

MODERNIST DESTRUCTION FOR THE AMBITIOUS CITY

MODERNIST DESTRUCTION FOR THE AMBITIOUS CITY

Hamilton, Ontario's Experience with Urban Renewal

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Modernist Destruction for the Ambitious City Hamilton, Ontario's Experience with Urban Renewal

Introduction

Urban renewal changed the landscape of many North American and European cities from the 1950s until the early 1970s. While cities are always changing, the term urban renewal refers to specific government programs which promoted urban redevelopment on a huge scale. Governments subsidized the destruction of complete city blocks to make way for new construction and new development. The large government-sponsored program was first initiated in the United States, where federal dollars were transferred to cities struggling to keep their downtowns from deteriorating. As postwar suburban communities thrived, people and businessmen remaining in the city feared their downtown neighbourhoods and businesses would become blighted which was seen as the precursor to the much-feared urban slum. Canadian municipalities received funding from both federal and provincial governments to revitalize the downtown cores of major cities like Montreal, Vancouver and Toronto. Smaller cities also received subsidies to improve their downtown districts and Hamilton, Ontario stands out as one of the major recipients of Canadian urban renewal funding, receiving the greatest amount per capita.

Hamilton, an industrial city on the western shores of Lake Ontario, received almost \$23 million from the federal government for its experiment with urban renewal, which included the redevelopment of a recreational area, an inner-city neighbourhood, and the city's commercial downtown. At the time Hamilton's politicians boasted that the destruction of the core's nineteenth century buildings was the largest single downtown urban renewal project ever undertaken in Canada. The thrill and dreams of modernist planning took over the city and caused it to lose sight of the importance of its architectural heritage. In many ways this city's experience with urban renewal reflects what happened in a large number of cities in North America. Business leaders and politicians lobbied to have their urban business centres bulldozed and replaced with modern structures like conference centres and indoor malls made of concrete and steel. These modern structures promised new tax dollars for the cities' coffers and an end to the fear of their blighted neighbourhoods deteriorating any further. However, Hamilton's experience with urban renewal also remains a very Canadian story, particular to

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Hamilton, Ontario and the way the city defined itself. Hamilton was known as the Ambitious City and its boosters and politicians struggled to push their city forward to counter Toronto's urban glory. Ironically, the city's elites embraced the idea of urban renewal with such enthusiasm that they failed to realize that they were destroying the city's priceless architectural heritage which could never be replaced.

hasn't changed?

This thesis explores the underpinnings of urban renewal and the architectural and planning ideas of the early twentieth century in an effort to understand why this modernist project was adopted with such enthusiasm. The thesis looks closely at urban renewal design and how it transformed Hamilton, while only briefly touching on the political and development interests behind the program. The intent is to provide an overview of the city's urban renewal experience and the international forces behind the modernist impulse so vigorously accepted by the City of Hamilton.

The first chapter examines nineteenth century social reformers' plans for an improved society and how they feared that the unstructured and illogical layout and infrastructure of the nineteenth century city was endangering the citizens of the twentieth century. The solution, as adopted by modern thinkers, architects and planners, was to tear down the old buildings and replace them with something more efficient. The work of architect and planner Le Corbusier is explored extensively in this chapter because his ideas came to symbolize what modernity was all about and help to explain the modern outlook and aesthetic. The urban renewal legislation in Canada is a reflection of the legislation in the United States, so both countries' urban renewal experiences are briefly examined in the first chapter as are the protests which the urban renewal projects inspired. These protests grew more and more difficult to ignore and in the early 1970s both countries' federal governments cancelled their funding for urban renewal projects, but not before hundreds of homes, many heritage buildings and four neighbourhoods were bulldozed flat into the ground in Hamilton, Ontario.

Chapter Two looks at Hamilton's particular experience with modernity and urban renewal. An analysis of newspaper articles and publications from the time period helps to clarify the motivations of the key players behind the city's enthusiasm for the project. This chapter establishes what Hamilton was like as a city at the time and provides an

overview of the entire renewal scheme for the city. The chapter also suggests reasons why the city was so vulnerable to a wholesale adoption of the modernist vision.

Modernist planners liked to think of their cities as efficiently organized. Part of the efficiency was to be achieved by keeping different uses separate from each other. They liked to have identified areas for recreational activities, segregated from residential neighbourhoods, which in turn were separate from the downtown – these separate spaces were to be linked with fast and efficient highways. In recognition of the modernist impulse for efficiency, the next section of the thesis provides a more focused look at the particular urban renewal projects taken on by the city of Hamilton, dividing them into three chapters to represent the recreational, residential and commercial areas. The first project, outlined in Chapter Three, was within the city but outside the urban core and involved the clearance of 175 acres of lakefront cottages and winterized homes on two beaches of Lake Ontario. The property was completely cleared in 1959 and the land was converted into a recreational area called Confederation Park.

Chapter Four examines a residential area encompassing 260 acres in the North End of Hamilton's inner city. The North End was identified as the city's second urban renewal project in 1961. It was the first urban renewal project in Canada to emphasize rehabilitation and conservation of a neighbourhood instead of complete clearance, although a great deal of buildings were destroyed. The bulldozers began to demolish housing in the North End in 1965.

The commercial downtown, the clearance of 43 acres of mostly nineteenth century city blocks and the widening of York St. are examined in Chapter Five. The urban renewal project which dealt with the Civic Square, as the downtown development was called, was the first in Canada where land was redeveloped for commercial use. The city started to plan this project in 1961 and clearance began in 1966. Demonstrating the power of modernist ideas and the hope which urban renewal brought to the city's leaders, Hamilton continued the urban renewal destruction into the 1970s, despite the fact that the federal government had stopped funding the program. York Street's shops and houses weren't destroyed until the mid-1970s when the street was widened into the modern, efficient, and sterile York Boulevard.

A great deal was written about urban renewal when cities throughout North America were expropriating downtown property under the urban renewal legislation and clearing land for new buildings. Scholars, critics, and government officials debated the merits of the program at the time but not much has been written since. Modernity, as a subject, is attracting scholarly interest and some historians are beginning to focus on individual cities in the United States and England to describe their specific experience with urban renewal. The political machinations and speculative motivations behind urban renewal in Hamilton were explored in the 1970s by Bill Freeman and Marsha Hewitt. The experience of Hamilton's North End residents was also documented in the 1970s. However nothing has been written about the physical impact of urban renewal in Hamilton nor has anyone looked at the scheme for the whole city in a general way in order to understand the motivations behind the program and to assess whether or not it was a success.

The legacy of urban renewal is still very much with us across North America and in some European cities. Downtown Hamilton was transformed by the urban renewal projects that its ambitious municipal politicians promoted. Familiar buildings and road networks were destroyed. Much of the city's visual memory was erased. Hamilton's downtown now struggles, and city planners are trying to readapt the urban renewal solutions which are currently seen to be causing problems particularly in the downtown commercial area. Therefore an examination of the renewal efforts of the past is timely and will help us to understand what Hamilton's politicians were attempting to achieve when they adopted the program so enthusiastically.

This subject is also important at this juncture because historic buildings are still neglected and destroyed in Hamilton and the public is beginning to shout "enough". On July 11, 2004, citizens protested the demise of the historic Tivoli theatre as its roof was destroyed to prevent it from tumbling to the street below after years of neglect. A young man turned to another and said "This has been going on for a long time in Hamilton. Do you realize that there used to be a Market Street over where that building is?" as he pointed to the flat wall of the Eaton's Centre on James St. North. "Nobody knows that a street used to be there," he told his friend. "They don't teach it in school." In silent protest, another man held an old photograph of the Grand Opera Theatre which had once

stood beside the Tivoli, before it was destroyed in the 1960s. Citizens who are waking up to what they have lost, and want their architectural heritage preserved, need to be reminded that a lot of Hamilton's heritage was destroyed during the great modernist urban renewal projects of the 1960s and 1970s.

While the city of the past did not show much interest in its historic buildings, the city of today does not care for the urban renewal documents which recorded their destruction. Archivist Carolyn Gray diligently catalogued the city's historical records in 1986, finding that there were more than 20 metres of material stored in City Hall. In addition to the documents outlining the expropriation process, there were photographs of the destroyed buildings. After months of requesting information, and the filing of a freedom of information request, City Hall has finally admitted that the documents no longer exist. The files were all destroyed like the buildings before them. Most disheartening is the fact that files of photographs, carefully catalogued in Carolyn Gray's book, *Historical Records of the City of Hamilton*, have all been discarded, leaving the researcher with a limited number of poor photocopies to try to understand what once stood along the beaches of Confederation Park and in the North End. Without the city's documentation to rely on, this thesis is based on archival evidence which still exists in the Special Collections branch of the city's public library. Photographs of the nineteenth century urban core still exist. The federal government paid for elaborate studies and maps to be done before an area was considered for urban renewal and these documents produced by the planners and Hamilton's Urban Renewal Committee were most useful in researching this topic. Many of the players are still living in Hamilton and their memories are also invaluable to understanding what happened forty-five years ago.

The sad truth is that it is only today we are beginning to realize the value of historic buildings. Recently, Richard Florida's book *The Rise of the Creative Class* has garnered a lot of attention because of his suggestion that the type of people a city needs to attract in order to prosper in today's service-based economy – the young, artistic, creative people – are drawn to authentic neighbourhoods with historic buildings and unique situations. Hamilton's nineteenth century city, which was bulldozed into the ground, provided just such authenticity – an authenticity which the people of the mid-twentieth century were prepared to do away with in exchange for the great modernist dreams of progress. By

examining the urban renewal projects of the past, an understanding of what those people wanted to achieve will become clear as will an appreciation for how values and ideas change over a generation. Most importantly we will have a document outlining what urban renewal was to Hamilton before any more documents and memories disappear. People need to know what they are missing, what their city was once like and why it has changed so dramatically. This thesis will strive to remind Hamiltonians of what they lost and why so much of their common heritage was destroyed.

Urban Renewal in Hamilton, Ontario

A Chronology

1958 – First Urban Renewal Study for Hamilton identifies 9 priority areas for redevelopment, mainly centred around the downtown core. The Study was presented to City Council in February 1959.

1959 – Van Wagner's and Crescent Beaches Urban Renewal Study recommends clearance of 175 acres of lakefront property.

June 31, 1961 – Hamilton City Council appoints an Urban Renewal Committee under Chairman Kenneth D. Soble.

1963 – Hamilton Urban Renewal Committee presents North End renewal project

1964 – Federal government amendment to NHA allows for money to be extended to municipalities for civic improvement programs.

September, 1964 – City asks for federal and provincial financial assistance for the preparation of the renewal study for 1150 acres in the centre of Hamilton

April 1965 – Planner Murray Jones presents preliminary plans for Civic Square.

June 1965 – bulldozers start to demolish houses in North End

September 1965 – Planner Murray Jones presents Central Hamilton Urban Renewal Study.

October 1965 – Planner Murray Jones presents Civic Square Urban Renewal Scheme to City

May 1966 – Planner Murray Jones presents York Street Urban Renewal Scheme.

December, 1967 – Downtown development awarded to First Wentworth Development Company, a subsidiary of Pigot Construction Company

1968 – bulldozers start to destroy downtown buildings

March 1970 – City terminates agreement with First Wentworth

October 1970 – Yale properties begins construction downtown

April 1974 – City wins OMB hearing to destroy buildings and widen York Street.

Chapter One

Modernity and the Idea of Urban Renewal

After the Second World War many municipal politicians relied on bulldozers to raze city blocks as their answer to urban decay. This dramatic response to challenges posed by downtown neighbourhoods was endorsed by both the Canadian and American governments from the late 1950s into the early 1970s and was called “urban renewal”. The impulse to destroy and rebuild parts of cities was not inspired by the devastation of the war years; instead it can be traced back to the nineteenth century. During the years following the industrial revolution social reformers were horrified by city slums, bloated by an influx of workers drawn to the promise of newly-created jobs. The reformers’ desire to clean up the nineteenth century city would combine with the ambitions of city planners and architects to plan for new, cleaner, healthier and more efficient urban environments by ridding the city of its old buildings and narrow streets. Influenced by the machines and the aesthetic of their newly industrialized world their ideas and plans for the renewed and efficient cities reflected their era. Architects, urban planners and theorists were prepared to turn away from the streets and the buildings of the past to create something totally different, a response we recognize today as modernism.

Geographer David Harvey links modernity’s acceptance of the ephemeral to the Enlightenment of the 18th century when scientists and philosophers embraced the idea of progress and change. In their optimism, Enlightenment thinkers “welcomed the maelstrom of change and saw the transitoriness, the fleeting and the fragmentary as a necessary condition through which the modernizing project could be achieved.”¹ Harvey connects Baron Haussman’s destruction of medieval Paris and his building of the grand avenues to the reformer-planners of the turn of the century and the 20th century’s large-scale urban renewal projects. While Haussman was prepared to institute change and to cut deep into the old city, his main concern was that the imperial grandeur of Napoleon III be reflected in the

¹ David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. (Great Britain: Cambridge Press, 1980), 13.

majestic thoroughfares where carriages and cavalry officers could ride and where barricades manned by citizen protesters would be difficult to erect. The social reformers who began criticizing urban environments later in the nineteenth century focused on the wretched conditions many city dwellers were forced to endure. The tenement houses were seen as breeding grounds for immorality, vice and the destruction of the family. Slum clearance, the actual destruction of the tenements, began in England at the end of the 19th century and people began to imagine new possibilities for cities which could herald a better society for all.²

Enthusiasm for the new spirit of progress and the technological advances of the age inspired some artists to envision a city which would be like a machine: efficient, dynamic and very rational. In Italy, the Futurist Society, founded in 1909, saw society's salvation in the destruction of traditional structures.

Take up your pick axes, your axes, your hammers, and wreck,
wreck the venerable cities, pitilessly. Come on! Set fire to the
library shelves. Turn aside the canals to flood the museums.³

They wanted to destroy the "museum city" and replace it with something more dynamic. They believed that by replacing the old chaotic structures with rational order, as defined by technological efficiency, humans would be free to improve their lives.

The promise of a better future and the belief in technological progress inspired many urban theorists and planners to envision completely new cities where they would see their ambitions for society realized. These modernists believed in the power of the future and blamed much that was wrong with their present condition on the unhealthy reality of the nineteenth century city. For these modernists the nineteenth century city wasn't worth preserving. It was sick and needed to be cured, or cut up, or even abandoned. The Englishman Ebenezer Howard criticized the large metropolis. He believed that society needed to be closer to nature and that people should live in smaller communities. He called his ideal

² Robert M. Fogelson. *Downtown: Its Rise and Fall, 1880-1950* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 330.

³ Umberto Boccioni, "Manifesto of the Futurist Painters 1910", as quoted by Marshall Berman, *All that Is Solid Melt into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982),25.

community the “Garden City” which he described in his book *Garden Cities of Tomorrow*, first published in 1898 under the title *Tomorrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform*. He was a social reformer who thought the large unhealthy cities of his day should be destroyed and divided into hundreds of “garden cities” where people could live and cooperate together on a small scale, linked together by the new technologies of his day, the railroad and canals. His plan was to break up the teeming, ugly metropolis and decentralize it so that people could enjoy the countryside in addition to the social opportunities of town life, combining the best of what both town and country could offer. Howard had his heart set on “a complete reconstruction of London,” with “a new city rising out of the ashes of the old” and while his plan hinged on the addition of eight or 10 satellite Garden Cities, only two were eventually built: Letchworth and Welwyn.⁴

American architect Frank Lloyd Wright is another example of a modernist who believed he could improve society by destroying the nineteenth century city. He thought that the new technology of his day – the motor car – would allow for a new type of decentralized city. Calling his new vision for the future Broadacre City, he believed it would end the fragmentation of modern life and reposition the family as the central institution in the new society. Wright wanted “to abolish cities and replace them with a continuous union of town and country where the individual and his family can flourish.” He published his ideas in a book called *The Disappearing City* in 1932.⁵ Wright, like Howard, believed that society needed to change and he would facilitate this by redesigning the city itself. He planned to abolish the crowded nineteenth century city, and create something totally different.

The desire to destroy and then rebuild was also reflected in Swiss-French architect Le Corbusier’s plan for urban society. His views helped to define and direct the modernist push to destroy and rebuild in the interests of an improved human condition. Like many of his modernist contemporaries, Le Corbusier saw modern technology as an essential ingredient needed to reform urban life and he

⁴ Ebenezer Howard, *Garden Cities of Tomorrow* (London: Faber and Faber, 1945), 157.

⁵ Robert Fishman, *Urban Utopias in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 163.

believed, like the others, that the twentieth century would bring about renewal and transformation. Decentralization was not his answer for an improved urban environment; instead he recommended destroying and then rebuilding the metropolis itself, believing that the solution to society's troubles lay in the way the city was set up. He believed a modern plan based on rational order, which could be easily replicated, would improve urban life. Le Corbusier explained his solution in his book *Towards a New Architecture*, first published in 1923:

The Plan is the generator.

Without a plan, you have lack of order and willfulness.

The Plan holds in itself the essence of sensation.

The great problems of to-morrow, dictated by collective necessities, put the question of "plan" in a new form.

