an open retreat in mid June 1985, to discuss the development of a consensus regional transit plan.

A Preliminary Consensus

The board discussions while on retreat focused on all issues regarding a regional plan, particularly on population and employment (the major trip generators), appropriate transit corridors, ridership, and levels of service to various sectors of the METRO region. Some board members expressed skepticism about probable ridership on some suburban lines. Others focused on the issue of providing better service to the east and northeast - areas that currently produce heavy transit ridership.

Although no action was taken on retreat, the board achieved a general consensus on a direction for a regional plan. As a result, board chairman John King presented a resolution for approving a general approach to a regional plan at the METRO board meeting 27 June 1985. King stated that although he is normally satisfied with a 5-to-4 vote, he indicated that because of the significance of this resolution, he wanted it to be amended until it could receive unanimous support. After extended discussion and multiple amendments, the resolution passed 8-to-0 (with one board member absent).

As passed by the board, the resolution did not represent approval of a final regional plan, but it did offer the basis for a plan as it included the following elements:

- The Regional Transit Plan (the generic plan) has correctly identified the major regional transit corridors requiring transit improvement.
- The Option C plan is the preferred transit option, but the interior rail loop is the highest priority section; radial suburban rail lines should be built only when justified by demand; and
- Service to the east, northeast, and southeast is to be redesigned and the possibility of grade-separating the entire rail loop is to be investigated.

As a result, a new map presenting the entirety of the new regional transit plan is not expected to be ready before fall. Indeed, METRO staff indicated that the study and design steps could take four to five months to complete. The possibility of a transit referendum was, therefore, deferred until 1986.

While it was disappointing to some not to achieve a full plan in June, the board action was nonetheless extremely significant. The board vote means that METRO has committed to beginning a new rail system. The choice of Option C, but with the priority on the inner loop, reflects the skepticism of some board members about suburban ridership. It also reflects a recognition that with METRO's existing and committed projects (five radial busways will be in operation by 1990) distribution within the multiple major activity centers - downtown, Greenway, Post Oak, and the Medical Center - will require an effective interconnecting system such as the loop will provide.

METRO staff are responding to the board direction with a variety of studies. In the northeast and east, the process is a continuation of the interactive planning of the past year. The results could even include additional rail. The most difficult issue appears to be the board request for an investigation of a fully grade-separated system. This appears to reflect the evident preference of chairman King for a highly automated system. However, the cost of full grade-separation will be high, particularly when decisions regarding acceptable and unacceptable environmental impacts of grade-separated construction are faced. Indeed, given the probable reductions in federal support and the need to make limited transit funds stretch as far as possible, the board direction to study an expensive, fully grade-separated approach is quite surprising.

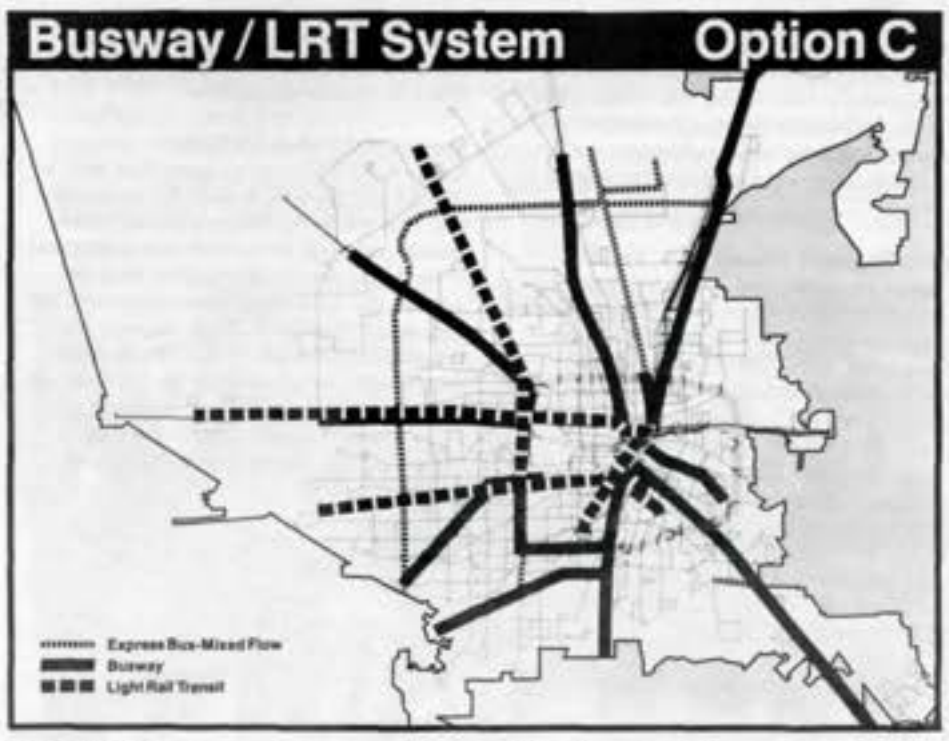
Overall, the board decisions must be regarded as positive. The idea of an all-busway system has been dropped and a commitment to a regional plan with a major rail component has been made.

Is the Regional Transit Plan Necessary?

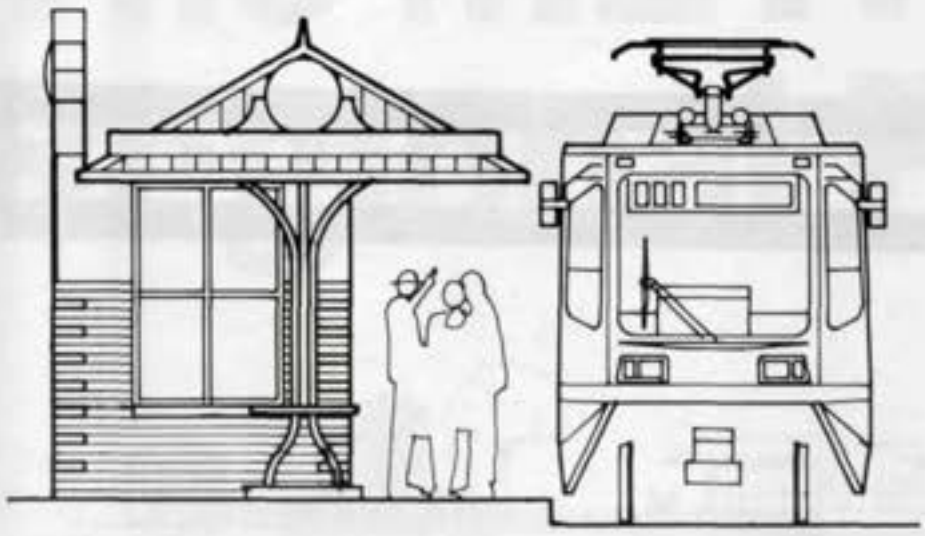
One argument is that no transit planning should be done - that if no plan is developed then action will be taken only on an incremental basis, if at all. Some argue that not planning transportation improvements will lead to spreading the concentrations of employment - that areas like downtown and Post Oak will stop growing and new employment will locate elsewhere. Another version of this argument holds that if no transportation improvements are built, people will be forced to live near where they work and a "sorting-out" process will occur which would reduce congestion.

