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A History of City Planning in Rochester

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As strictly defined, the record of city planning does not go back more than four decades, and most of the activities even of this recent period exerted but a moderate influence on the city's development. Yet the growth of Rochester has not been free from significant controls. Indeed, although most of these influences resulted from the independent decisions of individuals or groups not officially concerned with the general welfare, some democratic direction of community expansion did occur. A study of this patch-work or functional planning and of the successive attempts at more comprehensive city planning during the last few decades may illuminate some of the problems facing present day planners.

Nineteenth Century Planning

Most of the vital decisions during the first century of Rochester's growth were made without reference to the democratic choice of the community. Such significant matters as the street pattern of the early subdivisions, the location of the first bridges, the canals, the railroads, the university and other institutions, the theaters and amusement centers, and of course the factories and stores—all of these decisions were made without consultation with community authorities. Most of us, indeed, prefer to take our chances amidst the hectic forces pulsating along Main Street, yet time and again the city fathers have been forced

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to assume directive responsibility and adopt long-range programs in order to keep these varied forces pulsating.

Thus the city took forthright action in the early eighties to secure the elevation of the New York Central tracks in order to eliminate dangerous grade crossings. No American city of Rochester's size could boast a more happy solution of this problem by 1885, and Rochester's rapid growth during the next half century was made possible thereby.¹

The city likewise roused itself in the late eighties and adopted a comprehensive sewer plan. After several decades characterized by recurrent repairs of independently constructed sewers, litigation over damage suits, and hesitation to adopt a sewer plan because of the great cost involved, the city did finally project an east-side trunk sewer based on the most scientific study of the problem yet made in America. The sewer when completed by the able engineer Emil Kuichling in 1890 proved a lasting benefit to the community and especially to the east side which eventually paid the bill. Later developments of the sewer plan, including the introduction of a disposal system, likewise profited from careful surveys by Kuichling and other experts, and contributed in turn to the city's growth.²

The provision of a water system in the seventies involved closely analogous problems.³ The distribution of public schools, the location of public institutions, such as the city hall, the jail, and the poor home, presented other opportunities for planning (or at least influencing the character of) community development. But perhaps the most dramatic instance of city planning in nineteenth century Rochester occurred in the location of the public parks.

Rochester's park history is fairly characteristic of its experience with community functions which involve city planning. For half a century the citizens were content with the scattered squares donated by the promoters of varied subdivisions. Funds were provided with considerable reluctance to keep these squares fenced and to guard them from the ravages of children and carpet beaters. The still-accessible river gorge and the fields on the city outskirts, as well as privately operated amusement parks overlooking the falls and the lake, answered community needs after a fashion. But by the mid-eighties the inadequacy of these facilities, coupled with the spreading fame of public parks in Buffalo and other cities, spurred Rochester to action. When

the city council, fearful of the cost, hesitated to move, the park advocates secured a bill from the legislature creating a Park Commission authorized to issue bonds up to \$300,000 with which to purchase land and establish a park system. The advice of out-of-town experts was sought in order to remove the selection of park sites from the danger of local favoritism. In the development of the system the fairly independent park authorities, headed by Dr. Edward Mott Moore, early demonstrated an ability to plan for the future needs and interests of Rochester citizens.⁴

The planned, forward looking programs launched in these and several other fields during the nineteenth century did not relieve the city from all further concern on their account. Despite the fact that any list of Rochester's blessings would include each one of these planned functions (the parks, the water system, the sewers, the elevated tracks), we are still confronted from time to time by new problems in these fields. Yet for the most part our decisions today are between alternate extensions of the existing plans as required by the community's growing needs. These nineteenth century examples demonstrate the possibility for long-range planning of community functions. In a very real sense they point the way for the twentieth century city in which additional functions have become so complex that only comprehensive city planning offers a solution.

A Decade of Paper Plans

The first active discussion of city planning in Rochester occurred in 1904. The newly elected mayor, James G. Cutler, was a vigorous business man who had accepted the office, as he declared, only because many large public improvements were urgently called for. Amidst an atmosphere of surging optimism, stimulated by a building boom, the idea of the "City Beautiful" became a popular after dinner topic in Rochester. Professor J. H. Raymond, back from a visit to Paris, reported in glowing terms on the remarkable achievements wrought by city planners in the French metropolis during the previous half-century. A brilliant Rochesterian, Charles M. Robinson, had recently published *The Improvement of Towns and Cities*, an excellent study of urban aesthetics, and his increasing fame as one of America's foremost city planners spurred Rochester to action. Yet perhaps the chief in-

centive to community planning arose from a variety of practical circumstances.