Modern life demands, and is waiting for, a new kind of plan both for the house and for the city.⁶

Le Corbusier epitomized and, at the same time, influenced the modernist project. He believed that technology and the machines of the new age would help to bring about the rigour and order he wanted to inculcate into the new society, a society which was "profoundly out of gear".⁷ Other architects and artists during the 1920s, like Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and those attached to the Bauhaus movement in Germany, also embraced the idea that technology and rational order should influence new construction. It was an era of heightened political action and surging social theories. Le Corbusier adopted the slogan "by order bring about freedom."⁸ For him the buildings were the problem. He believed that the social unrest which dominated these years could be solved by the rebuilding of the city. Le Corbusier issued the rallying cry. The choice was either "architecture or revolution."⁹

A pioneer of modern architecture, Le Corbusier's ambitions for the renewed city reflected the modern impulse of the new century. He wanted to clear the "accidental" old city from the ground it was built on and to replace it with a

⁶ Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, (London: John Rodker, 1931), 45.

⁷ *Ibid*, 8.

⁸ Harvey, *The Condition of Post Modernity*, 31.

⁹ Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, 8.

geometrically designed layout.¹⁰ His plan was to rationally rebuild the city by using the positive forces of industry. The crowded street would be abolished. Instead the city would be made of widely spaced skyscrapers where the cafés would be on the roof-tops and the buildings would be surrounded by parkland. A network of high-speed transportation corridors would cut through the city, functioning with the speed and efficiency of a factory. Le Corbusier had romanticized technology to the point where he thought he could co-opt and harmonize industry's potential to make a better world for humanity. There were to be no more crowds in the street or in the public square. People would find peace and hygiene in an efficient, industrial world of high rise towers growing out of wide open spaces.

Le Corbusier helped define the idea of what was modern by focusing on the importance of the straight line. He claimed that the curved line, like the winding road of the old pack-donkey, was caused by "happy-go-lucky heedlessness, of looseness, lack of concentration and animality". Le Corbusier believed that if a society was too relaxed and did not maintain its concentration it would become dissipated and was at risk of attack by another, more controlled and efficient state. Self-mastery was reflected in the straight road, thought Le Corbusier, a straight road of reaction and action. He encouraged people to look to the "rectilinear cities of America" with admiration if not for aesthetic reasons then for moral ones. For him the modern city was reflected in the straight line used in the construction of skyscrapers, highways, sewers and tunnels. "The circulation of traffic demands the straight line; it is the proper thing for the heart of a city," Le Corbusier insisted. "The curve is ruinous, difficult and dangerous. It is a paralyzing thing."¹¹

The straight line represented an efficient way of moving people through a modern metropolis on the horizontal axis and housing people on the vertical axis. He saw the growing potential of the automobile and wanted the city to allow for the car's ease of circulation. In his book *The City of Tomorrow and its Planning*

¹⁰ Le Corbusier, *The City of Tomorrow and its Planning* (London: The Architectural Press, 1929), 320.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 16

he quotes from an international traffic conference held in 1923 which “reiterated again and again that speed is the very epitome of modern society.”¹² Le Corbusier believed that “a city made for speed is made for success.”¹³ He wanted to develop a city plan which would accommodate the car and he convinced the Voisin car company to finance his research for a new plan for the city of Paris. In his Plan Voisin of 1925, he demonstrated that the best way to rebuild for the car was “a frontal attack on the most diseased qualities of the city, and the narrowest streets.”¹⁴ He planned to open up the strategic heart of Paris by flattening the Marais district’s intriguing streets and the seventeenth century Place des Vosges and to replace the old streets and buildings with eighteen well-spaced modern skyscrapers.

His modern sentiment had no appreciation for the buildings of the past. “Now that we have the motor car, the airplane and the railway, would it not seem a sort of mental cowardice to go on being satisfied with the sumptuous but decayed heritage of the past,”¹⁵ Le Corbusier asked. While he was prepared to sacrifice the Marais, he wasn’t prepared to destroy all the great squares, churches and boulevards of Paris. His plan was to preserve some of the churches and palaces which he would surround with grass, creating a park-like setting for the skyscraper dwellers to stroll through. For the most part however, Le Corbusier reflected modernity’s neglect of the past while it pushed enthusiastically towards the future. He did not want to be burdened with a heritage, his goal was to improve the present as he explained so ardently:

Our world, like a charnal-house, is strewn with the detritus of dead epochs. The great task incumbent on us is that of making a proper environment for our existence, and clearing away from our cities the dead bones that putrefy in them. We must construct cities of today.¹⁶

¹² Ibid, 117.

¹³ Ibid, 179.

¹⁴ Ibid, 280.

¹⁵ Ibid, 264.

¹⁶ Ibid, 244.

While he did not value the buildings of the past he did recognize the 18th century for inspiring the 19th century with the fundamental principles of reason which in turn led to the industrial revolution and the new revolutionary machines which caused him such delight in the early twentieth century. The new equipment, as he called them, allowed for a new efficiency and a modern feeling of optimism. "This modern feeling is a spirit of geometry, a spirit of construction and synthesis," he explained. "Exactitude and order are its essential condition."¹⁷

He enthusiastically accepted the new construction techniques and materials, like concrete and steel, to mass produce his houses and his skyscrapers. Le Corbusier articulated the view that architecture should embrace industrial advances and respond with the straight lines and squared edges of a more modern look. "Decorative art is dead," he wrote. "Modern town planning comes to birth with a new architecture. By this immense step in evolution, so brutal and so overwhelming, we burn our bridges and break with the past."¹⁸

Le Corbusier was determined in his prescription for society's improvement and he did not shy away from promoting his utopian ideas for a modern movement in architecture. In 1928 the *Congres International d'architecture moderne*, or CIAM, was established and quickly accepted Le Corbusier's ideas of rationality, standardization and functionalist geometric form as its approach to contemporary urban design. CIAM declared that "town planning can not be determined by the claims of a pre-existing aestheticism; its essence is functional order."¹⁹ After the Second World War, Le Corbusier dominated CIAM and the international organization promoted his Modernist ideas and rational approach to urban planning to young architects and planners. The city was to be divided into four distinct and separate functions: living, working, recreation and circulation – there were to be no surprises in his orderly and functional solution to the chaotic nineteenth century city. The efficient straight lines of the new buildings and new high speed thoroughfares were to be the marks of the modern city. The planners

¹⁷ Ibid, 43-44.

¹⁸ Ibid, 5.

¹⁹ John R. Gold *The Experience of Modernism. Modern Architects and the Future City 1928-1953* (London: E&FN SPON, 1997), 59.

had idealized the rational cityscape which they thought could be achieved through rigorous planning. The persuasive glamour of international architecture and CIAM helped to disseminate their ideas for a clean and efficient city. As historian Christopher Klemek points out, “CIAM was conceived as a vanguard unit” to impose form and efficiency on the advancing enemy known as blight.²⁰

Although Le Corbusier’s urban planning designs would eventually be criticized for being “inhuman and disorienting” the young architects and planners who emerged after the Second World War were enthusiastic about using the modernist aesthetic to try to solve many of urban society’s problems.²¹ Howard, Wright and Le Corbusier’s ideas reflected a change in a way of thinking about cities. History was not important, the future was everything. “Universal” or “high” modernism was accepted by societies’ elites. Investors acknowledged that progress which had once been important for human emancipation now was essential for political and economic reasons.²² The demands of the new automobile-dominated city required new ways of thinking about cities and the modernist approach recommended clearance and the construction of sleek, straight-edged buildings made of concrete and steel, just as Le Corbusier had recommended.

These modernist solutions to urban problems were adopted by British planners and architects after the Second World War. Aerial bombings had destroyed half a million houses; in addition, slum clearance programs and other initiatives to improve housing conditions had stopped during the war so there were large neighbourhoods of substandard housing. A comprehensive approach to urban problems, rather than a piecemeal, house by house, plan was very tempting to the young modern architects and planners faced with so much devastation. Their interest in the Internationalist Style modernism, reflected in the straight edged, clean lines of architects like Mies Van der Rohe, combined with state funding, a growing acceptance of industrial building techniques and the introduction of the

²⁰ Christopher Klemek, “Urbanism as Reform – Modernist Planning and the Crisis of Urban Liberalism in Europe and North America, 1945-1975” (Ph.D. Diss, University of Pennsylvania, 2004), 267.

²¹ Wiltold Rybczynski, www.time.com/time/time100/artists/profile/lecorbusier.html

²² Harvey, *The Condition of Post Modernity*, 35

architect-planner into the planning process meant that the new modernist ideas were accepted for many urban rebuilding projects.²³ Within a few days of the aerial bombing of Coventry, the city's council and engineers "began to conceive of plans for reconstruction that owed nothing to what had been there before."²⁴ Mass production and the planning of large-scale initiatives were seen as a way to launch programs of reconstruction, in order to provide twentieth century amenities into the nineteenth century town. On the outer edges of European cities large working class apartment complexes were constructed out of pre-fabricated concrete slabs following the designs of the Bauhaus architects and Le Corbusier.²⁵

Cities in North America, while safe from the physical devastation of the bombings, were affected by post-war changes. Returning veterans caused a housing boom in suburban areas while inner cities deteriorated. Veterans were able to afford their own homes in the newly-built suburbs through government-sponsored mortgage subsidies and public investments in highway construction and other infrastructures. Houses, highways and shopping centres were built on the outer edges of cities coaxing customers away from the traditional downtown shopping core. Business leaders began to complain about urban blight and worried that their once respectable downtowns were turning into slums. Governments listened and approved funds for massive urban redevelopment, incorporating modernist planning principles and government funding into a program which came to be known as urban renewal.

suburbs,
downtown

In one sense, urban renewal had always existed as dilapidated buildings were torn down and others fixed up on an individual basis. A city block, over the years, would slowly change as individual buildings were rebuilt, updated or redesigned in a piecemeal fashion. The urban renewal program however represented something much more grandiose. It meant clearance of entire neighbourhoods. It was a term which was initially used in the United States for slum clearance and some housing projects during the 1930s but wasn't officially used as a term to define a specific government program until the U.S. Housing

²³ Gold, *The Experience of Modernism*, 14.

²⁴ Edward Relph, *The Modern Urban Landscape* (England: Croom Helm, 1987), 144.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 147.

Act of 1949 was revised in 1954 under Eisenhower's administration. The U.S. Housing Act of 1949 stated that its goal was to provide "a decent home and suitable living environment for every American family" and set the general pattern for the condemnation and clearance of land and the subsequent rebuilding. The focus was on the rebuilding of a city's downtown core but the task was seen as so formidable that a revision was made to the legislation in 1954 allowing for a shift from urban redevelopment to urban renewal. Government officials allowed for an urban renewal plan which would include the voluntary repair and rehabilitation of buildings in addition to the previously authorized condemnation, acquisition, clearance and sale of land by the local renewal agency.²⁶ While the goal may have been to provide Americans with decent housing, urban renewal was enthusiastically received by municipal and business leaders who actively supported the clearance of low-income housing areas in the downtown core and the development of large scale government and commercial buildings and high-income housing where the lower-income housing had once stood.

Urban renewal represented the confluence of the modernist push for clean, straight lines in urban design, the growing exodus to suburbia, the provision of public funds for large urban developments and the enthusiasm of big city mayors for fiscal relief. Downtown businessmen saw it as a way of reviving the downtown business core. And city planners saw it as a way of reorganizing the city in a more orderly and efficient fashion.²⁷ When the area to be "renewed" was flattened, the replacement buildings' clean straight modern lines answered the developers' need for cheap, pre-fabricated material with no ornamentation or expensive relief work. The new modernist look encouraged city dwellers to believe that their "renewed" urban core would represent the very essence of modernity with all the promise for success that a modern city, ready for the future, might guarantee.

In the United States local renewal agencies under the urban renewal program received federal funding and the power of eminent domain to condemn rundown

²⁶ Ashley A. Ford and Hilber Fefferman, "Federal Urban Renewal Legislation" in *Urban Renewal: The Record and the Controversy*, ed. James Q. Wilson (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1966), 96

²⁷ Fogelson, *Downtown*, 373.

neighbourhoods, tear down all the buildings and resell the cleared land to developers. It was hoped that the program would make sure people living in below standard housing found better accommodation; stimulate private construction; provide new tax revenues; restore the downtown core; and stop middle class whites from leaving for the suburbs. Urban renewal was supposed to solve all of urban America's problems.

The post-war boom brought about an economic shift to the suburbs. Across North America retail districts in the downtown core were threatened by the fact that "retail sales in central business districts declined dramatically between 1958 and 1963, while overall metropolitan sales mushroomed from 10 to 20 percent."²⁸ The decline of the urban downtown in the United States was affected by the pervasive racial discrimination of the time and the fear that the downtown core would become a black ghetto. The urban renewal program in the United States was seen by some as a tool for racial segregation. Poor black areas were cleared and often replaced by expensive housing that only whites could afford and separate housing projects were built for the poor which would prevent integration of social classes and racial groups.

Urban renewal was seen as a way of doing radical surgery on a city with problems. During the 1950s medical terminology was used to describe the urban situation. Cities were unhygienic and their downtown cores' infected parts needed to be removed by radical surgery if they were ever to be cured of their social and economic problems.²⁹ While the program's professed goal of slum and blight elimination was acknowledged as beneficial in itself, government officials also made it clear that a spin off from urban renewal would be "an increased tax base of great and immediate financial value."³⁰ The idea was that if the slums were destroyed, the buildings which would replace them would be able to accommodate wealthier tax payers and businesses. Increased tax revenue made the program very appealing to city politicians. They must have assumed that the

²⁸ David Shuyler, *A City Transformed: Redevelopment, Race and Suburbanization in Lancaster, Pennsylvania* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), 51.

²⁹ Relph, *The Modern Urban Landscape*, 147.

³⁰ Ford and Feffermen, "Federal Urban Renewal Legislation", 114.

displaced slum dwellers would move out of the city and disappear from the downtown thereby helping to renew the downtown core by their absence.

Many reports and documents were written at the time the urban renewal program was adopted in the United States. Initially observers thought the program would solve the problem of the urban poor even though the initial evidence they encountered suggested otherwise. One commentator, C.A. Doxiadis, wrote about his findings in 1960.

No matter where I start or which method I follow, this whole study and all my findings lead me to the firm conclusion that in none of the many urban areas that I have visited and studied is the situation as a whole improving, despite the efforts made through urban renewal.³¹

Doxiadis went on to decry the destruction of parks, gardens and beautiful buildings and he suggested that the root cause behind the urban renewal problems lay in the constant change occurring through out urban America and that as a society Americans were not looking at the overall picture for solutions. However, in his final analysis, he put his support behind the urban renewal program saying that the redevelopment of the nation's downtown cores was of the greatest importance and that if a city wants growth there will necessarily be problems. He suggested that the United States was playing a pioneering role in urban renewal and in the end it would have to "inevitably pay a high price for its experimentation" but that the program was indispensable for the nation's cities where the urban cores had to be revamped.³² He recognized that the destruction was hurting the society, but like harsh medicine, it was necessary for the cities to heal. The urban renewal program held up a promised solution to urban poverty. With a bulldozer's destructive force, the problem would be pushed away and a wealthy, prosperous downtown core would once again be a possibility - a belief the proponents of urban renewal wanted to hold on to.

³¹ C. A. Doxiadis, *Urban Renewal and the Future of the American City* (Ann Arbor: Public Administration, 1966), 23.

³² *Ibid*, 16.

From Philadelphia, Pennsylvania to San Francisco, California, cities across the United States condemned and cleared neighbourhoods in the belief that they were improving their downtowns. This enthusiastic response to the program led another commentator to gush:

In the short span of 16 years...hundreds of communities have shown that renewal is a necessary and desirable means of eliminating blight, aiding those people afflicted by it and rebuilding the physical, economic and social vitality of urban areas on a scale consistent with the demands of a growing Urban Nation.³³

From the destruction of almost one third of Boston's old city and its historic West End to the Pruitt-Igoe housing development in St. Louis, Missouri; to the destruction of a familiar streetscape in downtown Lancaster, PA, the modernist ideas of CIAM and Le Corbusier were realized in new concrete structures. At first, as critic Martin Anderson claims, urban renewal was not considered to be a threat to America's cities because the program wasn't expected to be accepted by so many municipalities. But by the time he wrote his critical book *The Federal Bulldozer* in 1964, he depicted urban renewal as "a firmly entrenched giant, reaching into virtually every important city in the United States".³⁴ While Anderson believed urban renewal's goals to be lofty, he felt the costs and consequences were "too great to ignore."³⁵ "People are forcibly evicted from their homes, businessmen are forced to close their doors, buildings, good and bad are destroyed – all in the name of an appeal to some higher 'good', the public interest."³⁶

Critics of big government like Anderson, were joined by those, like Jane Jacobs, who were concerned about what the program was doing to neighbourhoods and to the poor. Jacobs' fight against urban renewal grew out of her observations of what was happening in New York City and her concern for

³³ William L. Slayton, "Achievements of the Urban Renewal Program" in *Urban Renewal: The Record and the Controversy*, ed. James Q. Wilson (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1966), 229.