These arguments are largely irrelevant for several reasons. First, there is no "blank slate" on which a new transportation plan will be drawn. Plans already exist and guide the actions of various agencies. Highway plans, thoroughfare plans, utilities plans, flood-control plans, and so forth all shape the city. The key in planning improvements in any area should be coordination of these improvements. Furthermore, as the city, county, and state all have plans and independent funding, they will be building transporta-

The Regional Transit Plan shows the travel corridors linking the major activity centers and residential areas (Map courtesy of METRO)



The METRO board generally approved Option C, but determined that the inner loop should receive the highest priority (Map courtesy of METRO)



A key to the approach for the Banfield Transitway was the use of traditional design elements to integrate the new system into the existing urban context of Portland (Illustration courtesy of Zimmer Gunsul Frasca Partnership)

tion and other improvements. The idea that not planning transit will halt construction of transportation or other improvements is simply false.

The idea that the failure to build transit improvements will lead to a radical restructuring of our city also defies common sense. The largest concentrations of employment (downtown, Post Oak, Greenway, Medical Center) are all projected to remain large, and grow even larger. Suburban centers (such as Park 10, Greenspoint, and Westchase) may emerge, but they will not suddenly displace the other centers. Too much is already invested in physical facilities and infrastructure improvements, so in any scenario of the future the major urban employment center will remain - these centers will be the focus of the major travel demand. Moreover, as the existing transportation network already forms a radial network favoring some locations over others (notably downtown and Post Oak), this will contribute to the additional growth of these centers. The existing major urban centers will remain the centers of the future Houston, no matter how large it grows.

Finally, the concept that a failure to build transportation improvements will force a "sorting out" is based on the false assumption that the primary motivation for choice of residence and employment is transportation and congestion. In fact, a range of factors such as housing, costs, neighborhood, schools, and natural features affect residential choices, and job availability, career opportunity, and the like are factors in job choice. Transportation from home to work and work to home is the cost that most people have chosen to pay to have freedom in making these other choices. Indeed, one could argue that a factor in the quality of life of a city may be the number of choices that are offered for those daily commuter trips. One also could argue that a factor in the creation of a tax-supported transit authority is a cost that voters have agreed to pay in order to enhance their freedom in choosing where to live and work. Thus, it is incumbent on the transit authority to propose a system which addresses public transportation services across the region it serves.

Is the Regional Transit Plan Valid?
Transit planners (and urban highway planners) tend to focus on commuter trips (home to work; work to home) because these generally follow fixed times and fixed routes. As a transit system must operate over fixed routes and on fixed schedules, its most appropriate market will be the same kinds of regular, repeated trips. As it is apparent that rush-hour commuter trips are the primary source of the worst congestion, then it is appropriate to offer a competitive transit alternative. Thus, transit planners should first focus on peak-period travel.

Given this basis for travel and the knowledge that the present concentrations of employment will remain the major employment centers in the region, it is possible to assess how well METRO has focused its Regional Plan. Generally, the METRO plan focuses on the major regional employment centers (downtown, Post Oak, Greenway, and Medical Center) and also provides service to outlying employment centers as well.

METRO's hardest task is serving residential neighborhoods as well as it serves the employment centers. Because Houston has such low-density residential areas, combined with the high-density employment centers, METRO proposes to combine a feeder bus network and extensive local bus service with the major corridor transitways. Thus, particularly in outlying areas, patrons will have the option of one day taking a bus to a rail station or busway or driving to a park-and-ride lot, then taking a bus or train. Initially, outlying patrons will receive only busway service.

Overall, the plan appears to offer a reasonable mix of service. Clearly, it will offer more convenient service to some than to others, depending on where one lives and works. Will it draw riders? The only evidence now is the local bus service (which is not a fair comparison because it is generally not time competitive with driving oneself, although it does demonstrate that there is a substantial "transportation-disadvantaged" population in Houston), and the park-and-ride service with the freeway median bus lanes on the North (I-45) and Katy (I-10) freeways. Currently, only the North Freeway lane goes far enough and has enough history to judge - METRO's surveys indicate that this lane alone carried as many passengers as the three adjacent freeway lanes operating in the peak direction in the peak hour. When offered a quality service, Houstonians apparently will forsake their cars. According to METRO the proposed system will offer a quality service and should beat driving times in congested peak-hour operations. Thus, the system should provide a workable alternative.

Transit and Urban Design
While METRO's transit plan now will be refined and revised, it must be recognized that this planning before a transit referendum only will be carried to a conceptual level. Many details of the plan must be worked out once voters have approved the conceptual approach. Thus, support for the general concepts in METRO's plan should not be construed as blanket approval of the entire plan as it finally may be proposed. Clearly, sensitive urban-design considerations will remain to be resolved.

One key to a successful transit system will be convenience - "putting transit in the middle of things." The ease of access from transit stations to workplaces will be critical to encourage ridership. For example, Post Oak Boulevard is clearly the center of the City Post Oak urban center. Ideally transit service should be right along this spine, but the future of Post Oak as one of the "great streets" of Houston will depend upon how the transit line is actually put into place. An elevated scheme is unacceptable and at-grade operations will have traffic problems, so a subway, though it will cost more initially, may be the best answer. Other sensitive areas include downtown; Main Street and midtown south of downtown; the South Main area with the Museum of Fine Arts, Hermann Park, Rice University, and the Medical Center; and the area around Texas Southern University and the University of Houston. In all areas, issues of cost will be raised, as the only environmentally acceptable solutions may be among the most expensive (particularly if a fully grade-separated system is proposed). But, there is no sense in building a cheap solution if it might cause deterioration to the area it serves.

Another urban-design impact not yet fully recognized is the impact transit will have on development planning. Much of the planning of new real-estate developments is based on how those developments will be served by transportation services of various types. The dense cluster pattern of development around transit stations in Toronto shows the impact transit can have. Even in Dallas, the expectancy of future DART (Dallas Area Rapid Transit) stations is having a similar impact. Some areas adjacent to future DART transit stations are already showing a much greater density of development, yet transit may not reach them for several years. In Houston, should a system be approved, it could have a significant impact on development planning, particularly with a commitment to ultimate construction of rail in suburban corridors.

The Ultimate Issue
Each voter will determine whether he or she can support the proposed transit plan for Houston. The plan may not be the best theoretical plan that might ever be conceived, but, at this point, it is the result of an effort stretching over a period of more than two years. The plan will be a compromise - a solution balanced against concerns of individual citizens and groups, various transportation agencies, funding realities, and the like. Planning will have been carried to a conceptual level and alot more detailed design will occur before actual construction can begin.