The year 1904 was a focal point in Rochester's history, and while the final decisions in most of the questions it presented were deferred many years, inspiring visions began to appear. The recent legislative provision for a barge canal raised the issue of the proper route through or around Rochester. An engineer's plan for a southern route with a large canal basin or harbor extending in the river into the center of the city to Court Street dam gained favor. The use of the old canal bed by suburban cars was likewise first suggested at this time. A series of recent floods had prompted the creation of a commission to recommend a solution, and J. Y. McClintock, one of the engineers named, viewing the flood hazard as a challenge to plan a greater Rochester, proposed the removal of all the old buildings on the river banks north of Main Street and the creation of a great open plaza with landscaped avenues flanking the river from Main to Central Avenue bridge. The natural beauty of the river as well as an ample flood basin would thus be restored.⁵

The destructive Granite block fire of 1904, by accelerating the removal of Sibley, Lindsay and Curr into a new and larger store a long block further east, widened the breach between the east-side retail district and the older business district around the Four Corners. The new Sibley site invaded the district formerly used by farmers and hucksters as a street market, and the city council at last accepted responsibility for terminating that half-century-old practice. Rival sites for a new public market were again debated, and two locations, one on the east and one on the west side, were finally chosen, but the funds were exhausted in acquiring the eastern site on which the new city market was constructed and opened the next year.⁶

West-side promoters, not indifferent to these developments, joined to project a new department store at the corner of West Main and Plymouth; several months later plans were announced for a new and modern hotel to be located a block further west, and a private market was shortly mentioned for the same area.⁷ Long before these projects were realized, east siders began to conjure plans for a sumptuous hotel and other improvements on lower East Avenue.⁸ A move developed to persuade the city to acquire the triangle at the junction of East,

Main, and Franklin for a small park on which the liberty pole of earlier years could be re-erected as a fit symbol of civic virtue, but despite Mayor Cutler's prodding, the municipal authorities remained less venturesome than private promoters.

Indeed it was the enterprise of eager promoters that presented the dilemmas which compelled a resort to planning. Thus the chartering of two new interurban trolley companies (one running to Syracuse and one to Elmira, increasing to seven the number of these lines) raised anew the question of a union terminal. These companies, as well as the passengers and the central retailers, favored a station in the heart of the city. Unfortunately the congestion of street cars on Main Street already demanded relief, and Mayor Cutler declared that the admission of new lines with larger cars would require city planning. The first suggestion for a street parallel to Main Street resulted from the petition of a trolley company to turn down Franklin Street and open a new route, a so-called "inner belt line," across the river by Central Avenue or some new bridge.⁹

Main Street was not the only congested thoroughfare. The trolley company, discouraged with the delays on the winding approach to Park Avenue, sought permission to lay its tracks out East Avenue as far as Alexander Street and thence to Park Avenue, but a variety of factors obstructed the move. Earlier proposals were revived for cross town lines, for a boulevard around the city and another from Genesee Valley Park north along the east bank of the river to the center of town. A boulevard commission was proposed to secure co-operation between city and county authorities, but plans for the annexation of new territories, though only partially successful in these years, side-tracked that proposal.¹⁰

The project which very nearly launched an active city planning program was the proposed new station on the New York Central. Mayor Cutler mentioned the need for an enlarged station and urged the merits of a site further east. Westsiders were scarcely enthusiastic over this proposal and opposed its corollary, that the city sell Brown Square on the west side for a freight yard. Earnest efforts to make a suitable west-side station site available at reasonable terms were frustrated as A. J. Townson (of Sibley, Lindsay & Curr) quietly acquired title for the railroad to an east-side site.¹¹ Before the decision in favor of the lat-

ter location was announced by the Central, a group of business men, observing the vital community interests involved, engaged William J. Wilgus, a consulting engineer from New York City, to study the Rochester situation and recommend the best site for a new station.

After several months' study a dramatic plan was proposed for the construction of a new station over the river just above the falls and facing towards Main Street. The station was to accommodate the interurban trolleys on the street floor, while the steam cars would pull in on the floor above. Two broad highways, one decking each side of the river, would lead from the station to a gap in Main Street bridge. Elegant if shallow stores, lining their outer edges on lots leased or sold by the city, would largely repay the cost of condemning the necessary property and provide a fit setting for the river basin, the central feature of the station plaza. It was hoped that this compromise location would still forever the growing jealousy between the east and west sides.¹²