³⁴ Martin Anderson. *The Federal Bulldozer: A Critical Analysis of Urban Renewal 1949-1962* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1965), 3.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 52

her own New York neighbourhood in Greenwich Village. She too maintained that the urban renewal program was acting against the public interest. Her influential book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, published in 1961, attacked city planners and modernist urban renewal schemes. She claimed urban renewal destroyed neighbourhoods and brought about “the Great Blight of Dullness” to the urban core instead of upholding the city’s greatest feature: its diversity. She attacked Le Corbusier’s ideas by saying that “modern city planning has been burdened from its beginnings with the unsuitable aim of converting cities into disciplined works of art.”³⁷ She wrote of the importance of preserving and enhancing the street and of the important role old buildings play in sustaining and adding interest to the streetscape. Urban renewal, she wrote,

at best merely shifts slums from here to there, adding its own tincture of extra hardship and disruption. At worst, it destroys neighbourhoods where constructive and improving communities exist and where the situation calls for encouragement rather than destruction.³⁸

She also criticized the economic rationale of the urban renewal program, calling it a hoax. She complained that the large government subsidies were not sound investments of public tax money and that the individuals who were displaced were involuntarily subsidizing the program. She claimed that the means to urban renewal was just as deplorable as the ends. Jane Jacobs was outraged by the large amounts of federal money which went into the program and produced such a high degree of “monotony, sterility and vulgarity” in the downtown cores which were supposedly in need of renewal.³⁹ She believed the federal program was paternalistic in its approach to neighbourhoods and was responsible for the destruction of old buildings which she believed to be of irreplaceable value to the local economy and its need for diversity.⁴⁰

³⁷ Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961), 375.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 270.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 7.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 199.

While opposition to urban renewal destruction began to grow in the 1960s, planners and politicians continued to acquire government funds and support major schemes to tear down old buildings and destroy streets in order to replace them with large open spaces, cut by highly efficient roadways and dominated by concrete and steel buildings reflecting the modernist style. When large federal grants were offered to struggling city mayors, their willingness to adopt the program and receive the funding is understandable. The promise of federal and state funding meant that a municipal government could launch a grand scale urban renewal program in its downtown. The "blighted" areas of poverty and irrational transportation routes could be destroyed and replaced by efficient highways and new sleek office towers and commercial complexes which would be the very face of modernity. By the time the program was cancelled in 1973, bulldozers in the United States had razed 600,000 houses, most of which were low income, and displaced two million people. In their place, 250,000 new dwellings were built for the middle and upper income brackets.

The promise of modernity was equally alluring north of the border in Canada. The federal government in Ottawa followed the American lead and offered its own urban renewal program to provinces and municipalities wanting to demolish old buildings and create a new urban cityscape. Canadian housing policy was established with the Dominion Housing Act of 1935 and was reaffirmed in 1954 by the National Housing Act. Federal grants to municipalities for clearance of substandard areas was outlined under Part III of the 1954 Act, entitled "Housing Redevelopment". The Act offered federal assistance to municipalities "in the clearance, replanning, rehabilitation and modernization of blighted or substandard areas."⁴¹ More federal support was forthcoming under an amendment in 1956 which allowed the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation to help municipalities finance their urban renewal studies. In 1964 the Canadian government allowed for even more urban renewal funding by authorizing federal grants for the renewal schemes in addition to loans and contributions to civic

⁴¹ Canada, National Housing Act, 1954, chapter 23, section 1.

improvement plans.⁴² The 1964 Act called the program "urban renewal" and extended the funding arrangements beyond the concern for housing to municipal and community buildings and privately-owned facilities. It also allowed for the improvement and rehabilitation of buildings in addition to clearance.

The 1964 amendments permitted urban land to be purchased with federal funds and resold for commercial development thus opening "a veritable Pandora's box of local greed and boosterism".⁴³ Historian John C. Bacher characterizes Canadian housing policy as always having been supportive of the private marketplace and he suggests that the urban renewal amendments further encouraged the business orientation of federal housing policy. The federal government provided subsidies for urban renewal schemes and the provincial governments would also contribute to the program. The federal government would often cover 50 percent of the urban renewal costs and in Ontario, the province would cover 25 percent of the funding.⁴⁴ The Ontario Planning Act of 1951 gave the municipality and city planners the power to expropriate property slated for clearance and redevelopment. Senior levels of government at both the federal and provincial level were clearly encouraging large scale clearance for municipalities interested in renewal.⁴⁵ The inner-city slum was a stereotype and Canadians began to accept the image of the downtown core as a place of poverty, far apart from the culture of the suburban ideal, and this belief helped motivate municipal governments to contemplate urban renewal and slum clearance as a way of solving urban problems.⁴⁶ Section 20 of the Ontario Planning Act of 1960 supported the link between old buildings and clearance. The age of the buildings was given as a reason for the municipality to prepare an area for redevelopment or clearance, along with "dilapidation, over-crowding, faulty arrangement,

⁴² Canada, *Report of the Federal Task Force on Housing and Urban Development*, (Ottawa: Queen's Printer: January 1969).

⁴³ John C. Bacher, *Keeping to the Marketplace: The Evolution of Canadian Housing Policy* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993), 213.

⁴⁴ Richard Harris, *Democracy in Kingston* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1988), 31.

⁴⁵ Heather Nicol, "Fields of Dreams: Urban Renewal in Kingston's North End 1955-1971" in *(Re)Development at the Urban Edges*. ed, Heather Nicol and Greg Halseth (Waterloo, Ontario: University of Waterloo, 2000), 290.

⁴⁶ David Ley, "The Inner City" in *Canadian Cities in Transition* ed. Trudi Bunting and Pierre Filion (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1991), 323.

unsuitability of buildings or for any other reason.”⁴⁷ Clearly, the municipality could destroy any area it wanted as long as the scheme was approved by the Municipal Board. Clearance and renewal were seen as positive forces in the drive towards modernity.

Canada’s urban renewal program was in effect from 1954 to 1970 and during that time over \$226 million was disbursed to Canadian cities from the federal government through the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), originally called the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation. The housing agency saw urban renewal as serving a national purpose as articulated by Albert Potvin in the CMHC publication “Urban Renewal and Public Housing”. He believed that “trying to dress up older buildings that have served their intended purpose for the best part of their expected life span, retarding the demolition of age-worn homes, slows down the natural development and expansion of communities.” He advised that communities “hasten the end through major surgery” and that Canadians would have to accept “the idea that a spent and outmoded neighbourhood can be profitably amputated through a single operation.”⁴⁸

With encouragement from the three levels of government, the program was readily adopted by those who were connected to local municipal politicians and had interests in construction, land development or downtown prosperity. Local businessmen and real estate development agencies worked with politicians to get hold of the millions of dollars which were being offered up to transform Canada’s cities with the latest modern skyscrapers.⁴⁹ Although the program was initially designed to support Canadian housing policy and to improve housing conditions across the county, it was often twisted to serve the interests of those closest to power, often without showing real concern, or understanding, for those most affected by urban renewal destruction. As Bacher explains, “the welfare of tenants” was “secondary to that of commercially motivated redevelopment”.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Ontario, Planning Act of Ontario, RSO, 1969, s. 20.

⁴⁸ Bacher, *Marketplace*, 220.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 214

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 228.

As in the United States, racial issues were sometimes linked to urban renewal. Africville, a community of African-Canadians in Halifax, Nova Scotia, was cleared under the federal government's renewal scheme as was a neighbourhood of Chinese-Canadians in the east-end of Vancouver, B.C. Often when issues of race weren't a concern, issues of class were exposed because the urban areas selected for renewal often were inhabited by the very poor. Bacher suggests that urban renewal brought about "bitter class conflict across the nation." Montreal, Quebec, Canada's largest city at that time, received the greatest amount of money for renewal and many of Montreal's low-income ethnic minorities suffered hardships when they were forced to leave their homes.⁵¹ The city that received the second largest amount in urban renewal funding was Hamilton, Ontario, receiving the most in per capita terms. The industrial city at the west end of Lake Ontario received more than Vancouver and more than Toronto which were, and are today, much bigger cities. Between 1957 and 1970 Hamilton received almost \$23 million from the federal government and \$12 from the province to destroy what was old and build what was promised to be a renewed and more modern city. Hamilton's ambitions made it vulnerable to the promises presented by the modern planners and architects. Hamilton was an old city with old buildings and the government funds would allow the city to adopt a grandiose plan of renewal.

Paul Hellyer, a federal government minister responsible for CMHC eventually spoke out against urban renewal, despite CMHC's continued support for the program. His concerns were similar to those of Jane Jacobs.

In order to eradicate the 20 to 30 per cent of buildings that were rotting beyond repair, whole blocks were demolished. Thousands of sound houses capable of being rehabilitated at reasonable cost, together with thousands of others in perfectly good condition were destroyed. The economic waste was enormous. But far more importantly, the sense of community, that certain intangible something that gives a district life and

⁵¹Ibid, 219.

meaning, was eradicated. An atomic bomb could have scarcely produced greater dislocation.⁵²

Hellyer's criticism described what happened to some of Hamilton's oldest neighbourhoods during the 1960s and 1970s. Over 250 acres of Hamilton's streets and buildings were slated for clearance and redevelopment under the government-financed plan. The utopian ideas of Howard, Wright and Le Corbusier to abolish the nineteenth century city and to replace it with something more efficient and hygienic were being realized by a mid-sized industrial Canadian city with lofty ambitions. It remains an open question whether the planners, social reformers and architects of the past would have thought Hamilton was in need of redevelopment in the first place. One can not help but wonder whether the modernist thinkers would have seen the changes brought about under the guise of urban renewal as an improvement over what had already existed in Hamilton's urban core, an area which had once been home to some of Ontario's most attractive 19th century buildings.

⁵² Ibid, 226.

Housing and Community Development Policies

Table 19.1
Disbursements under the Urban renewal program and NIP
by Canadian urban centre (\$000)

City	Urban renewal 1948-1973	NIP 1973-1978
Halifax-Dartmouth, N.S.	12,345	3,711
Saint John, N.B.	19,113	1,498
St. John's, Nfld.	4,304	4,099
Other places in Atlantic provinces	2,002	17,292
Montreal, Que.	30,312	5,559
Other places in Quebec	40,601	38,335
Hamilton, Ont.	22,976	733
London, Ont.	3,587	2,469
Ottawa, Ont.	20,452	2,413
Sudbury, Ont.	9,930	1,229
Thunder Bay, Ont.	4,322	2,291
Toronto, Ont.	18,441	6,562
Windsor, Ont.	2,610	2,186
Other places in Ontario	10,149	41,014
Winnipeg, Man.	7,189	8,792
Regina, Sask.	178	1,464
Calgary, Alta.	6,948	4,223
Other places in Prairie Provinces	175	22,527
Vancouver	7,292	6,325
Victoria	1,697	1,500
Other places in British Columbia	2,531	12,097
Urban areas over 100,000 inhabitants	174,797	59,945
Other places in Canada	51,292	126,447

Chapter 2

The "Delicate Scalpel" of Renewal in Hamilton 1958-1975

Urban renewal held out modernity's promises of progress, opportunity and success and the city of Hamilton, Ontario was quick to be attracted to its alluring siren call. Hamilton's politicians and business leaders had benefited as the city grew and prospered during the Second World War and when the city started to lose population and its competitive edge to the suburbs in the late 1950s, the downtown promoters believed that something had to be done to ensure that Hamilton would hold on to its momentum and become the highly anticipated great metropolis of the future. A brief examination of the scope of the city's urban renewal program and the atmosphere which nurtured its growth in this chapter provides a frame for a more detailed examination of specific urban renewal schemes in the following chapters.

From the city's inception, progress and success were Hamilton's driving ambitions. When Hamilton was incorporated as a city in 1847 one of the City Council's first decrees was to adopt a city seal and they emblazoned it with the motto "I Advance".¹ Geographically blessed with a large natural harbour and inexpensive power from the Niagara escarpment, Hamilton grew as an industrial city but it was always very aware of its position between two greater cities: Buffalo, New York and Toronto, Ontario. Despite its growth and development Hamilton, like an envious sibling, aggressively watched its rivals who were also growing. Hamilton did not want to be left behind. In the mid-nineteenth century, the Toronto *Globe* used the derogatory phrase "the ambitious little city" to describe Hamilton and its efforts to compete with Toronto and the term was adopted by *Hamilton Spectator* publisher Robert Reid Smiley who removed the bite from the insult by deleting the reference to the city's size.² Hamilton was proud to be known as the "Ambitious City".

Saving architecture
now part of
advancing?

As the world prepared for war in 1939, Hamilton began to be noticed as a city poised for greatness. *Saturday Night* magazine dedicated an entire section to

¹ T. Melville Bailey, *Hamilton: Chronicle of a City* (Canada: Windsor Publications, 1983), 49.

² www.hpl.ca/LOCAL/SPCOLL/facts.shtml with additional information from Hamilton's public library archivist Margaret Houghton.

Hamilton and the city's potential for further growth and success. The headline for the edition of July 1, 1939 was "Hamilton's Rise to Industrial Eminence" and the article described the city as having "500 industries of virtually every category" in addition to being "one of the greatest distribution centres in Canada" with the "unusual advantages in respect to skilled labour and cheap power". *Saturday Night* predicted that this "great industrial and shipping centre" was on the threshold "of further great advances."³

always
known as
an industrial
city

Six months later *Maclean's Magazine* suggested that the city no longer needed to call itself the "Ambitious City" because "its early ambitions have been richly attained." In a glowing article by Frederick Edwards, Hamilton is described as an "amazing alloyage of a city that is at one and the same time: a busy port, a tranquil cultural centre, a hustling factory metropolis, a thriving market town and a serene beauty spot." Edwards suggested that "no other community in Canada is quite like it" and that while Torontonians may think of Hamilton as a "hick town", the reality was quite different. According to Edwards the city, had shed its "Ambitious City" title and was looking for a new moniker. Hamilton's Industrial Commission was pushing for "The City of Opportunity" and the Chamber of Commerce promoted "A Panorama of Beauty and Industry." With a population surpassing 155,000, Hamilton had tripled the number of its inhabitants and the value of its assessed property since 1900. In 1940 it was the fifth largest city in Canada.⁴

During the Second World War steel production increased and Hamilton grew and prospered. Lloyd D. Jackson was elected mayor in 1949 and he was seen as someone who recognized the city's growth and potential. He is described as trying to shake the city out of its provincial doldrums and "by imagination and daring" he moved Hamilton "into its rightful place as a metropolitan centre".⁵ During his mayoralty the city spent a great deal on city infrastructure, recreational

³ "Hamilton's Rise to Industrial Eminence," *Saturday Night*, vol. 54 (July 1, 1939), 21-36.

⁴ Frederick Edwards, "Ambitious City Makes the Grade", *Maclean's Magazine*, (Jan. 1, 1940), 6.

⁵ Thomas Melville Bailey and Charles Ambrose Carter, *Hamilton famous and fascinating: Two Centuries of a Colourful City*. (Hamilton: Griffen Ltd., 1972), 70.

facilities and beautification projects. The city doubled in size through annexations made from 1949 to 1957.⁶

The 1950s were a time of great urban and economic growth for Hamilton. Renowned Canadian photographer Yousuf Karsh visited the city in 1954 for *Maclean's Magazine* and found Hamilton to be "brimming over with the same kind of energy that won the Grey Cup for its football team." His glowing photo essay showed the city's industrial pride by highlighting some of the city's now 600 industries. From candy makers to nylon thread production to the hot steel mills, Karsh found that "acre for acre it's the busiest town in Canada."⁷ *The Hamilton Spectator* placed an advertisement in Toronto's *Globe and Mail* in June 1957, announcing that Metropolitan Hamilton was "now bigger than Windsor, Sudbury, Saskatoon and Owen Sound combined" due to the rapid growth of its industries and that Hamilton was "Ontario's fastest-growing major city."⁸ It appeared that Hamilton would continue to surprise everyone by its growth and prosperity. In 1947 a town planner had predicted that the city's population would reach 230,000 by 1975 and *Spectator* reporter Alan Morton was thrilled to be able to remind his readers in May of 1959, that the planner's "crystal ball was clouded" and that the city "high balled through that mark in 1956, nearly two decades ahead of schedule". Morton was also able to crow that the planners were predicting that the city would continue to grow and that the population would reach half a million by 1980.⁹

City planners had been wrong before and they were wrong once again. In September of 1959 the census showed that the city's population had actually dropped for the first time since 1939. While the towns on Hamilton's periphery like Burlington, Ancaster, Stoney Creek and Dundas were growing, Hamilton showed signs that it was beginning to lag behind.¹⁰ The city's growth rate was not keeping up with other cities in Ontario as well, and was even below the Canadian

⁶ John C Weaver, *Hamilton: An Illustrated History* (Toronto: James Lorimer, 1982), 186

⁷ "The Busiest City in Canada," *Maclean's Magazine*, Feb. 1, 1954, p. 12.

⁸ Advertisement for *The Hamilton Spectator, Globe and Mail*, June 17, 1957

⁹ Alan Morton, "City Growth Steadily Forces Residents to Suburbs" *Hamilton Spectator*, May 22, 1959.

¹⁰ "City's Population Drops by Over 500", *Hamilton Spectator*, September 3, 1959.

average. Its rate of commercial growth was also behind Hamilton's metropolitan area, the province and the country. Arthur D. Little, an American consulting firm, showed that in 1961 Hamilton had fewer sales per capita than Toronto and London.¹¹ The city which had soared through the war and the 1950s was in need of a boost. Hamilton was prepared to once again become ambitious and adopt urban renewal as a solution to its problems.