In most cities, transit has been recognized as an essential part of a balanced transportation network: an essential service which a city provides to its citizens and an essential element in improving the quality of life of an urban area. As Houston enters the competition for economic growth and economic diversification, quality-of-life issues will play an increasingly important role. Demonstrating to potential new investors and others who may boost the Houston economy that the city is taking steps to build a balanced transportation system will be key. The competition - from San Diego, Atlanta, Dallas, and Austin - has already either implemented new transit systems or has approved regional light-rail transit plans. Houston has one last chance to compete. A balanced transportation system is an essential part of any strategy for the future of the Houston area and approval of the METRO plan will be a necessary step towards the creation of a balanced transportation system. ■

Buses will remain an important part of Houston's transit system (Photo by Paul Hester)

Citeations

City Building in the New South; The Growth of Public Services In Houston, Texas, 1830—1915

Harold L. Platt, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983, 252 p., illus., $29.95

Reviewed by John Kalitski

Myths have a pervasive presence in most conversations or presentations about Texas or Houston. It is well known that the city by the bayou was founded by New Yorkers-turned-frontier-speculators Augustus and John Allen. Their optimism and commercial savvy permiated the atmosphere of the early commercial outpost spreading not only to the entrepreneurs who initially settled the city but also, so the story goes, to the businessmen who continue to set the tone and pace of the present metropolis. Until the recent recession, Houston's growth was, popularly, an unfettered progression of triumphant capitalism taming the wilderness and partaking of, first, agricultural, and later, natural riches. Houston's mythic destiny, according to the story line, was assured due to the independence, pluck, and cleverness of its business leaders who methodically fulfilled their visions of greatness. The statement has been made that the only difference between the myths of Texas and those of other states is that Texans continue to believe in their tales.

Harold L. Platt's recent book *City Building in the New South; The Growth of Public Services in Houston, Texas, 1830-1915* does not blatantly bash Houston's mythic dimension. Rather, the book gently reminds the reader of the facts and struggles of Houston's founders and history. The book amply demonstrates in painstaking detail how Houston's growth, like many other southern cities, has been highly dependent upon eastern financiers and corporations, the rulings of the federal judiciary, and federal congressional largesse. The primary example of this truth is the Houston Ship Channel. This singularly important element of Houston's infrastructure was at the time of its construction the recipient of the largest federal grant ever received by a city.

Platt, an associate professor of history at Loyola University in Chicago, comes to many of his conclusions by carefully examining the chartering and growth of utility and transportation franchises in the City of Houston. Through the study of franchise agreements and concurrent, ever-changing city charter, this historian "furnishes a reliable measure of the town's public priorities as well as (Houston's) evolution from a primitive outpost to a thriving frontier community." The author covers in great depth the emergence of Houston's commercial elite and their gradual assumption of civic responsibility. Responsibility was only assumed as it became apparent over time that business interests were intimately connected to the economic, political, and physical fitness of the town.

City Building in the New South is divided into two major sections, reflecting the transformation of the town from one run by a combination of volunteerism, ad-hoc law, and greed, to a mature political entity managed by professionals. Part I, entitled "City Building by Amateurs," chronicles the early efforts of businessmen as they carved out a successful commercial niche on the banks of an inhospitable bayou. Though financial resources were short, the early business leaders assessed the city for funds to build a common market house and to improve vital transportation links to the outside world. Their policies, which exploited the city's bond-bearing capacity to the fullest in the interests of the wealthy, ultimately drove the city to the brink of bankruptcy and self-destruction during the nationwide depression of 1873. At one moment of particular desparation, Mayor James Wilson personally floated the city by making $50,000 of overdue interest payments out of his own pocket. Platt describes the Houston of the 1870s and 1880s as a "Hollywood Movie Set for commerce; behind the façades of the major corridors of commerce, frontier conditions prevailed." The social welfare of the majority, who of course depended upon the wealthy minority for jobs and the like, was ignored through the commercial-civic elites' paramount belief in maintaining and improving the city's transportation, commercial, and industrial infrastructure. Quite simply, the narrowest business interests of those that had took precedence over those that had not.

Part II, "Urban Planning by Experts," explains how the impact of new public-utility franchises forced both businessmen and politicians to rethink their assumptions about the relationship of "natural monopoly" utilities to the municipality, whereas, before the introduction of running water, sanitary sewers, gas, electricity, street cars, and telephones, the majority of citizens accepted the frontier conditions that prevailed in the young Texas town. The introduction of utilities offered remedies to the discomfitures of frontier life. The promise of rapid improvements in the quality of life for the average citizen through improved utilities upset the political status quo that had always placed the broadest civic improvements over the individual needs and comforts of the Houston wards. Meanwhile, the complexities, failures, and costs associated with utility franchise modernization finally forced the municipal government to amend its wasteful financial practices. At the same time, the city had to create watch-dogging franchises which infringed upon the public's rights by illegally blocking public rights-of-way or failing to provide promised services. A prime example of franchise abuse was the water company which failed to provide lawful water pressure in fire hydrants. A disastrous fire which destroyed St. Joseph's hospital in 1894 brought public pressure to bear and eventually the city bought out the recalcitrant local interests who owned the utility and the city itself ran it. Under the administration of Samuel Brashear (1889-1901) the city government unsuccessfully pursued a utility takeover policy which frightened the commercial-civic elite who were concurrently pursuing conservative eastern money and federal money to back and develop the nascent oil industry and Ship Channel, respectively. In the wake of Galveston's destructive hurricane in 1900, traditional notions of infrastructure improvements took precedence over the city's commercial elite. Platt relates how Houston, known as a center of union activity and considered progressive - even socialistic - was not in the minds of its business leaders a place to do business. Complex political maneuvering by these same leaders resulted in Houston becoming the first city in the United States to adopt a commission form of government in a non-emergency situation. The commissioners were elected at-large, as opposed to the former ward-based system. The elites made use of the recent instituted poll tax and Jim Crow laws to effectively freeze out of the democratic process poor whites and blacks whose political agenda remained within the neighborhoods.

Houston, run as a corporation, ultimately grew at an incredible rate during the period before the first world war. The successful conclusion of the Ship Channel did secure Houston's preeminence as a place of trade and industry in the Southwest. However, in the process of consolidating these gains, the city fathers felt they had to crush and ignore the rights of their less-well-off fellow citizens. Houston, like many other cities in the "New South," "achieved fiscal and infrastructural stability but only by denying the rewards of modern urban life to a large segment of the population." Platt states, ". . .in the twentieth century, city building in the New South became a double-edged process of enhancing the general welfare of some while segregating others in unimproved neighborhoods. . .the commission government removed politics from administration by suppressing democracy at the ward level." Reflecting this shift in real political terms was the drop in the city voter registration roles - from 76 percent of eligible voters in 1900 to 32 percent in 1904. Longer-term legacies include the current morass in the Fourth Ward.