Popular enthusiasm was almost unbundled. The Central had hastily announced its acquisition of the eastern site before the Wilgus plan was published in December, 1908, but it was confidently supposed that a shift in plans could be arranged. The city officials now led by Mayor Edgerton, the Chamber of Commerce under E. G. Miner as president, the Central Trades and Labor Council, and numerous other organizations, as well as the editors of the five local dailies, endorsed the plan. George Eastman headed a lengthy list of industrialists who favored the proposal. Eager southsiders suggested that Main Street bridge could likewise be opened to the south with a second beautiful river plaza leading to a union station at Court Street into which all the other railroads might be corralled. Professor William H. Burr of Columbia University, invited to check the estimates of the Wilgus plan, reported them to be essentially correct, with the cost to the city not to exceed \$1,000,000 despite the fact that Main Street bridge property, as well as that on Central Avenue, was already soaring in price.¹³ The Central, however, affirmed its decision to build on the Joiner Street site already acquired, and the city, eager for a new station, could do nothing but lament the fact that its lack of a city plan had left such a vital matter to be decided by outsiders.¹⁴

Numerous lesser issues likewise stressed the need for careful planning. When in 1905 the state deeded to the city the old armory fac-

ing Washington Square, the opportunity to convert it into a Convention Hall appeared. Although Rochester's newly acquired aspirations as a "Convention City" called for more adequate facilities, the heated debate over the proper location for a new hall ended with a make-shift enlargement of the armory. In like fashion renewed appeals for a public library were stymied when the state's decision to remove the old Industrial School to a new site in the country left the old buildings available for new use. The state's plan to convert that institution into a prison annex was blocked by earnest appeals from Rochester, and Mayor Edgerton shortly appropriated a portion of the plant for a make-shift library, clearing the rest of the tract as a suitable location for Rochester's newly organized annual Industrial Exposition.

Outspoken citizens and visiting experts meanwhile became more explicit in their advocacy of a city plan for Rochester. Professor Sedgwick of M. I. T., invited to help dedicate a new building at the University of Rochester, chided the city for spoiling the river, its most valuable scenic asset. The achievements of Baltimore planners after that city's great fire in 1904 were noted in words of praise tinged with envy by a local editor. And in 1908, when the Chamber of Commerce invited Professor Charles Zueblin to lecture on city planning, he took occasion to elaborate on the strides made by Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Minneapolis, St. Louis and Harrisburg. Public opinion called for action, and on motion of William C. Barry the Chamber launched a Civic Improvement League with James G. Cutler as chairman and Charles Mulford Robinson as secretary. Enthusiastic support from the Chamber during the presidency of Edward G. Miner in 1909 enabled the League to raise \$10,000 and employ a panel of outside experts to prepare a comprehensive plan for Rochester.¹⁵

Mayor Edgerton, spokesman for George Aldridge, the political boss who was never slow to grant what he saw the city really desired, hastened to present his own plans for a City Beautiful. An elaborate plat for a boulevard encircling the city, following earlier but less specific or official suggestions, had been issued in the spring of 1908, and now the mayor proceeded to enlarge his plan to include the opening of a new street north of and parallel to Main, on which he proposed to erect a new city hall, thus permitting a use of the old building as a central library.¹⁶ A statistical study of the congested traffic across

Main Street bridge demonstrated the imperative need for a parallel central crossing. An appeal was likewise sent to Albany for the exclusive right to acquire the bed of the old canal, as soon as it should be abandoned, for use as a subway for suburban cars.¹⁷

Other interested citizens eagerly advanced independent proposals. Father A. A. Notebaert repeatedly urged the city to go ahead with the Wilgus plan for the improvement of the river. George Dietrich, Vice-President of the Chamber, returned from an investigation of European cities in September, 1909, full of ideas for a Rochester plan. Ernest C. Margrander, a New York architect formerly resident in Rochester, submitted a plan for a civic center south of Main Street on the river.¹⁸ Perhaps the most elaborate of these early plans was that of James A. Salter, a Rochester architect, who charted a north parallel street which in effect extended Mortimer Street from Franklin on the east to Fitzhugh on the west, located a new city hall on Exchange between the new thoroughfare and Church Street, and provided for a union trolley station on a plaza decking the river between Mortimer and Andrews bridges.¹⁹ Salter's proposal was closely similar to that which the mayor was impatient to launch, but an appeal from the Women's Educational and Industrial Union urged that final action be deferred until the plans of the experts hired by the Chamber should be presented for public consideration.

Another disturbing situation which appeared to call for community planning was the housing problem. Despite the building boom active since 1904, the shortage of homes for the new workmen attracted to the city by its expanding industries was becoming acute. An alarm was sounded by a Chamber report in the fall of 1906, and four years later Secretary Roland Woodward urged the city to create a commission charged to study and if possible correct the high rental problem in Rochester.²⁰ When George Dietrich became president of the Chamber in 1910 he declared that "the housing problem in Rochester is one of primary importance to manufacturing and mercantile interests as well as to householders of small incomes." A housing committee was accordingly appointed, headed by John C. McCurdy, and after several months' study, the committee took an option on a tract of land and called in a Boston architect to plan a group of low rental houses on model lines.²¹ Considerable enthusiasm for reform was engendered

by numerous press stories describing the wretched conditions in dilapidated but crowded tenements on South Avenue and other streets. Dr. Goler, the health officer, was outspoken in condemning many tenement houses, bemoaning the lack of sufficient authority to regulate them, though he did close several during periods of epidemic. Yet for some reason construction of the model homes was never begun, and when the revised building code appeared it was found to have adopted standards considered unavoidable in congested New York rather than the more generous standards of Cleveland and other western cities.²²