Mayor Jackson and his council were credited by commentators in the 1970s, with having started the urban renewal process which changed the city's core and "vaulted Hamilton ahead".¹² This great spurt of modernist enthusiasm was also caught by the next mayor, Victor K. Copps who was elected in 1962 and had to face the fact that stores and industries were leaving the city core.¹³ He and his councillors were credited at the time with taking the wrecking ball to the downtown's old buildings which "started Hamilton leap-frogging into a great modern city."¹⁴ Municipal publications and newspaper articles from the time placed the old city buildings against the promises of modernity. The structures were described as the problem and carried the blame for the downtown's inefficiencies. Once they were wiped away, the prognosticators believed, the city would be renewed and the promises of modernity would allow Hamilton to sparkle and stand proud.

Urban renewal was seen as the cure-all; a means for the Ambitious City to prove that it could be great once again, as is so tellingly described in the booklet, *Pardon My Lunch Bucket*, published to honour Hamilton's 125th anniversary in 1972.

...a few years back this town had what you might call a bad case of inferiority complex. A real bad case. It was always Toronto's doing this, Buffalo's doing that and we're doing nothing.

You know, things like that. Down-in-the-dumps talk. Well, all of a sudden some of the boys downtown and the boys at the city hall got talking and decided

¹¹ Arthur D. Little Inc., *Commercial Development in Hamilton* (Hamilton: Hamilton Economic Development Commission, 1968), 11.

¹² Bailey, *Hamilton*, p.70.

¹³ Weaver, *Hamilton*, p.191.

¹⁴ Ibid.

they were sick and tired of wearing Toronto's hand-me-downs.

There was nothing wrong with the city that a new spirit and a few new buildings wouldn't cure...say a new downtown core...somewhere where the people could go and shop and look around, a place where they could take their friends from out of town with a little pride.¹⁵

A new downtown was a way for Hamilton to show the larger centres that it still could be great and worthy of attention. A new modern downtown would place Hamilton in the big leagues where its ambitions said it belonged. Most importantly, a new downtown would bring people, and their pocketbooks, back to the city's core.

Of course, much of the city's downtown doldrums were caused by suburban growth. The city of Hamilton built its first shopping plaza on the old jockey club race track in the east end in 1955. The Greater Hamilton Shopping Centre, now known as Centre Mall, had parking spaces for 25,000 automobiles by 1960, cars which could not easily find parking downtown. Suburban dwellers found it easier to shop in the large malls and the downtown stores began to suffer. The downtown needed reviving but the urban renewal program, promoted by the federal government, was not initially interested in commercial redevelopment; instead its concern was housing.

suburbs

Slum clearance was the new solution for urban problems. Although Mayor Jackson did not like to use the word "slums" to describe Hamilton's neighbourhoods when setting up an urban renewal committee in 1960,¹⁶ most people in the United States and Canada identified slum clearance with urban renewal. Retired Hamilton politician Jack MacDonald, a former member of the urban renewal committee, remembers going down to Philadelphia to an urban renewal conference in 1960 with Graham Emslie, the committee's executive secretary and Ken Soble, the Urban Renewal chairman. When crossing into the

¹⁵ David Proulx, *Pardon My Lunch Bucket*, (Hamilton, Ontario: Corporation of the City of Hamilton, 1972)

¹⁶ "Committee Sets Pattern for Urban Renewal Scheme", *Hamilton Spectator*, December 30, 1960.

United States the border guard asked them what they were going to be doing in the U.S. Jack MacDonald, who was closest to the guard told him they were going to a conference on urban renewal. "On what?" questioned the guard. "On urban redevelopment", said Graham Emslie. "On what?," asked the guard again. "On slum clearance," said Ken Soble. "Oh," said the guard, now understanding, and he waved them through.¹⁷ Slum clearance was happening in the United States and it was clearly on the minds of Hamiltonians. The city's citizen of the year for 1955, George Clark, was reported as putting forward the idea "that old homes in some of the city's poorer districts be torn down and replaced by modern homes" in a *Hamilton Spectator* article, entitled "Would Wreck Slums. Build New Homes."¹⁸ Old homes were seen as blighted and a threat to the rest of the city. Instead of fixing them up, clearance was proposed as the solution. Acting Mayor Ada Prichard suggested that what Hamilton needed was "a scheme whereby downtown blocks could be razed, cleared and used for handsome, modern, inviting apartment blocks, with lawns and playgrounds for the children, plenty of parking space and those other amenities of contemporary living."¹⁹ Clearance of slums and blighted areas were deemed necessary to prepare for modern buildings. From the model citizen to the mayor, many Hamiltonians believed that modern buildings held the promise of opportunity while the old houses were seen to be holding the city back.

When the possibilities of urban renewal were being discussed for Hamilton in early 1957, the business editor of the *Hamilton Spectator*, Milford L. Smith admitted to feeling sentimental about the old familiar city. "One's life becomes wrapped up with the past in these surroundings," he wrote but then he allowed himself to be chastised with the thought that he would have to adjust to the changes because they are not about wreckers but about "builders, about the future, about the heritage we can leave for our children and their children in a city they will be pleased to call home."²⁰ Smith suggested that urban renewal cut through

¹⁷ Jack MacDonald, interview by author, Hamilton, Ontario, Saturday, June 5, 2004.

¹⁸ "Would Wreck Slums. Build New Homes" *Daily News*, Feb. 10, 1955.

¹⁹ "Low-Income Housing Plan Needed, Says Acting Mayor." *Hamilton Spectator*, Feb. 2, 1957.

²⁰ Milford L. Smith, "Looking at Business", *Hamilton Spectator*, Feb. 2, 1957.

sentimental selfish memories to allow the clearance of the inner-city because it promised "the greatest good for the greatest number." While endorsing the Hamilton Downtown Association's plans for renewal, Smith identified the program's illogical fear of blight without acknowledging the contradictions. He suggested that a city did not need to have slums in order to need urban renewal because if you do not practice renewal than slums might appear for "slums are bred of conditions that develop when renewal isn't practiced." According to Smith the small businesses still operating in the downtown core were doing well, although some buildings on the main streets were vacant. Smith saw the blocks of generations-old downtown houses being replaced with apartment buildings with "ample breathing space around them", reminiscent of Le Corbusier's vision of perfect city dwellings in his Plan Voisin for Paris. Commentators like Smith looked to the United States where urban renewal was being adopted in cities like Baltimore, New York, Chicago and Los Angeles. Urban renewal promoters from the U.S. were brought to Hamilton to present their plans and their goals to members of the Downtown Association and Chamber of Commerce. Ever ambitious, Hamilton was presented as being in the same league as these much bigger cities that were also trying to fight suburbia's success and bring a new dynamism to the downtown core. Smith accepted the premise that clean, tall modern apartments and a more modern approach to urban planning would entice people back from suburbia into the urban core, just as the commentators from Chicago and Baltimore said they would.²¹ Urban renewal was initially part of the business editor's beat because business interests on the Hamilton Downtown Association were pushing the city to conduct an urban renewal study. On November 25, 1957 the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), on behalf of the federal government, agreed to undertake the study partnered with the City of Hamilton. The study was enthusiastically endorsed by the downtown's business interests who wanted to improve the conditions of the urban core.

²¹ Milford L. Smith, "Looking at Business", *Hamilton Spectator*, February 2, 1957 and April 21, 1958.

Initiated in late 1957, Hamilton's first urban renewal study was completed in 1958. The city hired British-trained architect and town-planner Mark P. David to lead the study which was intended to help Hamilton's Planning Department make improvements to the city's Official Plan. David was under the direction of Hamilton's Planning Commissioner J. T. C. Waram and with the assistance of University of Toronto architecture professor Gordon Stephenson. Hamilton's population was predicted to increase to 600,000 people by 1980 and the city wanted to be prepared. It recognized that there was growing public concern to: "1) remove substandard housing; 2) provide good alternative accommodation; 3) prevent the spread of blight; and 4) rehabilitate older housing".²² While the study recognized that the city did not have the extensive concentrations of "bad housing in blighted areas, which exist in some cities" it did find "a considerable percentage of substandard structures" in older parts of the city.²³ David recommended that the city see itself as a series of districts, separated from each other by main arterial roads, or highways. The city's major thoroughfares would determine how and when the individual districts would change in character through redevelopment.

The city's Planning Department had conducted a city-wide survey of the exterior of every Hamilton building in the fall of 1957. From that survey, and the grading system for residential neighbourhoods suggested by Dr E. G. Faludi when he compiled a master plan for the city in 1945, David was able to identify 11 study areas for closer examination. An extensive survey was taken of both the interiors and exteriors of 20,239 dwellings in order to determine priorities for renewal. Eight field enumerators graded structures with penalty and deficiency points in order to compare physical deterioration and health and safety concerns. Deficiency points were given for structural problems like cracked or crumbling foundations or walls, sagging roofs, rotten floors and damp basements. Health and safety concerns were identified as outdoor toilets and baths and the lack of electricity, water, heating systems or adequate egress. The structures were then

²² Mark P. David, *Urban Renewal Study for the City of Hamilton*, (Hamilton: City of Hamilton, 1958), p.1.

²³ *Ibid.*

Areas deemed “blighted” are all in the oldest parts of the city.

Mark P. David, *Urban Renewal Study. Vol. 2.* (Hamilton: City of Hamilton, 1958).

classified by grade as to whether they should be conserved, rehabilitated or cleared.²⁴ The \$28,000 report recommended nine areas for renewal and was presented to the Mayor and Board of Control on February 3, 1959.²⁵

While housing was the main focus for urban renewal in the late 1950s, the city was hoping for provincial aid to eventually address commercial and industrial redevelopment.²⁶ Eight of the nine areas identified for renewal surrounded the central business district; the ninth was the Van Wagner's and Crescent Beach area which was identified as being the most in need of renewal and given priority as Area 1, as shown on the following map. The construction of an east-west highway and a north-south highway were identified as necessary for helping people get to the shopping districts downtown. Area 2 encompassed the 49 acres bordered by Barton, Queen, Dundurn Park and York where the report recommended partial renewal in the east and strong rehabilitation in the west. The southern border of this area would be cleared for the east-west expressway. For Area 3, the 113 acres north of York between Queen and Bay to the railway lands, block by block clearance was proposed and the area would be redeveloped for light industry and commercial services. Area 4 encompassed the 278 acres north of the CNR tracks between the harbour lands and Wellington which was slated for new apartment buildings of high and medium density and the rerouting of streets to discourage through traffic. The 117 acres on both side of Ferguson from King William to Barton was considered Area 5 and would be cleared for the new highway and parking facilities with parts being resold for light industry and warehouses. Area 6 represented 54 acres some blocks west of Wentworth and south of Barton which would stay residential and would need some rehabilitation. Low-rental housing was slated for Area 7 which encompassed 65 acres north and south of the TH&B railway and west of Wellington. The southern border of this

²⁴ Murray V. Jones and Associates, *Central Hamilton Urban Renewal Study* (Urban Renewal Committee, 1965), 42.

²⁵ Hamilton Urban Renewal Committee, *North End Renewal Project* (City of Hamilton Service Department, 1963), 1.

²⁶ Milford L. Smith, "Plan Campaign to Spruce City's 'Blighted Areas'", *Hamilton Spectator*, May 5, 1959.

Nine priority areas identified for urban renewal by the Urban Renewal Study, 1958
Mark P. David , *Urban Renewal Study*. Vol. 2. Hamilton: City of Hamilton, 1958

area would be used for an arterial road along the foot of the mountain which would follow the TH & B tracks, joining up with the Chedoke Expressway in the west. The 113 acres from Bay to Elgin, north of Mulberry was to stay residential because of its proximity to the central business district and might be turned into a neighbourhood of apartment buildings as Area 8. The final area for renewal was the 115 acres south of Main, between Dundurn and Queen to Melbourne and Duke which was slated for some renewal.²⁷

When the report was released Hamilton's Downtown Association feared it would be ignored so it launched its own public education campaign and organized meetings of representatives of the Chamber of Commerce and the Real Estate Board in order to set up a permanent committee to pressure for the report's implementation. Business leaders saw the city core as being positively affected by the renewal of surrounding areas. "If blighted and rundown areas are redeveloped with vertical housing, business throughout the city will benefit. A cross-town expressway and a north-south expressway would make it easy for customers to reach shopping areas," said F. W. Farrar, chairman of the Association's parking committee. "He deplored the existence of 'ramshackle, rundown, dirty, smelly premises' which, he charged, would doom the downtown unless they were razed and replaced with buildings in keeping with the types of houses businessmen proudly call home."²⁸

The belief held by businessmen and city planners was that urban renewal would entice people back from the suburbs into the city, where they would shop and carry on their business as they had done before. An expert from Los Angeles was quoted in the *Hamilton Spectator* as predicting that "millions of people will soon return to the cities from the 'frustrations' of the suburbs".²⁹ The additional highways would make travel around the city more efficient, the tall apartments would give the city a clean, modern look and most importantly a city needed to present itself as well-planned out. Planning director Norman Pearson took great exception when *Maclean's* magazine suggested that Hamilton was one of

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BY CITY
- THIS
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AND THE
PROJECTS OF
BUILDERS &
DEVELOPERS

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ "On Urban Renewal - Action Overdue," *Hamilton Spectator*, August 18, 1960.

Canada's ugliest cities, calling it "a dirty cramped little city utterly lacking in planning." Pearson responded to the comments that not only was Hamilton positioned on one of the most magnificent sites in Canada but that "it had shown itself to be one of the communities most interested in planning".³⁰

response to
being known
as ugly

Indeed, Hamilton had accepted urban renewal planning principles and the city's first urban renewal project was undertaken in 1959. The 175 acres of lakefront cottages along Van Wagner's and Crescent Beaches on the shores of Lake Ontario were identified as the area most in need of renewal by the renewal study of the previous year. Described in the city's reports as a slum, the cottages, some of which were used year round, were completely cleared and the land was converted into a park and recreation area.

The lakefront clearance area was far from downtown and those who had promoted the urban renewal idea in the first place were anxious to get downtown's renewal underway. In 1960 the city approved a capital budget of \$1 million for urban renewal projects over a four-year period. These funds would be enhanced by another \$1 million from the province and by the federal government's \$2 million. The \$4 million could be used for government-approved projects under the NHA.³¹ With the money in place, the city began to set up an urban renewal committee. Ken Soble, a radio and television owner, was asked to chair the Urban Renewal committee by Mayor Jackson in November, 1960 and he started the process of selecting his committee. Hamilton's Urban Renewal Committee would be made up of 20 members approved by the City Council. It was charged with making recommendations regarding urban renewal to Council. It was to be broadly representative of the community with representatives from the Chamber of Commerce, the District Labour Council, public and separate school boards, Housing Authority, Social Planning Council, Real Estate Board, Parks Board, Planning Board and other community groups. Two city controllers, a Member of Parliament and a provincial cabinet minister were also to serve on the Committee and advisory committees were established to

³⁰ "Deny 'Ugly City' Tag in Magazine Article," *Hamilton Spectator*, October 31, 1958

³¹ "On Urban Renewal - Action Overdue," *Hamilton Spectator*, August 18, 1960.

reflect the interests of an area being considered for renewal. Public meetings were held for public discussion on the planned projects.

Soble believed urban decay was the biggest problem facing the city. "Urban renewal is the whole subject of those policies, measures and activities that would do away with the major forms of physical blight in cities and bring about changes in urban structure, roads and institutions contributing to a favourable environment for a healthy civic, economic and social life for all city-dwellers," he said in his first statement as chairman. He compared urban renewal to a process rather than a program, suggesting that while the committee had a study already complete to guide them, the process would always need to be reassessed.³²

Committee member and city councillor Jack MacDonald suggested that the group would establish a minimum housing standard, choose areas to be acquired and cleared and recommend the best future development for the cleared land. Interestingly, the city seemed to be trying to refocus urban renewal back on the downtown core. Although the urban renewal study undertaken two years before had recommended areas for renewal, the committee was to draw up its own priority areas. MacDonald "envisioned some of the cleared downtown areas as providing perfect locations for modern apartment buildings which would attract residents back to the central part of the city."³³ The city was keen to allow the Urban Renewal Committee to get started on upgrading the downtown's core and the local paper, *The Hamilton Spectator* was equally anxious by the end of the summer of 1960 to see some action on the urban renewal front.³⁴ A sense of urgency was expressed and a frustration with all the delays.

For a long time the *Spectator's* editorial board had recommended the construction of high rise apartment blocks close to the downtown core. The paper suggested that the building of the Webb and Knapp high-rise apartments in Manhattan had worked for New York City so why would not the construction of new apartments work for Hamilton as well. They did not want to have to wait any longer for urban renewal to begin. "It would be absurd to pretend that the

³² "Urban Renewal, Long-term Project," *Hamilton Spectator*, November 18, 1960.

³³ "Will Take Steps To Set Up Urban Renewal Committee," *Hamilton Spectator*, March 19, 1960.