Platt's book was not written for the lay reader. As part of Temple University Press's "Technology and Urban Growth" series, the book is directed towards the specialist in urban planning, political science, or urban affairs. Much of the language is in the jargon of these specialties and the reader is helped if he has a

(Continued)

detailed knowledge of southern history. The latter is particularly true in the sections covering Houston's experiment with the commission form of government. These criticisms aside, the book is an extremely important work for anyone who wishes to have a richer understanding of not only Houston's past, but its present period of soul-searching. Current boosterism and efforts by the Houston Chamber of Commerce to promote the city as a place of business are well within the precedent of similar programs of the old Houston Business League as described in the book. Recent city-government struggles to provide services to neighborhoods and improve quality of life in the face of limited resources suggest that the traditional emphasis of maintaining fiscal and commercial stability with limited municipal resources may still hold true. Platt, in conclusion, states that policies are equally suspect which emphasize growth over quality of life or vice versa. A balanced view is advocated. One quote from the book which struck this reader as particularly relevant to Houston's current travails was stated by Rene Johnson, an editor of the *Houston Daily Post* at the turn of the century:

People can find so many progressive towns in which to locate these days that there must be a bid for population by supplying those comforts and conveniences of city life without which now . . . population cannot be secured. The city must not only present advantages, but comforts, modern improvements of every description, indicating a care for health and easy transaction of business and betraying a broad public spirit.

Houston, as this book makes totally clear, has an extremely strong legacy of commercial civic leadership. Houston's elite had a vision which created a thriving commercial city on the Gulf Coast. Platt declares, however, that this ascendancy was not achieved through the independence of mythical self-interest. Houston's leaders constantly looked to the outside to study, emulate, and finance their dreams. In the process, they took large financial risks of their own. The history of these attitudes and actions, the pitfalls and triumphs, is one that bears study for any serious student of Houston. *City Building in the New South* is an important addition to the literature of the city. ■

City of Houston Master Plan: A Step in Which Direction?

The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston
Sponsored by the Rice Design Alliance
In association with The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston
12 June 1985

Reviewed by Beth Beloff

The Rice Design Alliance symposium on planning, organized by Andrew John Rudnick, vice president of the Houston Economic Development Council, was intended to highlight the proposed planning process for Houston and the resolutions endorsing the process which were expected to be brought before the Houston City Council later in the summer. The program opened with a presentation by Efraim S. Garcia, director of Houston's Department of Planning and Development, on the proposed planning process, followed by a discussion among a panel of experts (architects, planners, developers, citizens) moderated by City Council member Jim Greenwood.

Garcia's presentation emphasized the basic planning process which will produce a composite plan document entitled the Compendium of Plans. Some panelists felt that the process was timid and lacked vision, but almost all agreed with Garcia about the need to start planning. With the statement, "You don't take a starving person to a lecture on *nouvelle cuisine*," Garcia emphasized the need for a basic incremental process that has attained a degree of public acceptance and understanding, which will enable it to serve as the basis for more visionary planning in the future.

Garcia explained that in March 1983, when he was hired as the city's director of Planning and Development, the only existing plan for the city was the Major Thoroughfare Plan. Previously, there had been a public policy of laissez-faire, letting the marketplace (and not the planning agencies) direct development. The enormous growth Houston experienced in the 1960s and 1970s taxed every aspect of the city's infrastructure, causing major problems with traffic, flood control, and sewage and waste-water disposal. According to Garcia, "Houston has been a reactive city. We have not foreseen problems and acted to avoid them." As an example of the result of this approach, Garcia noted that the city is so far behind that before a street can be included in a bond issue for improvements, its traffic count must exceed design capacity by 175 percent.

Garcia was given the charge to initiate a planning process by Mayor Kathryn Whitmire. As a result, he recently presented several planning resolutions to City Council. As Garcia pointed out, "all the authority required to carry out a planning process in the city is already available by ordinance." But existing ordinances have not been followed. Garcia's aim is to start with a visible show of support from City Council through its approval of planning resolutions to ensure that the city is behind the policy.

Garcia described the approach that the resolutions define as a building-block approach rather than a comprehensive master-planning approach. Initially, inner-city neighborhoods and suburban growth areas having the most pressing needs for intervention will be identified. Following this process, the balance of Houston's neighborhoods will receive attention within two years. Private planning organizations (which generally take the form of developer-oriented area improvement associations) will generate basic information and identify planning requirements in the growth areas around the city. Neighborhood associations will work closely with Garcia's department in developing such information on inner-city neighborhoods. Private-sector planning efforts are intended to augment the extremely limited staff and budgetary resources available to the city's planning and development office. (Please see related story, page 15.)

"Planning is long overdue in Houston," responded panelist Peter Brown, an architect, urban planner, and chairman of the Houston Chapter of the American Institute of Architects' Urban Design Committee. "The image and economic health of the city have been hurt by a lack of planning." Brown cautioned that the "patchwork quilt" approach of the resolutions might be too timid. He urged the city to tackle the problem all at once to make the well-conceived visionary document that Houston needs. Brown was in complete support of Garcia's planning effort, but he was concerned about the "lack of vocal support" from the mayor, the City Council, the Planning Commission, and local business leadership.

Mike Schaeffer, vice president of Village Developers, countered by saying, "Houston isn't as bad as we say it is. All cities generate the same problems Houston has." He said that he is not against good planning, but, as for the resolutions, "We need to maximize existing regulations available to the city, such as planning ordinances, deed-restriction ordinances, the street-closing resolutions, and start there as opposed to developing new regulations."

Kay Crooker, a member of the City Planning Commission and an active participant in the writing of the Tinsley development ordinance (see "The Development Ordinance and Its Discontents," *Cite*, Winter 1984), was most concerned about protecting the integrity of neighborhoods: "Neighborhoods are important havens from the concretescape of a city. They give the city its flavor and architectural character and should be treated as assets in terms of quality-of-life issues." She cited the problems neighborhoods have experienced from encroachment of commercial development, traffic, and signing, and the general lack of buffer zones between restricted residential areas and high-density buildings. "Development in Houston has been undisciplined. Planning would help alleviate some of the problems," according to Crooker. Crooker asserted that, although the resolutions would not help existing neighborhoods create buffer zones to separate them from commercial development, she thought it

important to develop performance standards for new development. "I like to think the proposed ordinances will be a positive change. But let's face it. We're not only homeowners, we're taxpayers, and the long-range solutions will be borne by the taxpayers, not by the developers who are causing the problems."

Robert J. Hartsfield, architect, real-estate broker, and developer, was in favor of the resolutions "because Houston needs to organize its destiny. Those who fail to plan, plan to fail." He said that at the least, Garcia's process would provide a good data base from which the city could operate. However, he suggested we need to create the vision and compelling environments of a first-class city, citing the San Antonio "Target 90" Process as something to emulate.