The new city plan was eagerly awaited by a variety of people. All desired improvements, but most citizens were surprised at the number and extent of those recommended. The City Beautiful seemed far in the future to those who read the Brunner-Olmsted plan. Old advocates of city planning boldly professed optimism, but many must have felt about their pet projects as Mayor Edgerton did when he declared "it will be a very long time before we can have a new city hall" if we wait until these plans are carried into effect. Enthusiasm for the Rochester plan was more unrestrained in distant cities where the obstacles to its execution were less evident.²³

Despite its failure of adoption, the Brunner-Olmsted report was in that day a model city plan.²⁴ A city hall with a spacious plaza was to be located on West Main, straddling the street at the point where the canal, soon to be removed, crossed. The sketchy design for the buildings to surround this civic center, and the plan for a long station plaza extending from the new Central station on the northeast side almost to Main Street, revealed the influence of European city planners. The provision for a north-side parallel street, extending Mortimer in both directions, promised to relieve Main Street and balance a new avenue to be opened over the aqueduct as soon as the barge canal should be completed. A commercial building to be constructed along the northern edge of the aqueduct, facing up stream, would hide from view the community's shabby treatment of the river below that point. All railroads were to be shunted into the Central station, and numerous improvements designed to beautify the bridges and other structures were recommended for adoption when occasion permitted.

A second and third section of the report dealt specifically with the street and park systems. General recommendations called for a

spreading of the building lines on several principal streets, in order to facilitate widening at a future date. Specific proposals included the extension of certain dead-end streets and development of parkways to connect the several parks and afford worthy approaches from the central part of town. Both sides of the gorge below the main falls and extending to the lake were to be restored as a public park, the old canal bed was to be converted into a parkway, several new small central parks were to be provided for playground use, and additional land was to be acquired sufficient to join Highland and Cobbs Hill as one large park.

A few citizens were disappointed by some gaps in the plan, but most were overwhelmed by its comprehensive character. James P. B. Duffy regretted the neglect of the river in the center of town. Father Notebaert preferred to see the city hall over the river at Court Street. However, all critics were silenced by the prophesy of Herbert N. Casson that, assuming teamwork on the plan, Rochester would grow to 400,000 by 1925 (almost doubling its 1911 population) and would have four Main Streets and ten East Avenues. Edward G. Miner characterized the plan for a City Beautiful as a prudent investment. Plans for the temporary housing of several city offices in various buildings promised to defer the need for a new city hall until the site could be readied.²⁵

However, prospects for action dimmed when estimates of the cost became available. City Engineer Fisher found the assessed valuation of the property needed for the city hall and plaza to be \$769,200, while that for the station plaza reached \$510,400, making a total of \$1,250,000 to start with — provided the property could be acquired at this value. A similar impasse was reached when the estimates for the cost of the north parallel street reached approximately \$2,000,000. The hope that increased property values along the new street would ultimately return taxes to repay the cost did not solve the immediate problem. When the need for a new Hemlock conduit appeared, the parallel street and other projects were quickly shelved.²⁶

Consideration of the major proposals under the city plan was overshadowed in 1912 by discussion of the housing problem. A "Sanitary Survey of Rochester," made by Mrs. Caroline B. Crane at the invitation of the Women's Educational and Industrial Union in 1911, start-

led many formerly complacent citizens by its vivid portrayal of several near-slum areas.²⁷ A "Fourth Ward Survey," conducted by Rev. Edwin Rumball of the Unitarian church and published in a significant local monthly, *The Common Good*, shed additional light into dark corners.²⁸ A disastrous tenement fire in New York prompted Rochester authorities to summon fifty tenement house owners to explain their failure to provide fire escapes as required by law.²⁹

The housing question gained the front page when George Eastman backed a New York firm which proposed to erect a million-dollar tenement to house 200 families at the corner of State and Jay Streets. The city's pride in its reputation for individual family units was quickly aroused, and vehement protests greeted the company's appeal for a modification in the building ordinance in order to permit the elimination of fire escapes and a reduction of bedroom space. Rival editors took opposing views of the situation. The *Herald*, a champion of the model tenement, ran a series of articles exposing the wretched conditions in the crowded old structures which occupied the area in question — the "private homes" which had become tenements and slums by virtue of the economic plight which faced the families of poor workmen in a city lacking adequate housing facilities.³⁰ Tempers reached such a pitch that a solution of the problem became impossible. The model tenement was effectively blocked, and the construction of new homes on the outskirts of the city was accelerated, but the deterioration of old houses and tenements in the crowded central area continued.