³⁴ "On Urban Renewal - Action Overdue," *Hamilton Spectator*, August 18, 1960.

time and conditions are not ripe for a renewal program," the paper insisted, and then went on to draw attention to a businessman's comparison of Hamilton's downtown with Coventry, a city in England which had suffered aerial bombings during the Second World War. The blitzed city of Coventry presented an opportunity for rebuilding, the logic went, and Hamilton now had government money offering it the same opportunity as well. *Hamilton Spectator* editorial writers drew the connection between the two very different communities and were eager to point out "that Coventry's reconstructed heart is a demonstration piece of the harmonious blending of the commercial and aesthetic".³⁵

The central downtown core area had not been included in the first urban renewal study because the program's focus, as directed by the legislation, was on housing issues. In early 1961 however, the Hamilton Downtown Association was aggressively promoting renewal of the downtown and had appointed its own committee to try to influence Soble's committee. "Every goal which the downtown business men will pursue in this campaign will have in mind the good of all citizens of the city, for it is a well-known fact that a decaying downtown means a decaying city with resultant general blight and ruinous taxation," editorialized the paper in an article about the Downtown Association's plans.³⁶

In December 1961 a 260 acre residential neighbourhood in the North End of Hamilton was designated as a renewal area. The clearance and rehabilitation of buildings began in 1965 and it was said to be the first renewal project in Canada which not only focused on clearance but also tried to rehabilitate individual homes. The North End was less than a mile from the city core, but even before the work had begun there in late 1964, the city had returned its focus to the downtown core.

Victor K. Copps was elected in 1962 and as one writer suggested, "he saw that the economic boom was running out of steam, and he directed his energies toward new development as a solution."³⁷ The business community was clearly anxious to support him and guide his attention towards the development of the

³⁵ "Getting Started on Urban Renewal," *Hamilton Spectator*, October, 11, 1960

³⁶ "Urban Renewal Program Launched for Hamilton," *Hamilton Spectator*, February, 14, 1961

³⁷ Bailey, *Hamilton*, 106

downtown core. In September 1964 the firm Murray V. Jones and Associates was hired to study central Hamilton as a possible site for urban renewal. They identified 1,150 acres of the downtown and west end of the city as an urban renewal area and decided to recommend that two renewal projects be prepared immediately for redevelopment: the Civic Square and the York Street area. Three other areas were also identified for eventual renewal but the focus was to be on the downtown core and York Street which led into the core. The commercial downtown was now able to be assessed for renewal because of new legislation put forward in 1964 which allowed senior levels of government to fund the planning and redevelopment of commercial areas. Hamilton was so quick to take advantage of this legislation that it became the first Canadian city to take on the renewal of a large commercial area. ←

Mayor Copps held urban renewal up as “evidence of the economic stability and progressiveness of the city and of its faith in the future.”³⁸ Images of the very modern possibilities of urban renewal were presented to the citizens of Hamilton in Urban Renewal newsletters which were circulated in 1969 and 1970. The 26-story Stelco Tower was featured on one cover. It had straight smooth lines and looked similar to a Mies Van der Rohe skyscraper, although clearly not as tall. The image was of power, of clean lines, of efficiency, and of being in the big leagues of modern design. On the next newsletter, an apartment building, planned for the North End, was featured which was identified as a residential-commercial complex with luxury apartments. Its modern look and lifestyle would replace an “eyesore” at the foot of James St. Both buildings were featured on their own, surrounded by empty space. The old Victorian world was being replaced with apartment buildings, modern office towers and the new life which was believed to automatically accompany these modern accoutrements.

With urban renewal, the city was offering Hamiltonians the chance to dream about being modern. To honour its 125th birthday, in 1972, Hamilton proclaimed itself reborn and alive again because of urban renewal. “With a

³⁸ City of Hamilton, “Urban Renewal Program Summary”, Government Documents, McMaster University Library, (1965), 5.

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Volume 1, No. 1 — April, 1969

CORP. OF THE CITY OF HAMILTON
URBAN RENEWAL

NEWSLETTER



The very modern Stelco Tower was featured on the first Urban Renewal Newsletter, distributed in 1969. Note all the people walking above the street level. Today very few people venture above the street to walk on the roof of the commercial mall.

delicate scalpel, contractors are cutting away the rot of the Victorian age and replacing it with the 26-story Stelco Tower.” This “new look” was described as a “facelift” for the downtown core where “Victorian architecture begrudgingly gives way to the world of steel walls and concrete.”³⁹ The opening of Lloyd D. Jackson Square, the new downtown concrete shopping plaza, on August 22 1972 was said to be the day which would long be remembered in Hamilton as the moment “the city moved from small-town to big-time.”⁴⁰ The ambitious dream continued to be pursued when York Street homes and stores were destroyed and turned into a wide boulevard as recommended by the modernist planners.

As a “big-time” city Hamilton had turned away from its Victorian roots ←
and embraced modernist city planning schemes which promised efficiency and rational order. These urban renewal schemes envisioned the modern city divided into separate recreational, residential and commercial areas connected to each other by expressways. The following chapters explore the different urban renewal schemes for the separate parts of the modern city.

³⁹ David Proulx, *Pardon My Lunch Bucket*.

⁴⁰ Stan McNeill, “Partners in Progress” In *Hamilton: Chronicle of a City* (Canada: Windsor Publications, 1983), 177.

Chapter 3 Recreation Hamilton's First Urban Renewal Scheme

Modernist city planners offered rational layout ideas for their imagined cities. They believed a city should be efficient and orderly with distinct areas set aside for separate functions: living, working, recreation and circulation. By rationally organizing a city into an orderly system, machine-like efficiency was the expected outcome. The urban planners who studied Hamilton under its first urban renewal study in 1958 reflected these modernist ideals. They identified the need for new, high-speed highways, a renewed North End housing district without industry, a revitalized commercial area in the downtown core and a recreation area. They did not see the city as an organic whole but instead as a system with its various separate components doing their specific jobs for the benefit of everyone. While Hamilton's first urban renewal study focused primarily on housing, it also acknowledged the importance of recreation areas for the people of Hamilton and identified an area along the shoreline of Lake Ontario for immediate renewal, recommending that it be turned into a beach recreation area.

The 1958 urban renewal study addressed areas of concern which were already being discussed by City Hall. Recreation was seen as being very important to a growing population and the study suggested that "a connected walkway, park and open space system"¹ would be possible for the city. A continuous belt of open space from the west end of Hamilton, to Cootes Paradise, along the face of the escarpment to King's Forest, the Red Hill Creek area and down to Van Wagner's and Crescent Beaches "would form one of the most attractive park systems in North America".² The green belt was presented as a system, separate from the residential areas. To this end the study recommended that the cottages and houses on Van Wagner's and Crescent Beaches, at the extreme east end of the city on Lake Ontario shoreline, be razed.

This area had only come under the jurisdiction of the city in 1956 when 2600 acres from Saltfleet were annexed to provide Hamilton with more industrial and residential land. Before 1956 the city's only lakefront property was the Lakeland Beach, west of Van Wagner's and Crescent Beaches. Expropriation of the Van Wagner's and Crescent

¹ Mark P. David, *Urban Renewal Study* (Hamilton: City of Hamilton, 1958), 27.

² *Ibid.*

Location of Van Wagner's and Crescent Beaches

City of Hamilton, "Formal application for Federal and Provincial Financial Assistance, Redevelopment Project Van Wagner's and Crescent Beaches". Hamilton: CMHC, 1959.

Beach cottages would allow the expanding city to offer increased recreational facilities to its growing number of citizens.

The urban renewal document identified 213 acres of Van Wagner's Beach and Crescent Beach, called "Planning District No. 48", as having the most blight in the city and the stretch of beach frontage was given the highest priority for renewal. The study identified 192 buildings, representing 198 dwelling units and occupied by 745 people, as in need of renewal. The land which was used year round as a residential area was recommended to be transformed into a "much-needed lake beach park for Hamilton".³ As part of the study, enumerators looked at the area's 192 buildings and classified 148 of them, or 77 per cent of the district, as having a "basic deficiency", giving them a "D" on their score cards and assigning them to the "presumptive clearance" group. Buildings were given a "D" for "basic deficiency" when a field enumerator identified a major substandard structural or health condition which was deemed a threat to the occupants. The housing deficiencies found by the enumerators were believed to be too costly or too difficult to fix. The study's enumerators identified structural deficiencies outside the houses in bad foundations, bad walls and bad roofs. Inside the buildings, the enumerators gave a "D" for rotten and damp floors or a seriously damp basement or cellar. Health considerations also contributed to a "D" score if the water supply was only available outside; if the toilet and/or bath was shared or outdoors; if there were not two exits from the units; if there was no electric lighting; if not all the rooms had installed heating; if a room was without windows; and if the rooms were smaller than required by the city's by-laws. Given that the majority of the buildings in this district were cottages which had been converted to year-long occupancy and that there were no plumbing or water services available to the houses, it wasn't difficult to understand why so many would be considered in the "Presumptive Clearance" group because of their "D" rankings.

Three houses were considered redeemable and they were put in the "rehabilitation group" while 41 buildings, the remaining 21 percent of the district, passed the deficiency tests and were classified in the "conservation group".

In addition to the study's interest in the condition of the district's buildings, there was also a concern expressed for the density of the population. The study recorded that 100

³ Mark P. David, *Urban Renewal Study* (Hamilton: City of Hamilton, 1958), 22.

Van Wagner's and Crescent Beaches

Existing Land Use 1958

City of Hamilton, "Formal application for Federal and Provincial Financial Assistance, Redevelopment Project Van Wagner's and Crescent Beaches". Hamilton: CMHC, 1959.

buildings, or 53 percent of the district, were overcrowded. The high number of dwellings in poor condition and the fact that the residents were far from social and shopping facilities, and therefore considered isolated, put the whole district into the “blighted” category. The study did not give the residents’ perspective on their homes. It may very well have been that the “isolation” afforded by these beach houses was part of the area’s charm for the residents.

The study recognized that the city had already expropriated some land along the beach for recreational purposes and it recommended clearance of all the substandard buildings along Crescent and Van Wagner’s beaches, which meant most of the Crescent Beach houses, to create recreational parkland. This redevelopment would mean that the district would no longer be considered residential. The report also recommended the construction of a new major road from the district’s southern border through to the north.

The push to expropriate land along the beach front began a year before the Urban Renewal Study had officially been presented to the City. In the spring of 1958 Hamilton’s City Council voted to begin the expropriation of the houses along Van Wagner’s and Crescent Beach and 85 acres of land along the lakefront. Alderman John Munro told the *Hamilton Spectator* that the development of the beachfront was the realization of a long time dream. He said that a summer playground for Hamilton’s industrial workers was “a wonderful thing for the people of this city – especially those who are unable to get away during the hot weather.” He thought the recreational development should look like Detroit’s Bel Air project and wanted the beach to be cleaned and the sand sifted. His comments emphasized the importance of cleanliness and propriety for the new development as opposed to the ramshackle state of the beach in the 1950s. “Properly-constructed, clean bathhouses can be provided to give people a proper place to change. Parking space for cars could also be provided.”⁴

Once the city had expropriated the land, Hamilton leased the good housing and commercial establishments back to the owners or tenants. However Alderman Munro believed that 90 percent of the homes in the area were substandard and claimed that the Board of Health had condemned about 50 of them.⁵ When Frank Watson, who was

⁴ “Joint Effort Hailed,” *Hamilton Spectator*, April 9, 1958

⁵ *Ibid.*



Cottage at Crescent Beach

City of Hamilton, "The Beach Strip – Submission to the Federal and Provincial Governments" September, 1973.

negotiating the sale of a house and three cabins on the beach, asked the city for occupancy permits, Dr. L. A. Clarke, medical officer of health, said that no one would be allowed to live in the cabins after the summer of 1958 and that the buildings would be the first to be condemned once the beach clean-up began. Watson argued that people had occupied the cabins since 1947 and that the homes were insulated, had no faults and had washrooms nearby. However Dr Clarke was concerned that the families living in the three cabins had to share the two outside toilets, one for the women and one for the men, and that they had to collect their household water from an outdoor pump. Mayor Lloyd Jackson decided that this case would mark the start of the beach clean-up and refused to provide occupancy permits for the 3 cabins and the house once their summer occupancy was over. The *Hamilton Spectator* headline on May 5, 1958 for Jackson's decision was "City Takes First Firm Step Toward Beach Rehabilitation".⁶

At the end of the summer of 1958, the Medical Officer of Health was also concerned by an outbreak of infectious hepatitis in the area. Dr. Clark identified the source of the outbreak as a polluted pond behind Crescent Beach. Two adults and five children, all residents of Crescent Beach, had contracted the liver disease and one person had to be hospitalized for an extended period. Dr. Clark suggested that the solution to the hepatitis problem was to fill in the polluted pond. By the time the urban renewal study was presented to City Hall identifying the Van Wagner's and Crescent Beach area as the number one priority for urban renewal in 1959, the public was already well prepared for major changes to the beach residential area since it had for so long been presented as a dirty and unhealthy place in desperate need of rehabilitation. The city had in fact already begun the expropriation process. What the urban renewal scheme offered was the possibility of federal and provincial funds to help the city achieve its rehabilitation ambitions for the beach front property.

Originally the city planned to expropriate only 86 acres but in February of 1959, after the release of the Urban Renewal Study, the area was increased to 173 acres. As stated in the Study, Hamilton's population was projected to grow to 600,000 people by the 1980s and this was the opportunity a growing, modern city needed to preserve its lakefront in addition to removing the substandard housing identified in the study – an opportunity

⁶ "City Takes First Firm Step Toward Beach Rehabilitation," *Hamilton Spectator*, May 5, 1958.

enhanced because of the possibility of new government funds to complete the job. Mayor Jackson was reported as saying that this was the first City Council project to receive such enthusiastic approval from the people of Hamilton. Alderman William Thompson said that Hamilton's teenagers were excited by the project and that the enthusiasm for the new beach would extend around southern Ontario and attract tourists to the area.⁷ Even the residents who lived in the area slated for clearance were reported to support the proposal.⁸

There is very little evidence of what happened to the people who lived in the houses along the beach after the buildings were cleared. Bill Freeman and Marsha Hewitt suggest that while Hamilton's first urban renewal project was seen as a success, no one considered what happened to the residents. "It was simply assumed that they were better off living elsewhere."⁹ Reg Wheeler, who lived north of this area on what is called the Beach Strip and was elected to City Council in 1960, remembers the Van Wagner's and Crescent Beach as a cheap place to live. Hamiltonians at the time thought of the year-long residents as poor people. He also remembers it as a place where people would go if they wanted to hide from society, for instance if they were "in a family way" and had to move away from curious neighbours.¹⁰ Jack MacDonald also remembers the people of this cottage community as being "marginal" and both MacDonald and Wheeler do not remember any opposition to seeing the cottages destroyed.¹¹

Reg Wheeler maintains that the people who lived on Van Wagner's and Crescent Beach year-round were likely happy to get the expropriation cash from the city because it was "probably more than anyone else would pay" and allowed them the opportunity to put a down payment on a better house. Wheeler also remembers the cottage owners as being happy to receive money for their cottages because most of the structures had endured some damage from Hurricane Hazel in October, 1954 and Hurricane Connie in August 1955. In any event, the demolition of the cottages had been discussed thoroughly before he joined Council and after 1960 the subject did not come up again. The city

⁷ "Council Agrees 13-4 To Buy Beach," *Hamilton Spectator*, February 20, 1959.

⁸ "Residents of Shore Area Back Beach Park Proposal," *Hamilton Spectator*, April 18, 1958.

⁹ Bill Freeman and Marsha Hewitt, *Their Town: the Mafia, the Media and the Party Machine* (Toronto: James Lorimer, 1979), 121.

¹⁰ Reg Wheeler, interview by author, Hamilton, Ontario, June 1 2004.

¹¹ Jack MacDonald, interview by author, Hamilton, Ontario, June 5 2004

planned to replace the houses on the beaches with a recreation area complete with camping areas, game areas, a pond for small boats and swimming and lots of parking lots.¹² Not only was the city seen as preserving the waterfront for its citizens but it looked like provincial and federal money would be made available to rehabilitate the beach through urban renewal funding.

The city prepared its formal application for federal and provincial financial assistance immediately after the 1958 Urban Renewal study was submitted to Council in February 1959. The City's report for the redevelopment project of Van Wagner's and Crescent Beaches was also completed in 1959 and gave what it called "proof" that clearance was the only remedy to the situation. It suggested that a public beach couldn't exist along side residential homes. The possibility of residential use was rejected because of the area's isolation; its proximity to a heavy industrial area; and the high cost of providing water and sewer services. Industrial use was also ruled out because it was too long and narrow. Given the "urgent need" for a public recreational area and its proximity to the shoreline, the report concluded that the area needed to be redeveloped as parkland. The city would gain a recreation area while removing many substandard dwellings. The report shows that 50 percent of the area's 199 families were interested in moving to public housing. City staff were charged with helping to find new accommodation for people in other parts of the city. In its report the city included joint reports from the Fire Prevention Bureau, the Health Department and the Building Department for each dwelling in the two beach communities. Examples are shown on the following pages.

¹² "Foresee Population of 600,000 Enjoying Facilities in 25 Years," *Hamilton Spectator*, February 6, 1959.