In the discussion that followed, three points of view were evident. The two architects, Brown and Hartsfield, sought to emphasize the need for visionary planning and proposals, while Garcia argued that the planning *process* must be initiated prior to the formulation of specific plans. Schaeffer emphasized the need to retain a positive business and development climate. Overall, the audience clearly seemed to support planning for Houston as a way to protect its assets and to ensure that the mistakes of the past will not be endlessly repeated. ■

Gardens

Gardens of Maxwell Court, Rockville, Connecticut, Charles A. Platt, landscape architect (Monographs of the Work of Charles A. Platt, *1915*)

The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston
Sponsored by the Rice Design Alliance
13 March - 10 April 1985

Reviewed by Barrie Scardino

In keeping with its eclectic approach, the Rice Design Alliance this past spring produced an outstanding lecture series on gardens. The five authorities who spoke on different traditions in garden design gave their audiences a historic overview with an affectionate look at individual gardens they revere. The striking poster announcing the series, designed by Lorraine Wild around a romantic, Surreal photograph by Sally Gall, set forth the notion that "great cultures often express themselves most remarkably through their gardens and garden architecture." These lectures delivered proof of that assertion.

Ellen Samuels spoke on "The American Garden" with knowledge and enthusiasm. Her lecture followed the general outline of her book *The American Woman's Garden* (1984, with Rosemary Verey). After a brief discussion of English, French, and Italian historical precedents adopted by 18th-century American housewives, Samuels discussed gardens of the city and town, estate gardens, perennial gardens, gardens of specimen collectors, and finally country gardens. She concentrated, however, on what seemed to be her favorite American gardens. Two of these, the townhouse garden of Emily Whaley in Charleston, South Carolina and the large country garden of Adele Lovett on Long Island, illustrated the major points of Samuels's lecture. The Whaley garden, a 30′ by 50′ enclosed space, is a lush, almost tropical, garden with a colonial array of flowers and herbs existing within the confines of the fence, borders, and walks planned by Loutrell Briggs many years ago. In contrast, the 2½-acre estate of Adele Lovett can be described as exhuberant, with flowers blooming year-round in a garden filled with meandering paths, lawns, and statuary. The beauty and success of these gardens lie not in their size or perfection but in their maturity, the individual creativity of their owners, and in the unabashed use of native-plant materials. Samuels's knowledge and love of gardens stem not only from academic interest, but from wide experience in looking at many types of gardens all over the United States. Her enthusiasm was contagious and provided a strong beginning for the series.

The second lecture, "Classicizing of the Roman Renaissance Garden," by David Coffin, professor of the history of architecture at Princeton University, provided a fascinating look into the psychology as well as the ancient history of gardens. Coffin classified three types of Biblical gardens: the "Garden of Eden" as exemplified in the pleasure gardens of abbeys such as Monreale outside Palermo; the "garden enclosed," a symbol of virginity and purity first described in the *Song of Solomon*; and the "paradise garden," derived from the New Testament, which was more like a vast park, symbol of "the abode of the blessed after death." As the idea of gardens developed in Italy during the 15th century, vistas from the gardens, views into the gardens, water, and statuary began to be used to enhance the sensuous enjoyment of nature. But the Renaissance context in which the great 16th-century gardens were laid out looked back to classical antiquity, replacing medieval religious symbolism with a new symbolic language based on theories of proportion and classical mythology. Coffin's detailed discussion of the Villa d'Este at Tivoli stressed the extravagance, and extreme technical difficulty, with which this fabulous garden was created. Its famous waterworks punctuate an elaborate plan of axes and cross-axes, giant cypress trees, hedges, and a myriad of classical statues and architectural ornament. The symbolic narrative of the Renaissance gardens, while not necessarily comprehended by many of those who enjoyed them, was to the owners and designers a major source of satisfaction. For example, at the center of the Villa d'Este garden are the statues of Venus, representing the pleasures of vice, and of Diana, representing the pleasures of virtue. As interesting as Coffin's lecture was, it is to be regretted that he did not have better and more current slides of the gardens on which he spoke.

Deborah Nevins, who teaches the theory of landscape and garden design at Barnard College, was to talk on flower gardening in England and America from 1880 to 1930. However, her lecture covered much of the same material as that of Ellen Samuels, with too few references to Eng-

lish gardens. Yet it was a complement to, rather than a repetition of, Samuels's talk. Nevins discussed radical changes in the 19th-century economy, in roles of women, and in educational opportunities after 1890 which had a profound effect on American gardening. Both Harvard and MIT opened schools of landscape architecture, and the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago of 1893 established in the United States the Beaux-Arts conviction that buildings should stand in a setting, integrated with the landscape. Urns, statues, clipped trees, and axial planning became important elements in turn-of-the-century gardening. However, Charles A. Platt and his disciple, Ellen Shipman, stressed informality and lushness, creating what Nevins called "the battle of styles: formality versus informality." The issue was resolved during the beginning of the 1920s by the concept of "appropriateness." Regionalism, individual taste, and the size of a garden became determining factors in its design. In illustrating her thesis Nevins discussed the work of many landscape designers and architects practicing during the early part of this century, calling Beatrix Farrand (1852-1959) the "most brilliant landscape designer of the 20th century."

"Optical Illusion in the French Garden," by F. Hamilton Hazlehurst, professor and chairman of the Department of Fine Arts at Vanderbilt University, used the work of André Le Nôstre to illustrate how illusionistic devices were used in 17th-century France as part of the strict geometric subjugation of the landscape. Control of the environment was perhaps the overriding purpose in constructing these elaborate gardens, first at Vaux-le-Vicomte and culminating at Versailles. Le Nôstre was able to capture the spirit of ordered discipline and perfect equilibrium in his enormous parks with vast parterres, fountains, radiating avenues, and courtyards. The spectator feels in control of such an environment as he walks through it. In actuality, however, subtle changes in perspective managed by foreshortened or hugely proportioned elements, as well as the use of different planes, have been contrived specifically to sustain this illusion. Elements of surprise are used throughout Le Nôstre's gardens as well: small side gardens, pools, fountains that are heard before they are seen, and unexpected splashes of colorful flowers. Hazelhurst was an articulate and entertaining speaker with good slides to illustrate his discussion of Vaux-le-Vicomte, the garden on which he concentrated. The issue of control and the use of deception in the garden, while epitomized in the French examples, are no less valuable in the small private garden.