Meanwhile, varied efforts to revive one or another aspect of the city plan were balked by the increasing friction between rival sectional leaders. A First Ward Improvement Association, formed in 1913 to press forward the scheme for a north-side parallel street was effectively countered by the East Avenue Improvement Association and the Clinton Avenue Improvement Association, both of which insisted that the southern parallel street over the Aqueduct and on to East Avenue should come first.³¹ Small fortunes were reaped by lot speculators after the first mention of the latter project, thus helping to postpone its realization by boosting the estimated cost of the land from \$800,000 to \$1,250,000. The city did safeguard its interests in the canal bed by an amendment to the Malone bill before the legislature

assuring its use to the city. A Municipal Art Commission was appointed, with Cutler at its head, but its powers were limited to recommendations, so that Rochester completed its first decade of planning discussion with little or no concrete results.³²

A Decade of Detailed Planning

The urgency of several of the city's functions maintained a constant pressure on the municipal authorities. Edwin A. Fisher, the city engineer who saw Rochester's problems more clearly than most citizens, declared that the city should seek an exemption of its \$8,000,000 water bonds from calculation under the debt limit since no other city in the state, except Buffalo, was thus handicapped. It was a mistake, he believed, to conclude that Rochester was straining its credit with a debt (including the water bonds) of \$17,000,000, for Toronto across the lake, despite a similar debt, had recently undertaken civic improvements which promised to give her a sure lead over Rochester. Judge Rodenbeck among others endorsed the move to exclude the water bonds from the city debt, but the measure was tabled. Another scheme for financing the proposed parallel streets called for the acquisition of a larger swath of territory than required for street purposes, permitting the city to sell or lease the remnants at the advanced prices justified by the improvement. Rochester joined Buffalo in an appeal to Albany for adequate power to condemn land for such purposes, but again action was deferred.³³

When in 1916 Bion J. Arnold, the Chicago traction expert called in by the Rochester Railway Company to study the increased congestion on Main Street, recommended that several trolley lines be diverted from that route, the demand for a parallel street revived. The First Ward Improvement Association sponsored a new study of the cost for a north parallel street. Unfortunately the increased estimates had now reached \$3,000,000, which the mayor declared doomed the project. The Chamber of Commerce, less readily discouraged, brought the four rival civic improvement associations together behind a scheme for simultaneous construction of both the north-side and south-side parallel streets,³⁴ although nothing came of the plan.

A number of practical if minor accomplishments marked the next few years. A charter amendment provided a City Planning Commis-

sion (soon renamed a Bureau) to which the mayor in 1918 named James G. Cutler, George L. Herdle, James S. Watson, and George Aldridge, with Edwin A. Fisher as superintendent. The mayor announced a tentative policy for regulating four-family houses, and the planning bureau readied itself, in view of a threatened epidemic, to tackle the housing question.³⁵ The planning superintendent considered all applications for modification of the street plan, recommended new street extensions, and supervised the location and to some extent the character of new buildings. The plans of distant cities were studied by Fisher during occasional visits, and experts from afar were brought to Rochester for consultation on a zoning program and other improvements.³⁶

The same war years that diverted attention from the planning debate likewise suspended the building boom which had previously served in a measure to keep the housing problem within bounds. A critical housing shortage thus developed by 1919. A state housing committee, reaching Rochester in the midst of its crisis, discovered that hundreds of families were camping out in summer cottages or using other makeshift methods to avoid rent increases of 95% since the war's end. The mayor appointed a special housing committee, and ordered a rent survey, but petitioned Albany that the city should not be included under the provisions of state housing legislation, since, as he declared, "Rochester can solve its own problems." The housing committee listed many old tenements above stores in the central district as available shelters for the new workers flocking to Rochester.³⁷ The new owner of the *Times Union*, Frank E. Gannett, recommended the formation of a philanthropic organization to build homes for the poor at cost, urging prompt action by the Chamber's newly appointed housing committee, since the city could not wait for the state to move. "Rents," he declared, "must come down."³⁸

Yet the Chamber's housing committee, reporting in the fall of 1920, found the city still in need of 6,000 houses, with the result that home builders shattered all previous records during the next two years. The 1922 product alone reached a valuation of \$10,392,325 for 1,467 houses and apartments, sufficient to accommodate 2,080 families. Several fine new subdivisions had been laid out with the aid of Superintendent Fisher of the planning bureau, but as later events disclosed,

much of this construction had been financed at inflation values and a disproportionate number of homes faced early foreclosure.³⁹ Moreover, none of the investigators discovered a formula to ease the fate of those still compelled to live in the antiquated tenements that crowded many old streets.