Van Wagner's Beach – House #18

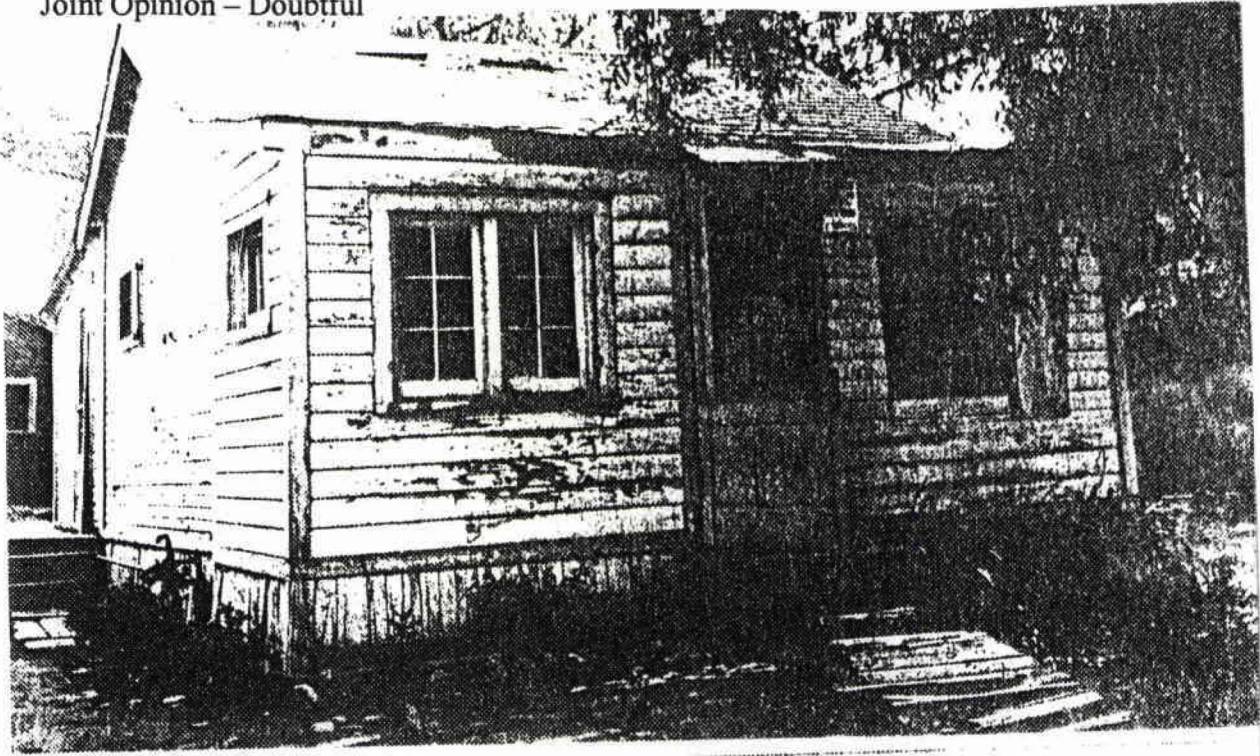
Frame dwelling

Fire Prevention Bureau – wiring fair, pressed cardboard partitions.

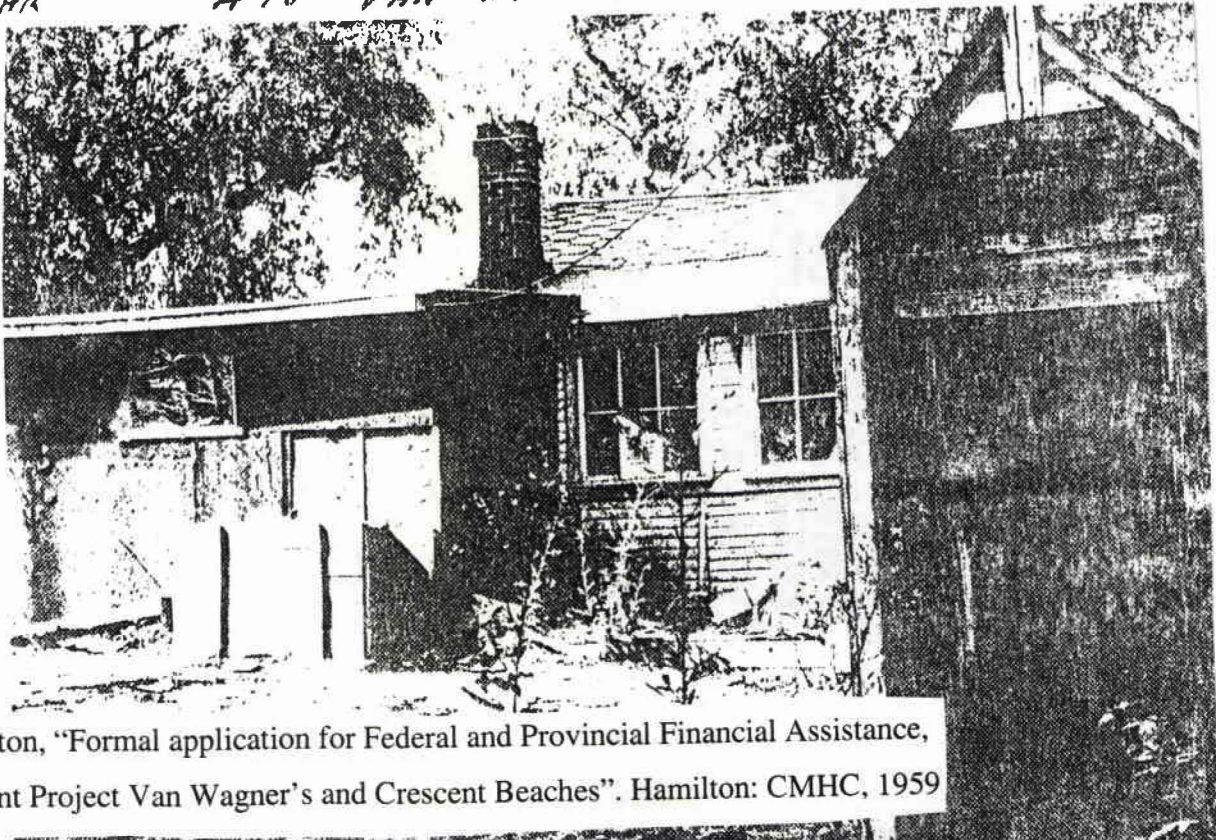
Health Department – improper sanitary facilities

Building Department – no proper foundation, roof leaks, outside steps not satisfactory.

Joint Opinion – Doubtful



REAR #18 VAN WAGNERS



f Hamilton, "Formal application for Federal and Provincial Financial Assistance, elopment Project Van Wagner's and Crescent Beaches". Hamilton: CMHC, 1959

Van Wagner's Beach #50

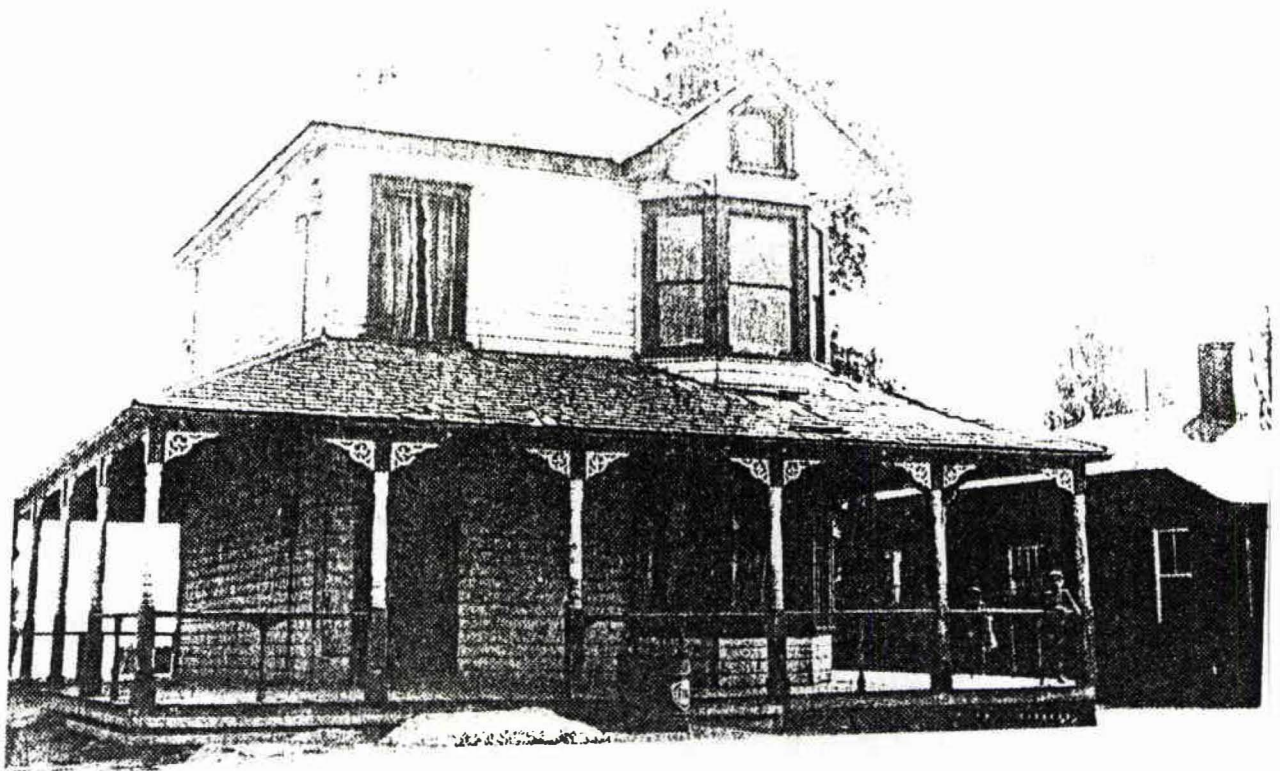
Frame Dwelling

Fire Prevention Bureau: interior lath exposed. Danger from fire. Exposed wiring and electrical fixtures. Chimney on bracket. Building in poor state of repair and unless repairs are undertaken extreme hazard exists.

Health Department: very poor condition; inadequate heating; pail type privy only. Unsatisfactory.

Building Department: Verandah surrounding building in poor condition and dangerous. Holes in floor. Roof rotted badly. Shed in rear attached and falling down.

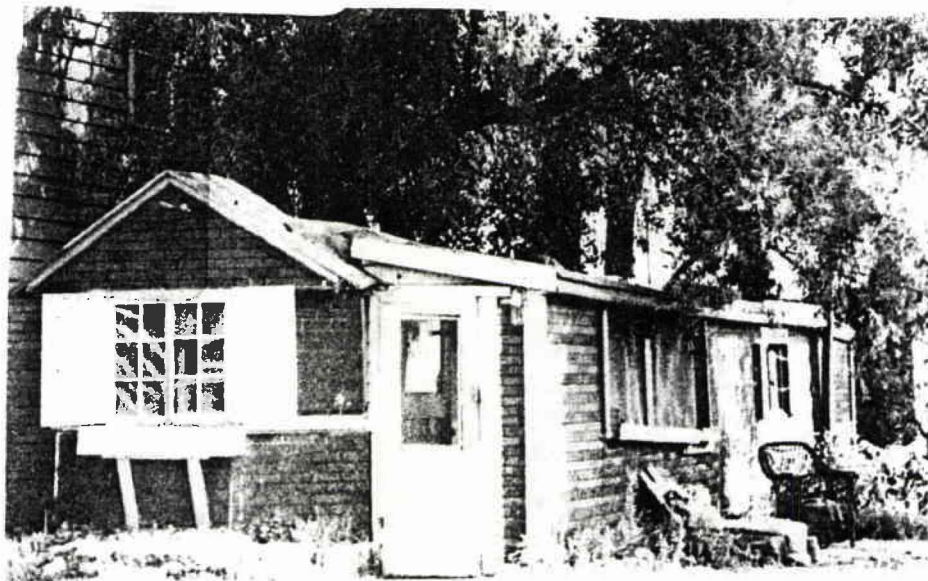
Joint Opinion: No.



Van Wagner's Beach #48

Converted street car

Joint opinion is that the dwelling should be condemned.



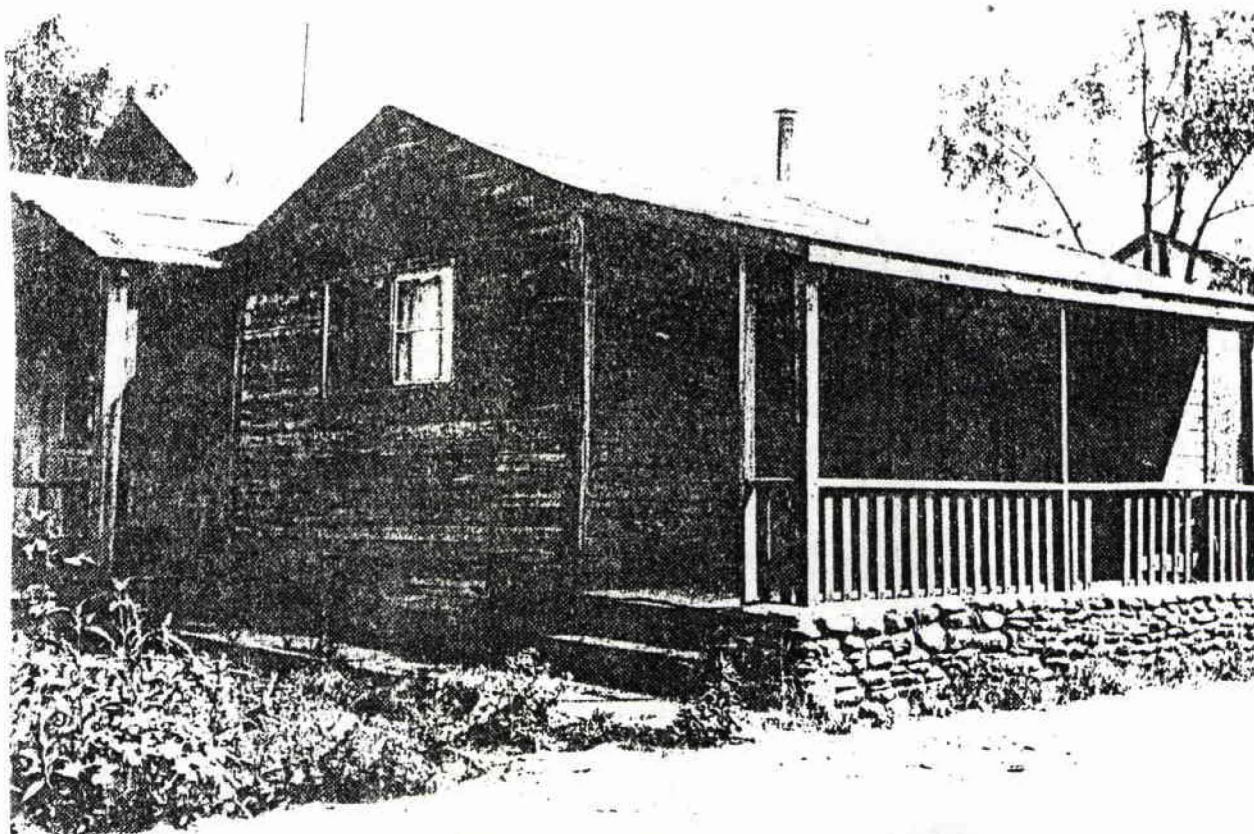
#54 Crescent Beach

Fire Prevention Bureau: wiring fair

Health Department: well water under pressure; flush toilet; household waste draining to the beach. Fair

Building Department: Chimneys need repair

Joint Opinion: OK



Van Wagner's Beach #54 and #55

Insul-brick dwelling

Fire Prevention Bureau: uninhabitable

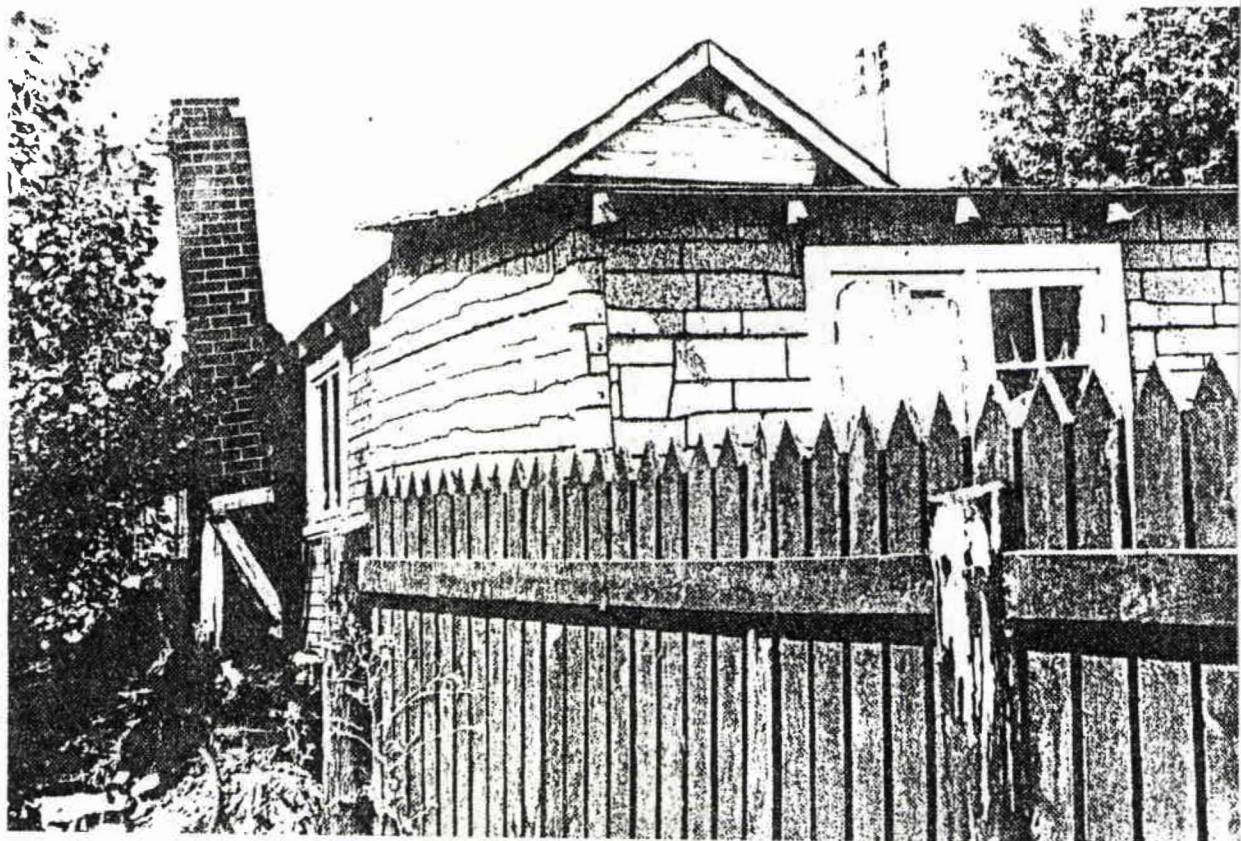
Health Department: uninhabitable

Building Department: no proper foundation; building set on ground

Joint Opinion: No.