Writer Maggie Keswick's lecture, "The Chinese Garden," was not a historical account of the development of Chinese gardens but a thorough discussion of different ways in which the Chinese have viewed and treated their landscape. While she spoke on both public and private gardens, the focus was on cosmographic designs laid out in circumscribed spaces. These gardens have a supreme intellectual quality in their understated symbolic programs. But unlike the literal symbolism of the Renaissance Italian gardens, the Chinese used rocks, water, and indigenous plants to symbolize all of nature in one small garden. Philosophically, the Chinese viewed the forms of sky, mountain, and sea as physical embodiments of the spiritual world. Through their gardens, they sought to express a oneness with them. In China, harmony and intimacy were achieved by respect for the rhythms of nature. Designs were asymmetrical but balanced. Principles of complementary forms - male and female, vertical and horizontal, rough and smooth, mountain and plain - expressed the criteria guiding design in the Chinese garden. Portals were extremely important and were decorated accordingly. The material of Keswick's lecture provided an interesting contrast to the Western gardens discussed in the other lectures. Her excellent slides made her lecture coherent and enjoyable.

The current rediscovery of the garden indicates a renewed interest in a particular interpretation of nature: as both continuous with the environment and as a contained, controlled, and refined artifact. While each of the lectures emphasized a different cultural response to this idea, a collective summary might be that garden design in any tradition is a reflection of intimate human interaction with and meditation upon the vicissitudes of nature. ■

Suspended Animation: Photographs of Houston Architecture

Cullen Center
Sponsored by 1600 Smith and presented by the Houston Center for Photography
23 May - 2 September 1985

Reviewed by April Rapier

At its inaugural, the Cullen Center at 1600 Smith Street hosted an exhibition entitled "Suspended Animation: Photographs of Houston Architecture." This ambitious and disparate group of photographs (102 images, many of which were quite large) was curated by Elizabeth Glassman, Sharon Lorenzo, and Phoebe Weseley. As an exhibition area, the space is grand and well-considered; it is neither a token to the display of art, nor offered as an afterthought.

Although there were many exquisite, contemporary images - some serving as personal statements, others purely architectural documents, a special few combining both elements - the vintage images (one dated as early as 1917) stole the show. They provided a glimpse of a place worlds removed from the present, and spoke of the unique combination of an urbane center and the wild west. The street scenes and skyline vistas plotted a course of rapid growth, and, period styles and trends aside, there was a determined quality in the movements of passersby. Of special note were photographs of downtown: "Capital and Fannin" (n.d.) and "Main Street Looking North" (1920), both signed Cecil Thomson Studios; Frank Schlueter's "Houston Skyline" (n.d., print marked 1928); Richard R. Long's "Houston Skyline" (1948); and a number of anonymous photographs from the collections of the Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library, and the Harris County Heritage Society.

Photographs that transform one's accustomed day-to-day experiences, that somehow inspire in the viewer the freedom to witness the expected in an unexpected way, are richly fulfilling. The exhibition included pictures that showcased the few individuals who extract magic from steel, glass, and pedestrians. George Krause's photographs are silent meditations, experiments in the passage and suspension of time. They powerfully demonstrate the scale and mass of contemporary architecture, and then tame these elements by the addition of people, whose frozen gestures are equally strong.

Sam McColloch's two photographs entitled "Callanish/Houston" (1984 and 1985) are comparative diptychs; they are crisp, beautiful, and very funny. In one, a distant view of downtown Houston is seen beside a shot of Stonehenge-like monolithic rocks. The two are remarkably similar. The other parallels a close-up of these ancient, towering stones to the new RepublicBank Building. These overviews put our mighty skyline in proper perspective. In a similar manner, Beaumont Newhall's "Cranes" (1981) whimsically depicts a city and its aspirations. The cranes rise like dinosaurs, overseeing a transitory land.

Gary Winogrand has always been attuned to the rhythm of his environment, whether familiar to him or explored for the first time. Few have the grace of instant acclimation he had, evident in the untitled street shots from the 1970s that portend a rising star. Frank Gohlke makes an issue of occurrence in "Signs Near Freeway, Houston, Texas" (1978) and "Apartment Building Under Construction, Houston, Texas" (1978). It's not that the signs in the first image are unique to any one city; that they exist at all is odd enough. His intense vision, aided by the acute sharpness of large-format camera equipment, isolates elements normally taken for granted and makes them seem a bit less imposing, more unique.

Paul Hester's use of architectural elements is almost incidental to the wonderousness that can be created by a balance between the camera and a playful, intelligent sensibility. In a picture entitled "Panorama From the Southeast Corner of the 19th Floor of 5000 Montrose, 4:10 p.m. on 16 Dec. 1982," one sees the 270-degree sweep from one wall of a balcony high over Houston to the other. The panorama camera compresses space in a marvelous

way because it forces an adaptation to the increase in information included in the frame. "120.78.121.3 Waiting for the Bus" (1978) is a timeless photograph that touches on the power of light over architecture. "Looking East from Parking Garage, Federal Land Bank, 1980" involves a tongue-in-cheek repositioning of the grandiose and the ordinary, allowing one the unlikely view of a building from a vantage point inaccessible to most.

weighty artifice hangs in the air, and the buildings seem at once solid and precariously balanced, due to Hambourg's physical vantage point (he shot straight up). Perhaps this particular image works so well because one of the points of reference - towering buildings - is blurred, and the others are in focus.

Sharon Stewart also took advantage of waning light in "Highlight Series, III and

Left: *"Callanish/Houston," 1984-1985 (Photo by Sam McColloch).* Lower left: *"Main Street Looking North," 1920 (Photo by Cecil Thomson Studio, courtesy of the San Jacinto Museum of History Association/Cecil Thomson Collection, and the Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library).* Below: *"120.90.79.4 Little House on the Prairie," 1979 (Photo by Paul Hester)*

Sylvia Plachy's "Untitled (Houston)" (1984) is seen from the interior of an automobile parked near the Galleria. The driver, in the foreground, points to construction underway. The photograph hints at undercurrents of activity, of actions and events conspiring, of the way things really work. Sally Gall's highly romanticized opinion of an already impressive city makes it even lovelier in a bold, futuristic way. Her photographs are printed with a soft, impressionistic technique. She chose unlikely areas from which to photograph, the results being well worth the effort. Casey Williams's two untitled, medium-scale, hand-colored studies for murals (1983) are filled with the energy of discovery. Pondering oddities and structural eccentricities, they have notations scribbled on their surfaces, and are a bit less serious than the murals he so beautifully paints. They are also more fun.

The abovementioned images are black and white; the number of color and black-and-white photographs in the exhibit was roughly equal. With one or two exceptions, the impact of color on the imagery was negligible. It seemed that there hovered around the exhibition an erroneous belief that snippets of fabulous buildings make fabulous abstract images. The use of graphic composition strictly for the sake of design so often falls short of its once-noble intention; it is a primitive, overused technique that for the most part impairs one's experience of the whole via its parts. Far too many reflections were preyed upon as well.