The planning bureau was meanwhile giving effect to a portion of the Brunner-Olmsted plan. The canal bed was at last acquired by the city, which undertook to build a "subway" for the interurban lines and to construct the first section of the south parallel street as a deck over the subway from Main to South Ave. The latter street was widened, as directed in the earlier plan, and a city hall was designed to straddle the new avenue (later Broad Street) at the old City Hall site — a portion of the plan never again heard from. A more practical achievement of the bureau was to extend University Avenue northwest to Andrews Street, thus in effect opening the eastern end of a north parallel street. The planning bureau successfully directed the widening of several other streets and supervised a variety of projects which required large outlays. A zoning ordinance was prepared to regulate the height and area as well as the use of buildings, but varied factors delayed its adoption until 1929, thus permitting much ill-advised construction.⁴⁰

Several fruitful suggestions from varied sources kept alive the idea of the City Beautiful. Charles E. Evans presented an outline design in 1920 for a civic center around Franklin Square. Some of the scenic merits of the Cleveland Civic Center were adapted here, as a new city hall, a library, and other buildings were projected in close relation to the Central station. Harvey F. Remington, as head of the Highland Improvement Club, suggested that the city acquire the land between South and Mount Hope Avenues and the river, from Court to Clarissa, for a river front similar to that at Boston along the Charles. That proposal was defeated by the Lehigh Valley railroad, though the company promised not to mar the section with warehouses or car barns.⁴¹ But the deaths in quick succession of Aldridge and Edgerton in June, 1922, coupled with the rising tide of the movement for a city manager government, diverted attention to other problems.

Renewed Efforts at City Planning, 1924-1933

The mid-twenties witnessed a revived interest in comprehensive city planning. The increased number of automobiles, which for a time had relieved congestion by facilitating a more flexible use of auxiliary streets, was beginning to clog all central area streets. The erection of several tall buildings, drawing tenants from older side-street business lofts, made property owners in those areas increasingly eager to have the long-debated parallel streets plotted and opened so that they could undertake permanent improvements. A careful survey, launched in 1924, produced a series of 1,453 assessment-district maps by 1929, a useful basis for scientific planning.⁴²

The expanding municipal activities revived agitation for a new city hall in 1924. Few advocates of the West Main Street site appeared when the City Council staged a public hearing on the question, but friends of a Fitzhugh and Broad Street location contended with those who favored a river site. It soon developed that west-side leaders had copied the strategy so successful for the east siders in the station controversy, quietly buying up the Fitzhugh site for the city. But George Eastman among others decidedly favored a location over the river, and in order to clinch the argument Eastman purchased the former tobacco factory on the west bank of the river between Broad and Court, offering it to the city at a moderate rental for temporary use and as a gift if used as part of a civic center.⁴³ At Fisher's suggestion, John R. Freeman, an expert hydraulic engineer, was employed to make a new study of the river flood problem with special reference to the effect of the construction of a city hall on either Court or Broad Street bridges. The favorable report on this question served to check plans for use of the Fitzhugh Street site and rallied support for the plans proposed in May, 1924, by H. T. Noyes and E. S. Gordon.⁴⁴ These close advisers of George Eastman, expecting the city to reach a population of 678,000 by 1950, saw that the mounting values of central lots would require a decking of the river north of Main Street for auto parking, and urged the construction of a civic center over the river south to Broad if not to Court Street.

A series of thirty-three editorials in the Democrat and Chronicle, starting in December, 1925, urged City Planning as "Rochester's Next

Important Step.”⁴⁵ The car registration in the county doubled during the first five years of the twenties, with resulting congestion in the central business district. When the planning bureau, charged with plotting street improvements, issued a plan for the extension of Broad Street, a rival plan was drawn by a local architect, Storrs Barrows, who with the support of Henry T. Noyes formed a Broad Street Extension Association to press the project.⁴⁶ Although the planning bureau finally approved the amended Broad Street extension plan, the move to press it through the Council was blocked by the united action of north parallel street interests and the advocates of a new Ridge Road bridge.

The success of the Ridge Road faction, supported by the community's patriotic enthusiasm for a World War memorial, despite a cost of \$2,600,000, awakened the central district factions to a new sense of their mutual interests. Noyes and his associates, encouraged by the increased enthusiasm for a comprehensive city plan following adoption of the City Manager Charter, invited the north-side and west-side interests to join in a Civic Improvement Association. The first city manager, Stephen Storey, appointed a new City Planning Commission (soon renamed a Board) with the hope that a home grown plan could be evolved. But when its volunteer members, J. Foster Warner, Edward G. Miner, John W. Fulreader, and their ex-officio associates, Henry L. Howe, Clarence M. Platt and Arthur L. Vedder, found their time too limited for the detailed analysis required, \$50,000 was appropriated to employ a city planning expert, Harland Bartholomew from St. Louis. The contract adopted in May, 1929, called for a major street plan, a civic center plan, and specific recommendations for railroad and harbor developments, transit facilities, public recreational and zoning problems. The several reports issued by Bartholomew appeared early in 1930, and after approval by the Planning Board were printed and submitted to the Council. Unfortunately the onset of the depression, with mounting public welfare costs, shattered hopes for large construction outlays by the city, and only the major street plan gained official approval from the Council.⁴⁷