54 & 55 VAN WAGNERS



In June 1961 the Ontario Municipal Board gave its formal approval for the city to share the costs of expropriation with the federal and provincial governments. "From the ugly jumble of shacks and debris that once characterized Crescent Beach, the city's property department has created a broad, clean expanse of bathing and picnic areas," the *Spectator* reported enthusiastically.¹³ That summer the city expropriated most of the buildings and removed 120 of them. The Cove Restaurant on Lake Avenue North and a pub on Van Wagner's Beach Road called Edgewater House resisted expropriation but the city persisted. While some suggested that the city run the pub and keep its tenants, Controller Jack MacDonald recommended demolition, "suggesting it would not be in keeping with the proposed development of Confederation Farm, a domestic zoo planned for the area."¹⁴ The city wanted the beach to be a spot for good, clean fun with no liquor and no rundown houses. Instead there would be parking for 2,500 cars, a walkway along the beach strip, public washrooms, a farm for the children, change rooms and services for beach concessions. Wheeler remembers the plans for the beach as being "grandiose" and "too rich for our blood". He did help to save the old Van Wagner's Farm from being destroyed but it was subsequently vandalized and lost to arsonists. He also managed to save Van Wagner's school by stalling and prevaricating when the provincial government asked why it had not been torn down. He proudly remembers behaving like a character from the Gilbert and Sullivan's *Mikado* as he delayed the provincial bureaucracy with wit and confusion.¹⁵

The city hired Donald Pettit, a Toronto landscape architect to come up with a master plan for the beach front property. His company, Project Planning Associates, proposed a \$3,685,000 development to be completed in five phases and then pared it down to \$750,000. The goal was to make available the maximum amount of recreational facilities to people of all ages. Project Planning Associates suggested that large metropolitan centres like Toronto, New York, Chicago, Vancouver and Detroit all have large scale beach development projects and "in a modern context, Metropolitan Hamilton has no

¹³ "Crescent Beach Ready for New Patrons," *Hamilton Spectator*, June 12, 1961

¹⁴ "End Two Big Obstacles to Beach Development," *Hamilton Spectator*, March 29, 1962

¹⁵ Wheeler interview

such public facility".¹⁶ The consultants recommended picnic areas, the beach, marina, swimming pool, amusement gardens and restaurants to make Hamilton stand out as a modern city with the appropriate recreation area. The park land was now referred to as Confederation Park and the plan in 1963 was to have the park ready for the country's centennial celebration of Confederation in 1967. City Council was beginning to get anxious for the development to begin and finally approved contracts for a pavilion housing a restaurant and change houses in April, 1963. Mayor Vic Copps showed his impatience with how slowly the project was proceeding by reminding Council that they were asking for money from the federal and provincial governments for a new urban renewal project in the city core. The city, he said, had been heavily subsidized by the federal and provincial governments for the beach front project with the understanding that the area would be redeveloped. "We can't expect them to take us seriously unless we follow through with this project," he warned his Council.¹⁷

On June 25, 1964, the city finally announced that its \$3,000,000 Confederation Park would officially open to the public and would be able to show off its newly completed bath house and snack bar. Hamilton was proud of the metamorphosis and newspaper articles about Confederation Park and its greenery usually referred to the once "swampy, storm-battered huddle of cottages, some converted into year-round slum dwellings" which existed before the urban renewal plan called for their clearance. This was a Hamilton success story. An article published in the *Hamilton Spectator* in June, 1970 claimed that the clean-up of the cottage slum settlement may have been Canada's first urban renewal project.¹⁸ This was said at the time when Hamilton was very proudly clearing its downtown core in what the city considered to be the largest commercial urban renewal project in Canada.

The city's boasting aside, Hamilton had been prepared to acquire the land before the urban renewal funds were considered a possibility. Jack MacDonald remembers thinking that the city should acquire the land, after Wilson's restaurant burned down. Wilson's was across from Hutch's restaurant and when MacDonald and his wife drove

¹⁶ Project Planning and Associates Ltd. *Van Wagner's Crescent Beach: A Proposed Park Development*. (Hamilton: City of Hamilton, March, 1960)

¹⁷ "Beach Park Development Launched over Protests," *Hamilton Spectator*, April 10, 1963,

¹⁸ "Campsite opening caps an impressive decade," *Hamilton Spectator*, June 15, 1970

out to the site he remembers thinking that the city should acquire the land and said so to City Council.¹⁹ Alderman John Munro also claimed that the beach expropriation was a long-held dream. By the summer of 1957 the city had already determined that the buildings in the area were substandard and residents' health was at risk. The rundown community did not conform to Hamilton's notion of what a modern, expanding city should be like. The city's health department was said to have already condemned 50 buildings and in the spring of 1958 the city began expropriating land to build a recreational area. When Alderman Munro articulated his ambitions for the beach park he suggested that in order to develop the recreation area to its fullest potential provincial and federal money would be necessary but he didn't suggest that the money would come from urban renewal sources and he was prepared to start the expropriation process without the funding in place. The planners who put the urban renewal study together in 1958 were aware of the city's concerns and ambitions because they were working under the general supervision of the Hamilton's Planning Department. The study required a total of \$28,000 to complete, most of which came from both the federal government, through a grant from the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation, and the City of Hamilton. Given the source of funding and the fact that the city's Planning Department was directing the study it is understandable why Director Mark P. David and his staff gave the beach area the study's highest priority for renewal even though it would be difficult to argue that the cottages along the beach front had much to do with urban housing concerns, particularly when the scheme involved destroying houses, not creating new ones. The presentation of the Urban Renewal Study to City Council in February 1959 acted as a catalyst and encouraged the city to expand its dreams for the water front by increasing the acreage planned for expropriation. The city's ambitions for the waterfront influenced the Urban Renewal Study but they were easily accepted by the modernist planners. The beachfront renewal reflected modernist planning practices. It would clear the chaotic assortment of cottages and people who lived on the two beaches and replace them with a clean and orderly recreation area, distinct from the city's residential areas.

¹⁹ Jack MacDonald, interview.

Chapter 4
Residential
The Destruction of North End Homes

The National Housing Act and its amendments concerning urban renewal initially focused on the provision of housing to communities and the elimination of substandard housing conditions. The Van Wagner's and Crescent Beaches urban renewal scheme was not about building houses but it did get rid of substandard dwellings and this impulse to clean up blight continued to be a factor throughout the 1960s. People who wanted their cities to progress and to be considered modern would not tolerate old, dilapidated buildings. Old buildings were not considered to be of any of historical or aesthetic value and in fact were considered to have a blighting influence on nearby homes. Old neighbourhoods were prime targets for urban renewal enthusiasts as were poorer communities. For many the issue was about clearing up poor districts, stopping blight and the possibility of slum development. An Ontario government "Urban Renewal Scheme Implementation Manual" from 1966 showed an image of a poor-looking child standing under laundry in a paved alley juxtaposed to children playing on a lovely lawn in front of a modern house. The message was clear: urban renewal presented an opportunity to move people out of poverty into wealth by eliminating the poorer housing conditions. In their mandate to improve an older, poorer community, Hamilton's urban renewal committee had many residential neighbourhoods to choose from. They decided that the North End, a well-defined, old, working class community with some houses in need of repair, was most threatened by the scourge of blight. This tight-knit community was renowned for its spirit and cohesion, but the urban renewal enthusiasts could only see a blighted area in need of some clearance, some open space, a new highway and some rehabilitation as was being done in the United States. They felt they were doing good by bringing urban renewal to the North End and following the modernist plans of the time. They were going to open it up, remove the blighting influences and make it a better place to live.

The North End had been settled in the mid-nineteenth century when Hamilton expanded from the downtown streets of Main and James towards the waterfront. It was separated from the main downtown area by the CNR railway tracks and through the years

Hamilton Urban Renewal Committee, *North End Urban Renewal Project* (City of Hamilton: 1963), 41.

residents had developed a keen sense of a separate identity from the rest of the city. The waterfront community did not have a thriving harbourfront because of competition from the railway, and only a few industries were established in the North End. It was primarily a residential part of the city for manual workers who worked on the waterfront or as industrial labourers in factories in the North End and in industries further to the east. By 1860 the area west of John St. North, was developed with a small number of homes and industries like the Canadian Cotton Company. The cotton mill was an impressive Victorian brick building on the west side of James Street, north of Simcoe. People who lived in the North End would be able to walk to their jobs at the mill. After the economic slump of 1860, speculators constructed many small homes for factory workers. The North End, situated on a rise above Burlington Bay, had a shoreline dotted with “boathouses, small dilapidated houses, rotting wharves and considerable quantities of unused land”¹ and away from the shoreline, most of its buildings were industrial workers’ dwellings. In the 1960s the vast majority of the area’s buildings, 88%, had been constructed between 1900 and 1930, with 7% constructed before 1900 and 5% built after 1930. While clearly an old neighbourhood, it did not initially receive the highest priority for renewal.

Hamilton’s first Urban Renewal Study of 1958 ranked old residential neighbourhoods for redevelopment and the North End was given a fourth priority out of nine supposedly blighted districts. The downtown business leaders lobbied for their own area’s urban renewal and the report recognized the importance of the central business area as a priority for redevelopment but, given the legislation’s mandate for housing, they chose the residential neighbourhoods to the west of the downtown core for their attention. The area bounded by Queen-Barton-Dundurn Park and York was suggested as the second redevelopment area, after Van Wagner’s Beach and Crescent Beach. The community to the east along York Street and north between Queen and Bay to the CNR tracks was considered the third in line for redevelopment and the fourth priority was given to the North End. All three were said to be “blighted” and had experienced a decrease in population from 1951 to 1956. The North End had experienced the largest reduction in

¹ Murray V. Jones Ltd. *North End Urban Renewal Scheme* (Hamilton: Urban Renewal Committee, June 1968)



Canadian Cotton Mill

Located in the block Ferrie, James, Simcoe and MacNab Streets. The Architectural Conservancy called it “a mildly interesting example of early industrial architecture”.

Architectural Conservancy of Ontario, Hamilton Branch, “A Report on the North End Redevelopment Area”, (Hamilton, Ontario: Urban Renewal Committee, 1963).

population with 30 % fewer residents. The report included maps which identified all three districts as having a high incidence of juvenile delinquency, and relief cases. All three were also earmarked for a new highway or arterial road to pass through their districts. The study's focus was clearly directed towards the old residential areas for redevelopment while, at the same time, recognizing the importance of renewal for the commercial downtown.

The Hamilton Downtown Association had lobbied hard for renewal and while disappointed not to be favoured with renewal plans for the central business area the association continued to organize to ensure the city would follow through with the study's suggestions. "This \$28,000 study can be implemented or put on the shelf," F.W. Farrar, Chairman of the association's parking committee, told his fellow members. "It's your job to see that dust does not collect on it."² The association was keen to see the central business area rescued from the "ramshackle, rundown, dirty, smelly premises" which the business leaders believed threatened the city's downtown, but if the report was only going to recommend residential neighbourhoods for renewal because of government priorities, then the businessmen would support the plan. They saw any urban renewal redevelopment as good for the city's downtown and there was always the hope that, while the government was focusing on housing in the late 1950s, it might change its urban renewal focus to include industrial and commercial properties in the future. Hamilton's Chamber of Commerce also took an active role in promoting the 1958 study and committed itself to educating businessmen about the importance of urban renewal. The business leaders expressed enthusiasm for the possible redevelopment of the waterfront in the North End. "If redevelopment along the waterfront attracts new industries, we will all prosper," said Farrar. Perhaps it was the business community's enthusiasm for waterfront development combined with the fact that the North End was a clearly identified residential community of working class people not far from downtown, in addition to fighting the threat of blight, that convinced the Urban Renewal Committee to select this area of 260 acres, as Hamilton's next redevelopment area to receive tax dollars from three levels of government. The objective stated in Murray Jones' report of 1968 was "to encourage renewed confidence and stability in the physical, social and

² Milford Smith, "Plan Campaign to Spruce City's 'Blighted Areas'," *Hamilton Spectator*, May 5, 1959

economic characteristics of the North End neighbourhood” and to help it “regain its importance as one of the most desirable neighbourhoods in the city of Hamilton.”³

Clearly Murray V. Jones did not understand that the North Enders thought their neighbourhood was already quite desirable, nor did he understand the value of the old buildings to the community at large. His 1968 report suggests that the Hamilton Branch of the Architectural Conservancy was not very enthusiastic about preserving the North End’s architectural heritage. Jones’s report makes it sound like the Conservancy didn’t think the buildings in the North End were worth preserving, in particular any building constructed after 1865. In fact the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario’s report to the Urban Renewal Committee in 1963 had recommended that a number of buildings be saved. The Conservancy called for the preservation of the “neat elegance of Georgian detail”⁴ of 493 James St. North which was “scarcely discernible behind a neglected exterior confused with sidewalk parking, litter and free-standing signs”.⁵ It also recommended that a modest red brick Georgian home built in 1848 at 401 John St. North be saved. It described the house as a well-preserved example of its period, unique in the North End and difficult to find elsewhere in Hamilton. The house next door, 399 John St. North, was originally designed as a store in the 1840s or 1850s and it was the last of its example of this type of store in Hamilton and probably all of Wentworth County. The houses at 60 and 62 Ferrie Street were also called to be preserved because of their architecturally significant stone construction. Despite the Conservancy’s recommendations, all five houses were torn down. Perhaps the Urban Renewal Committee did not take the Conservancy very seriously because of the tone of its report, which in general supported the urban renewal enthusiasts’ belief that the North End was semi-blighted without social cohesion or a physical centre. The words strike one today as damning and paternalistic, suggesting that the North Enders were not like most Hamiltonians:

There is a quite distinct spirit of independence in the general inhabitants. These are mature well-adjusted members of society, but they reveal a much stronger inclination than those in other sections of

³Jones, *North End Urban Renewal Scheme*, 1968, p. 2.

⁴ Architectural Conservancy of Ontario, Hamilton Branch. “A Report on the North End Redevelopment Area”, (Hamilton, Ontario: Urban Renewal Committee, 1963).

⁵ Ibid

the city, to 'live their own lives' and to live far less chummily, albeit on good terms with their immediate neighbours.⁶

The report went on to identify issues of overcrowding and the lack of open space in the North End and suggested that "the balances have been disrupted, a blight has taken hold and today there are sufficiently blighted areas to warrant the improvement that judicious urban renewal can offer." The Conservancy did not try to save the old Canadian Cotton Mill which it called "a mildly interesting example of early industrial architecture".⁷ In the end it admitted that "while most buildings in the North End are of less architectural and historic value than others in the City, the noteworthy buildings that do exist in the North End are especially valuable for being so rare."⁸ Why the Committee did not try to preserve the few North End buildings identified by the Conservancy is not clear. Perhaps its members understood that the Conservancy was also concerned about the issue of blight and ignored its suggestions because they thought that the buildings were not as important as the hope that Urban Renewal could bring to such a misunderstood community. The idea of wholesale destruction was also considered acceptable at the time and the thought that a beautiful and historically significant building could stop the modernist desire for clearance was not seriously contemplated.