Several photographers took advantage of twilight's magical effect on the city. Michael Ruetz's "Houston, Downtown" (n.d.) is another panoramic photograph. Firmly establishing the foreground with a glitzy Holiday Inn sign, he then gathers the dim skyline around and behind it; the result is an eerie, beautiful statement. Serge Hambourg's "The Tower Theatre" (1980) pays homage to a dazzling pop icon, an adoring tribute to a former beauty resurrected. Even more impressive is his "First City Tower" (1983), which resembles the futuristic concept drawing of Houston Center seen in an older, anonymous photograph done for the Texas Eastern Transmission Corporation. A IV" (1980 and 1981). Both are mystical, as seen by someone absolutely in love with the impossibility of it all; "IV" looks as much like a lithograph as a Cibachrome. One has the feeling that Joel Sternfeld barely could believe his good fortune at having found one of those bizarre, fake Christmas trees high atop a light pole, and dense fog to accentuate it. This comprises the foreground of "The Pennzoil Building, Houston, Texas" (1978). As one moves to the background, the fog thickens, almost completely obscurring the distinctive structures that rise and separate slightly, letting a bit of sky peep through. This combination of formal design elements and a fond look at human silliness is endearing and unforgettable. David Crossley looks at the same building with different results in "Pennzoil" (1983). His is a handsome abstraction that pits old architecture against new.

Geoff Winningham's "Untitled" (Houston) (1984) featured on the exhibition poster, catches a shimmering light scattered about the frame, which casts the other elements - a strolling person, street arrows - into a Surreal category by association. Wendy Watriss's "Downtown Houston, Twilight" (1984) is seen from a high point of view, eliminating all city-street references (both negative and positive). This tidy neutrality is other-worldly. Danny Samuels doesn't treat soon-to-be-passing icons of peculiar construction as holy, but as of interest nevertheless. These go far beyond documents, involving the viewer in a more complete understanding of each site. Samuels accomplishes this by including the human touch that almost certainly accompanies each house or business; the structures are grounded in reality and memory.

That the photographers, each in their own fashion, refer to a perpetual state of change was one of the most dynamic aspects of the exhibition. The photographs were enlivened by this concept, and an additional challenge was offered the viewer by these transformative images - a challenge to the imagination that, once issued, was impossible to deactivate. ■

Studies in Tectonic Culture

Physics Amphitheater and Chemistry Lecture Hall, Rice University
Sponsored by the School of Architecture, Rice University
28 February - 2 May 1985

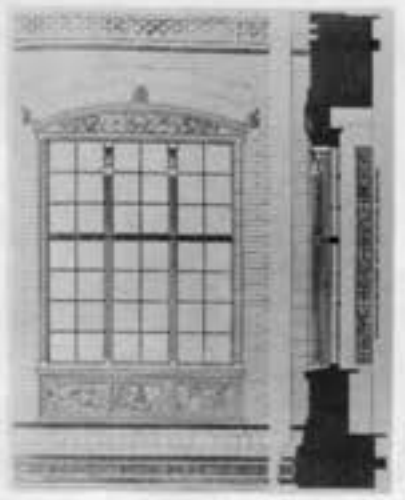
Reviewed by Mark A. Hewitt

The School of Architecture at Rice University found itself last spring in the middle of a discourse on the fate of Postmodern architecture when Kenneth Frampton, professor of architecture at Columbia University and one of the world's leading architectural critics, came to deliver the first annual Craig Francis Cullinan Lectures, an endowed professorship to be shared by the Architecture School and the Department of Art and Art History. Frampton's galvanizing and intellectually provocative papers, collectively entitled "Studies in Tectonic Culture," must be seen as both a brilliant reinterpretation of the work of several key figures in the history of modern architecture and an attempt to reorient current architectural theory and practice away from representation and toward materiality and construction. (The themes of several upcoming student journals confirm the popularity of this topic.) "Architecture," Frampton argued, "is *tectonic* rather than scenographic in nature," and he set about to prove that the constructional or tectonic ideal emerged in the 19th-century architecture and writings of the Schinkelschule to form the basis for all the major achievements of 20th-century architecture. This was polemical history at its best - a cogent and precise interpretive schema applied to Perret, Mies, and Kahn which yielded important new insights into their work. In the end, members of the Houston architectural community were treated to nothing less than a prescription for putting architecture in the pink again - a tonic for the ills of Postmodernism.

In the first and most difficult of the talks, Frampton set out to define the "tectonic idea" in 19th-century architecture - embodied on the one hand by the Crystal Palace of 1852-1854 and on the other by Schinkel's Berlin Bauakademie of 1836, each symbolizing an attitude toward the expression of the constructional reality of building. The former seemed to signify an acultural expression of the potential metal skeletal construction and the emerging technology of the glass curtain-wall, the latter a more complex representational tapestry of masonry-bearing and frame infill systems; one merely technological, the other tectonic. Drawing upon the work and writings of Friedrich Gilly, Karl Boettrischer, A.W.N. Pugin, Joseph Paxton, J.N.L. Durand, and Gottfried Semper, Frampton attempted to trace the origins of the term "tectonic" and to plumb its ambiguities, finally establishing a complex dialectic between the "technological object," the "scenographic object," and a third condition, the "tectonic object," as a synthesis of the first two.

Things got complicated here, especially when discussing Semper, whose definitions of tectonic and distinctions between skin and skeleton do not necessarily agree with Frampton's overarching interpretation. Semper's view of the tectonics of art, craft, and architecture - all material culture - was based on the emerging 19th-century concept of the *organic*, influenced by biological and morphological studies. He wrote in an unpublished manuscript in 1856: "Tectonics is an art that takes nature as a model - not nature's concrete phenomena but uniformity and the rules by which she exists and creates. . . .The sphere of tectonics is the world of phenomena; what it creates exists in space and manifests itself through shape and color." Semper, in looking at architecture in the same way as weaving or pottery, attempted to fuse the formal qualities of ornament and the manifestations of skin with those of structure and methods of craft or making. Wolfgang Herrmann cautions those who would interpret Semper as a prophet of the new technologies of 19th-century building to look closely at his pronouncements on iron construction (he disliked the Crystal Palace) and his rather loose connection to Boettischer's concepts of core- and art-form (*Kern and Kunstform*). Frampton's discussion of Semper did not lack fidelity or thoroughness - he ended with a fine excursus on the *knot* as metaphor for all kinds of joining - but in subsequent lectures he demonstrated that his own theory of tectonic form in modern architecture was very different from those of 19th-century theorists. He used tectonic form to describe a kind of metaphysical logic behind the expression of structural and constructional elements, systems, and conditions: the joint is first and foremost among these conditions.