Yet the Bartholomew plan, despite its apparent defeat, made significant contributions. The Chamber of Commerce, organizing a new Rochester Civic Improvement Association to promote the city-wide as-

pects of the plan, engaged Carey Brown, a city planner from Washington, as secretary. The earlier association by that name, reorganized as the Business District Association, pledged the various central district factions to co-operation. The recently established Bureau of Municipal Research undertook a comprehensive analysis of the city's fiscal problems, seeking to chart a course which would make possible long range planning. The latter's findings, however, strengthened the convictions of those who saw no available means to launch a large scale construction program. As the Business District Association failed to agree on a schedule of projects, stalemate resulted.⁴⁸

Although the Bartholomew plan had pretty thoroughly canvassed the potentialities of the varied locations for a civic center, new proposals continued to appear. The Report had reviewed eight sites, including one not mentioned above, suggested by James S. Watson who favored Anderson Square on East Main Street, and Bartholomew's own second choice, Franklin Square, where the close proximity of the Central station appeared as an advantage. Rumor had it that the experts originally intended to present the latter site as first choice until an interview with George Eastman disclosed the latter's preference for the river site and his insistence that a balanced development of Rochester required that the civic functions, which had always been centered south of Main and west of the river, should not be removed from that area.⁴⁹

Despite the conditioned approval by engineers Freeman and Fisher of the proposed decking of the river, friends of the Genesee continued to hope that its open course might be restored and brought into the picture. Thus Storrs Barrows prepared an elaborate plan for the location of the civic center on the west bank overlooking a beautified river on land south of Broad which could be acquired at less expense than a safe deck over the river would entail. A similar proposal by Bohacket and Brew, two other Rochester architects, was combined with a modified (or perhaps we should say elaborated) version of the parallel street plan. One significant feature of the civic center treatment in this proposal was to locate the proposed library, museum, and auditorium on the east bank of the river connected by modifications of the existing bridges with the city hall and other civic buildings to be located on the west bank.⁵⁰

Varied specific opportunities to apply these plans have occurred. Considerable use has been made of the major street plan, and numerous minor street connections have been effected; building permits have generally conformed to the new zoning regulations made possible under the larger powers granted by state law in 1929. But when the Federal Government erected a new post office, an effort to secure its location near the proposed civic center proved unavailing.⁵¹ In similar fashion, when the new Museum of Arts and Sciences was projected in 1940, a location on East Avenue, far from the proposed civic center, was chosen. However the Public Library, a more integral feature of a civic center, was appropriately located on the east bank of the river in 1935, ready to take its place as a part of a central group of civic buildings without predetermining the question of decking the river.⁵²

Recent Planning Prospects

Meanwhile the depression, which had curbed the city's growth and weakened its capacity to undertake large projects, launched the federally financed New Deal program, one aspect of which, under the National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933, made funds available for approved local projects. Accordingly the Civic Improvement Committee of the Chamber, under the able leadership of Arthur H. Ingle, submitted a carefully reasoned appeal to the City Council, favoring an application for federal funds to finance the construction of both the north-side and south-side parallel streets. Unfortunately the city, requiring other major specific improvements, had successfully petitioned for over \$4,000,000 to aid in their construction that year, thus again deferring the parallel streets.⁵⁴

When the Chamber's Civic Improvement Committee renewed its plea for parallel streets in 1935, the Bureau of Municipal Research re-studied the fiscal problems involved, for the business leaders of the city had become less willing to countenance the use of federal funds. The City Manager appointed a committee, headed by Nelson E. Spencer, to explore the possibility of financing the project with local funds. But the committee, discovering no method for raising the estimated cost of \$9,000,000 for both streets, urged that the city proceed with a gradual extension of Broad Street and assess a major portion of the cost on the central business district. That district, forced during the

previous decade to share the burden for improvements in other parts of the city, did not propose to shoulder the major cost for its own rehabilitation. As a result this last campaign for parallel streets suffered the fate of its predecessors.⁵⁵ The City Council had moreover made repeated efforts to secure federal funds for a new city hall and civic center—all for varied reasons failing of success.⁵⁶