If the first lecture took on the German intellectual tradition of the previous century, the second talk, "August Perret and Structural Rationalism," offered a bold reinterpretation of the legacy of Viollet-le-Duc in France. Frampton's detailed examination of the major works of August Perret not only demonstrated the genius of this pioneer in reinforced-concrete architecture but established a methodology to be used in the final two lectures. By focusing on the basic architectural and constructional elements used as themes by each designer, and on the way in which these elements manifested tectonic form, Frampton subtly unfolded his thesis on the continuity of constructional logic in modern architecture. For Perret, not only



Window detail from the Berlin Bauakademie by Karl Friedrich Schinkel (Collection of Architectural Designs, *1982*)

were types of column, slab, and rib discussed, but also the varieties of wall and fenestration treatment, such as the *porte-fenêtre*. If any important themes in this architect's work received short shrift, it was his blatant reliance on Beaux-Arts planning and his often clumsy attempts to reconcile classical proportioning systems to the new constructional exigencies of concrete.

"Mies, Kahn, and Classicism" and "The School of Zodiac: Utzon, Scarpa, and Tectonic Form" were to round out the series, but Frampton chose wisely to limit the scope of his study to one penetrating talk on Mies and one on Kahn. In one of the most incisive discussions of the German master's work this writer has ever heard, Frampton examined the different types of wall, column, and joint used in the early court houses and villas versus the later Chicago-period buildings and the *spatial* connotations of each. Extending and modifying the views of such other scholars as Colin Rowe, Frampton demonstrated the dazzling precision which characterized Mies's thought and his profound understanding of both representation and construction. Less satisfying or conclusive was his lengthy examination of Kahn's major buildings - it seems that as Kahn's stature grows we grow only a little closer to a real comprehension of his complex genius. Though it is obvious that this great American architect was interested in what Frampton calls tectonic form, it is less clear whether constructional or material concerns formed the real basis for his work, as is often argued by his followers.

The first annual Cullinan Professorship was a success both as an event and as an enrichment to the intellectual life of the Houston community - the palpable excitement felt at each lecture amidst the audience was evidence of this. Students clearly were anxious to hear and absorb substantial architectural theory and history from a major scholar of modern architecture. Whether they were adequately prepared for the ideas put forth is a question that must be asked, given the School of Architecture's limited commitment to theory and academic research. Also, one might ask whether this prestigious new chair is to be used fully in the future as an opportunity for classroom exposure to major scholars, or whether Rice students will be offered only a brief taste of what fine minds like Kenneth Frampton's have to give. ■

In Pursuit of an Elusive Future

Peter C. Papademetriou

The past decade has brought changes to Houston that no one would have predicted as recently as 1970. The international crisis in the petroleum industry has had a dramatic impact on the city's economy, its urban form and patterns of settlement, and even its pulse and tempo. The creation and continued evolution of a public mass-transit authority is beginning to effect the urban landscape, contrary to the sentiments of even those who would die rather than give up their car keys. A progressive mayor has transformed the image of the city's chief official from an absentee-developer type into a pragmatic accountant, and a woman to boot. "Heronner," however, has projected a vision that is as realistic and no-nonsense as her predictable dress-for-success fashion image. A bit dull perhaps, but at least the potholes are on the decrease. Changes in national demography appear to be shifting also. The late '60s spurt of California license plates in Houston gave way to Michigan license plates in the '70s; one can't help but wonder which American cities are now host to spurts of Texas plates. The fact is that the city is in a slowdown. The "see-through" office or condominium building has become a distinctive Houston type; they come not singly but in groups. And now that insurance companies are starting to own hotel real estate, the boomtown edge has worn off.

On an upbeat note, the national Yuppification Movement is in full gear, with more Saabs than Trans Ams on the freeways. Inner-city renewal is in evidence, although its reasons-for-being probably have as much to do with the cause-and-effect of overall retrenchment than with any commitment toward a way of life. Quality-of-life concerns are being manifested, although the see-and-be-seen street life of Perrier and cafes may be just another form of consumer fashion. However, culture is one of these consumer products, and the Houston public is simultaneously acquiring a lyric theater, a Noguchi-designed sculpture garden, and, of course, a new convention center. Diversity also appears to be on the upswing, with new constituencies: Hispanics, Asians, and gays are more and more an integral part of our urban population.

If one word has characterized Houston s notion of itself in this century, it is "growth." Boosterism has been the essential attitude, constructive criticism the extreme position, and the future the goal. Historic preservation, for example, has been a pathetic effort - an anomaly and a paradox. Mythology and fantasy, "image" if you will, were the elements which informed a present that never looked back.

Until the second world war, the presence of adequate capital made it possible for Houston to emerge from village to town to city, and to create the amenities that urbanization was supposed to offer as an alternative to rural life. In the 1920s, Houston saw itself as the "Little New York" of the South and by 1930 it had become the largest city in Texas. The Progressive Movement was in full swing, and while one ultimately might fault its capacity to address a sense of the whole city, it nonetheless did add one component to a future-directed outlook.

This element was *vision*, an image of order and a sense of integrated organization in which public and private were clearly placed, supported in physical terms by a cohesive architectural language which began to relate piece to piece. Guiding this vision was a sense of the public good. A social contract, even in a laissez-faire context, began to emerge.

Yet the pressures of post-war urbanization, the loss of leadership, and the unanticipated period of expansion (reaching unexpected levels in the 1950s) overwhelmed these tentative efforts. The commodities of timber, cotton, and produce transported by a visible network of railroads gave way to the invisible commodities of oil, gas, and a system of distribution for goods and people that took the form of the individual motorized vehicle.

The City Beautiful gave way to the City Efficient, and the first official document to guide Houston's future was contained in the 1942 Major Street and Thoroughfare Plan, where traffic engineering became the basis for the organization of the future. As concept, however, this plan was an abstraction, a projection of the current state-of-the-art as a blueprint for development. Yet there was no real way to imagine the future, because its character could not be described in physical terms. Moreover, the strategy was limited by a conservative notion of the proper role of the government with regard to public intervention, one which prevented the development of a comprehensive view as had been presented in the 1929 *Report of the City Planning Commission,* Houston's classic document of the Progressive Movement. This instrument, nonetheless, has remained the presistent framework of the future.

The natural scientist, A.E. Parr, once observed what he perceived to be a limitation of sociology: it attempted to evaluate the very age of which it was a product. The obvious conclusion was that there was no way to evaluate loss, a lack of reference, and no standards against which to measure. For Houston, the future has been a goal which recedes indefinitely, and as the technology of change (including real technology, but also economics, politics, and social geography) becomes more rapid it remains ever elusive, and any sense of eventually achieving reality becomes more diffuse.

The ancient Greeks recognized that the *polis* was, by definition, the public place. Consequently, the private domain was equalized, routine, and anonymous. In contrast, the public domain was highly figured; the *agora* and *stoa* were the places that became institutions, where collective public ritual was acted out. Politics as the process of social intercourse was rooted in the existence of the city itself. Concensus was essential, and respect for the past was embodied in the permanence of these public institutions.

There can be no future without a past, no accomplishment without a record. Perhaps this quiet interlude in Houston's existence can be tapped to yield a panorama of possible new directions, to *plan* a future, and to decide how to guide its evolution. One should use the rear-view mirror when driving to the future. ■

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