Perhaps the most frequently discussed issue confronting planners during this last decade has been the future of East Avenue. Repeated efforts to break through its "E" residential classification (established under the zoning ordinance adopted in 1929) were generally blocked as the community rallied to preserve the beauty of its proudest residential street. The passing years have removed many of the old residents and witnessed the demolition of numerous mansions. Finally in 1942 the City Council, at the behest of the remaining residents as well as the city planning and zoning boards, adopted a new "F" residential classification, applying it to a wide tract bordering East Avenue from Alexander Street to Park Avenue. The new zone in effect preserves this area for development as a public green belt, a fit parkway for the Rochesterians of tomorrow.⁵⁷

Planning studies touching other aspects of the Rochester situation included a renewed examination of possible lake port developments, both at Charlotte and Irondequoit.⁵⁸ More immediate achievements have resulted from some of the surveys conducted by the Monroe County Planning Division, one of the most active county planning authorities in the country.⁵⁹ But the aspect of planning which stirred the greatest controversy was that arising out of the housing problem.

Rochester's building boom of the early twenties had tapered off sharply during the latter part of that decade. Dilapidated and unsanitary quarters in the old sections near the central district were again pressed into use as building activities remained stagnant during depression years. In 1937 a survey of 5,000 cases by the Council of Social Agencies revealed one family in ten to be "badly housed." Congressman Kelly's efforts to secure federal funds for a housing project in Rochester were defeated by local hostility, and City Manager Baker appointed a committee to seek a solution for the problem. W. P. A. funds were used to finance a city-wide survey of housing conditions conducted under the direction of the Bureau of Municipal Re-

search. The resulting report presented a mass of evidence indicating the need for action, and the City Manager's committee approved by a slim majority a resolution urging the City Council to petition Albany for legislation creating a housing authority for Rochester. When the Council determined otherwise, the advocates of improved housing conditions successfully organized a Citizens' City Planning and Housing Council to keep the problem before the public.⁶⁰

Despite confidence among the opponents of public housing that the situation would solve itself, no relief had appeared when the outbreak of the Second World War presented fresh difficulties. New workers attracted to Rochester factories by war contracts tramped the streets in search of shelter, while the almost complete cessation of home building operations, enforced by a shortage of materials, intensified the crisis. Fortunately the situation did not become as acute as in many cities, partly because of the ability of residents to supply most of the manpower required. The government's action, freezing rents and restricting evictions, checked the inflationary trend which had caused most of the hardship at the end of the last war.⁶¹ Whether the post-war years will repeat the home building boom in the suburbs, matched by further decay in the city proper, or will see planned housing construction throughout the city, remains to be seen.

It is too early to assess the work of the Council on Postwar Problems: Rochester and Monroe County, organized in 1942 to study and plan for Rochester's industrial, educational, welfare, and civic future.⁶² The Council's conception of city planning is certainly more inclusive than that of previous Rochester planners, yet the occasion is a challenging one, and perhaps the varied committees launched by the Council under the joint chairmanship of Marion Folsom and Alan Valentine may usher in a new era of practical urban planning. Among other significant surveys projected, the basic task of preparing a master plan was assigned to Hiram E. Bryan.⁶³ The independent efforts of the Civic Improvement Committee of the Chamber of Commerce are trending in much the same direction. Moreover the Citizens' Planning and Housing Council, under the untiring leadership of two active women, Mrs. Leonard Jones and Mrs. Alan Valentine, has pressed forward with varied studies related to planning and housing problems.⁶⁴

The city's planning authorities have likewise experienced numer-

ous reorganizations during the past decade. The creation of the Department of Commerce in 1940 with supervision over official planning activities was accompanied by a change in personnel. Carey H. Brown, William G. Kaelber, David C. Barry, Henry L. Howe and Harold S. W. MacFarlin comprised the new board, of which August H. Wagener served as secretary and director of planning.⁶⁵ George H. Hawkes and J. Howard Cather have since replaced Brown and Barry, and early in 1944 a landscape architect, Floyd W. Walkley, has been employed to bring the street plan up to date. The recent adoption of a charter amendment providing for a new City Planning Commission of eight members, seven to be appointed by the City Council and one to be named by the Manager, is designed to democratize the planning authority and make the Council responsible for its activity. A division of planning will remain under the Commerce Department where it will administer the policies determined upon by the new planning commission.⁶⁶ With the naming of William G. Kaelber as Chairman, and J. Howard Cather, George H. Hawks, Arthur H. Ingle, Louis W. Johnston, Harold S. W. MacFarlin, Harry P. Ruppert and Mrs. Alan Valentine as members of the City Planning Commission the reorganization has been completed.

The city has thus readied both its official and its citizen planning agencies for the larger responsibilities anticipated in the post war years. Perhaps, as has frequently occurred, Rochester, after a long period of hesitant discussion, will at last launch a planning program which will attract as much praise as the water and park systems of the last century.

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