While the North End was frequently presented as a rough neighbourhood with a high immigrant population, the initial Urban Renewal study of 1958 suggested that the district had lots of potential. It described the neighbourhood's access to the water as being beneficial to the residents. It assigned the community to the blighted category because it was identified as an area that had "concentrations of blocks in which 'fair to poor' buildings predominate" and the surveyors were concerned that the substandard buildings threatened to spread their decay to the sound housing.⁹ However, elsewhere in the study the surveyors reported that in the North End "the type of housing is very varied, but in many parts the residential atmosphere is surprisingly good". The report went on to suggest that:

the recreational development of the shoreline, together with the diversion of industrial traffic, and the redevelopment of substandard sections which are located on the west side of

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Mark P. David, *Urban Renewal Study*, (Hamilton: City of Hamilton, 1958), p.15.

James Street, would ensure that the District would become a very desirable neighbourhood in which to live.¹⁰

In December 1961 the North End was officially designated a redevelopment area by Ontario Minister of Municipal Affairs. The Urban Renewal Committee, under Kenneth Soble, began to work on its plan for the redevelopment of the community. One of the major concerns of the era was the fear of blight. Urban planners were concerned with the areas of blight because of what the blighted areas might become. Like some insidious virus, blighted buildings or other blighting influences were seen to have a detrimental effect on adjacent properties, somehow turning them into slums. Heavy traffic which passed through the North End was said to have a blighting influence, as was the cotton mill on James St. North. The CNR tracks were said to be blighting as were the North End's substandard buildings. The small size of some of the front and back yards in the North End were seen as a blighting influence as were the mixed uses of some properties. Blight was to be feared and dealt with quickly. In the newspaper and committee reports of the day the fear of blight grew more than did the blight itself, damaging the community's reputation.

The first urban renewal study of 1958 characterized the North End as a district encompassing varied housing with spots of blight. At the Ontario Municipal Board hearing in 1963 the North end was described as

...one of the oldest areas in the city and, in its time, one of the finest. It still contains a great many fine homes, unfortunately in the past decade or two a certain degree of blight has crept in and it is the feeling that if this is allowed to go unchecked eventually there is a great danger that the blight will continue to grow and that eventually portions of this area would turn to slum.¹¹

The OMB approved the Urban Renewal Committee's plan for the North End, despite the fact that there was evidence presented against the plan, in order to save "the area from the deterioration which has been evident for many years."¹² By 1966, newspapers

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 23.

¹¹ Hamilton Urban Renewal Committee, *North End Renewal Project*, (Hamilton: City of Hamilton, 1963), i.

¹² Ontario Municipal Board Decision, June, 1963 as reproduced in the *North End Renewal Project*, 1963, 30.



Georgian-style stores on James St North. 493 James North, above, was singled out by the Architectural Conservancy to be preserved but it was destroyed as was the hardware store, shown below. The hardware store was badly missed by residents. Many felt it was ironic that the city wanted to improve their houses and then took away the store where they could purchase the necessary tools.

Architectural Conservancy of Ontario, Hamilton Branch, "A Report on the North End Redevelopment Area", (Hamilton, Ontario: Urban Renewal Committee, 1963).



characterized the entire North End as “260 blighted acres.”¹³ Residents had to argue forcefully that their community was not blighted. “This isn’t a dirty or blighted area,” said James St. North grocery store operator Peter Antonio who acknowledged that many of his customers received welfare. “If they don’t all paint their homes, it’s because they can’t afford the paint, but they’re clean people.”¹⁴ It was beginning to look like the city was trying to force urban renewal on a community which didn’t want it and that the community’s poor were under attack.

The authorities made a point of inspecting and surveying the area very thoroughly presumably because they wanted to make no mistakes when it came to recommending buildings for destruction. The initial survey done by the Planning Department’s urban renewal division in 1958 was redone in 1961 when every building was resurveyed by members of the Planning Department and Urban Renewal staff. Their findings were checked by Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation staff and if a property was difficult to classify another inspection was carried out by the City’s building department. The surveyors in 1961 classified the buildings as 7.4% “conservation” which meant they were fine as they were; 47.6% “rehabilitation” and 45% “clearance”. The 1958 report had recommended: 52% “conservation”; 12 % “rehabilitation”; and 36% to the “presumptive clearance” category which demonstrates that as the interest in urban renewal developed the desire for clearance seemed to grow as well.

The enthusiasm for urban renewal was encouraged by city bureaucrats and the Mayor. As protests and petitions opposing urban renewal in the North End became public, Mayor Victor Cops or Committee Chairman Kenneth Soble would often remind the counselors of how important urban renewal was to the city of Hamilton and that they should not be swayed by the opposition. “The greatest damage that could be done to the north end and to urban renewal throughout the city would be if the committee does nothing. We must proceed forthwith.”¹⁵ Later the Mayor would encourage the Board of Control and City Council to approve the urban renewal committee’s actions because “this would prove that Hamilton is serious about redevelopment, about renewing and maintaining the city. This proof is very likely to attract a great deal of attention from

¹³ “Now the politicians vie for label of visionary,” *Globe and Mail*, Oct. 4, 1966

¹⁴ “North End Residents Fear Disruption Under Scheme,” *Hamilton Spectator*, June 24, 1963,

¹⁵ “North End Renewal”, *Hamilton Spectator*, March 16, 1962

private investors and developers of the type required to the downtown area.”¹⁶ A great deal seemed to be riding on the redevelopment of an isolated working class community. It looked as if urban renewal had as many implications for the city of Hamilton as it had for the redevelopment of the North End. Urban renewal was believed to be of dire importance to the downtown core and the politicians did not want protests from the North Enders to jeopardize their larger hopes.

Public relations was recognized as the means to convince residents of the North End that Urban Renewal was going to be good for them. Both Urban Renewal chairman Ken Soble and his successor Graham D. Emslie, were radio men and communication experts on the Hamilton scene. Soble was manager of CHML and Emslie was director of news and public relations at CKOC before they were given the urban renewal task. In 1967, Emslie wrote a glowing tribute to the significance of the urban renewal project in the north end and suggested that the city had met the opposition to the scheme head on. The Committee challenged the techniques used in gathering signatures for the citizen petitions, distributed leaflets and brochures in several languages and hosted a series of four public meetings where 1,600 residents heard the plan explained and could offer their own suggestions.¹⁷

A major critic of the city’s urban renewal plans was Hamilton’s Social Planning Council whose researchers suggested that the urban renewal scheme was “arrived at ‘through the biased eyes of class consciousness.’”¹⁸ The Council issued a report in December 1963 outlining their concern for the residents of the North End, particularly those who had lived there for many generations, those with low incomes, large families, and families dependent on social service agencies. The report questioned the issue of blight. The Council sent interviewers sent into a cross-section of the study area and to evaluate the condition of the buildings. “They found only 8% of the dwelling units to be dilapidated or extremely dilapidated, while an additional 18% were badly kept up. The other dwelling units were judged to be in favourable condition.”¹⁹ The Council was

¹⁶ “Hamilton Serious about Renewal,” *Hamilton Spectator*, November 17, 1962

¹⁷ Graham D. Emslie, “Hamilton’s North End: the Urban Renewal Commissioner Speaks” *Urban Renewal and Public Housing* III, #3, (1967), 3.

¹⁸ “North End Residents Rear Disruption Under Scheme,” *Hamilton Spectator*, June 24, 1963.

¹⁹ Social Planning Council of Hamilton and District, “The Social Cost of Urban Renewal”, (Hamilton: December, 1963), 19.

quick to point out that these findings, which showed that three out of four homes were in average or favourable condition, contrasted starkly with the claims by the city's planning department that 45% of the buildings were classified as "clearance". The Council asked whose standards were being used to classify an area as "blighted" or a slum. "The quality of social relationships in the area, the feelings of the residents of the area about their environment, the values of the residents in regard to expenditures for 'housing' as compared to other living expenses should be considered." The Council referred to U.S. Senate subcommittee hearings on the relocation of the elderly in their report and gave particular prominence to Jane Jacob's testimony. The Council recommended small scale changes and warned of the large-scale clearance schemes. "For tenants, owners and businessmen alike, large scale change of a neighbourhood exacts social and psychological losses. The clearance or relocation may destroy not only buildings, but also a functioning social system."²⁰

Despite the Council's warnings, the modernist answer to blight during the 1950s and 1960s was clearance. By flattening old homes, urban renewal enthusiasts believed, new dreams could be built and progress was possible. Of course, the dream of urban renewal for Hamilton went beyond the North End, the city as a whole was promised its benefits and the politicians and businessmen were determined to follow the plans, made possible by federal and provincial funding, to rebuild something better and more modern. The city's initial impulse to tear down 520 buildings in the North End was met with serious opposition. "The idea was to rehabilitate this area. You're razing it," said Alderman Frank Dillon who himself lived in a house slated for demolition. "To accept this would be to break faith with the public."²¹ A compromise was worked out with a three-stage plan for redevelopment which would remove 260 dwellings from the North End. The first stage would run from 1963 through 1965; the second from 1966 through 1968; and the final stage from 1969 on until completion. In November, 1962 City Council approved the revised plan and the Urban Renewal Committee tried to sell the redevelopment scheme to the local population in four public meetings which continued through March, 1963. The Ontario Municipal Board approved the Committee's plan for the area in June,

²⁰ Ibid, 25.

²¹ "For Renewal in North End," *Hamilton Spectator*, April 19, 1962.

1963 acknowledging that some people would lose their homes but that the community's improvement would greatly outweigh their suffering. It recognized that the physical characteristics of its 1795 properties made the North End "suitable for a properly planned residential community".²² The first stage renewal plans for this planned community involved the leveling of a 10-block area between Wood and Simcoe Streets with an easterly extension between MacCaulay and Picton across Catherine Street to create a T-shaped community park and playground for three area schools. This plan involved 14.53 acres and the destruction of 148 buildings, including two schools.

Bennetto Public School and St. Lawrence Catholic School were considered to be blighted and the solution was their destruction. Initially Bennetto Public School was the only one slated for clearance, but when there was little support among Catholic voters for the scheme Jack MacDonald spoke with the area priest who told him that the Catholic community was worried that students would leave the Catholic School to attend the more modern Bennetto. So MacDonald promised that St. Lawrence Catholic School would also be rebuilt and the community responded positively.²³ The Urban Renewal Committee's report included letters from the Medical Officer of Health and the Fire Prevention Bureau acknowledging that the schools had unsanitary drinking fountains, walls in need of painting, unsafe stairs, unsafe basement classrooms and overcrowded conditions. The decision to raze Bennetto School and rebuild it as two schools was hastened when fire destroyed most of the old school in March 1965. The first of two new replacement schools was completed in February, 1966. The Senior Bennetto school contained a gymnasium, 400-seat theatre, swimming pool and was attached to a brand new community center. Centennial Junior School opened in September 1966 at the other end of the large playing field which cut through what had once been Macauley, Picton and Ferrie Streets. St. Lawrence School was demolished in 1966 and rebuilt in 1967 with a new auditorium. The plan to link the schools' play areas by closing part of John Street was never completed, however, Catherine Street was closed between Maccauley and Picton Streets and the homes on the closed blocks destroyed. Today there is a field of green between Centennial School and the recently shut down Bennetto School. Under

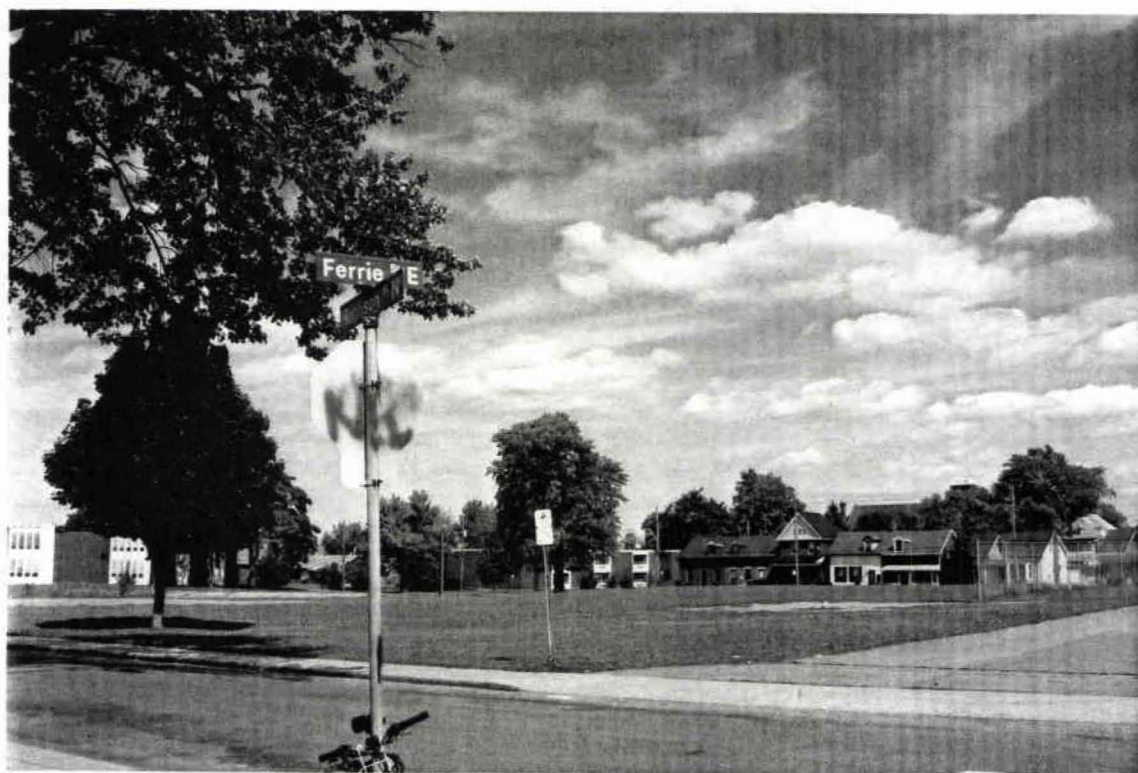
²² Ontario Municipal Board Decision, June 1963 as reproduced in North End Renewal Project (Hamilton: Urban Renewal Committee), 30.

²³ Jack MacDonald, interview by author, Hamilton, Ontario, Saturday, June 5, 2004.



Ferrie St., between John and Hughson was cleared. The top photo shows the corner of John and Ferrie where the significant buildings at 401 and 399 John St. once stood. To the right of the picture is Bennetto School. The tall building is the senior's residence, the Kenneth D. Soble Towers, named after the Urban Renewal Chairman.

The bottom photo shows the corner of Hughson and Ferrie. The flat playing ground was covered with houses before they were cleared in 1965. (photos by author)



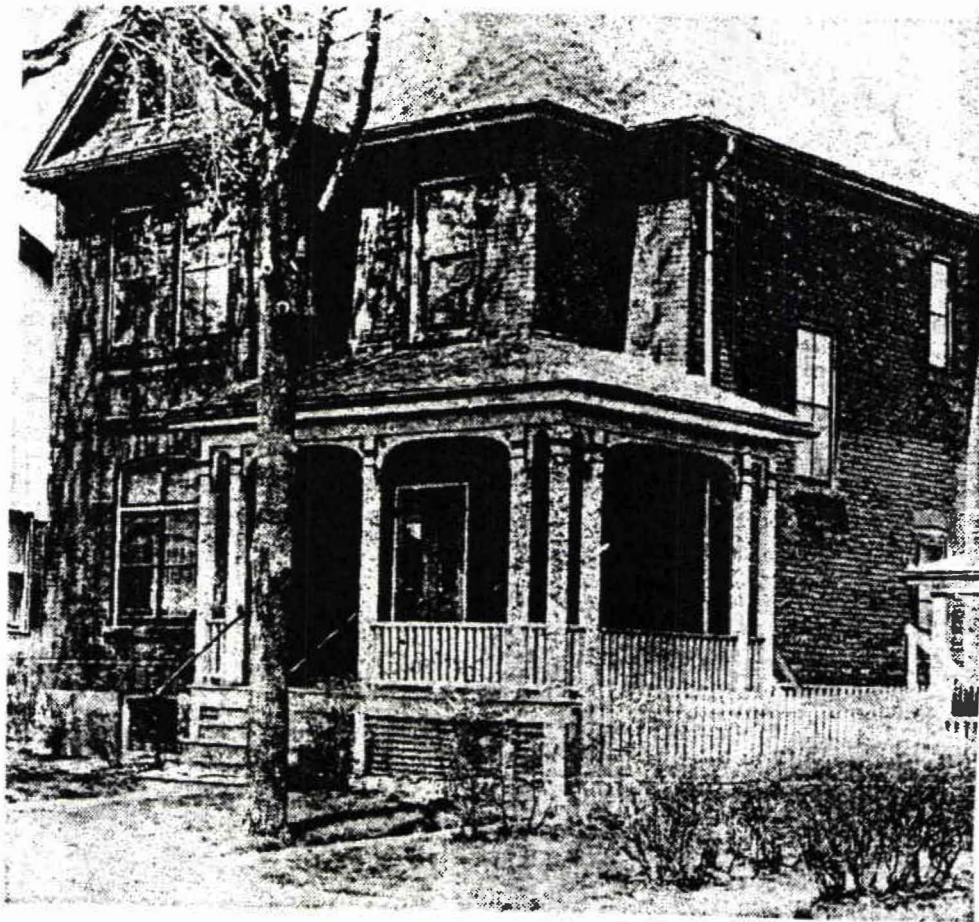
the field must lie the foundations of 401 and 399 John St. which the Architectural Conservancy had tried to preserve by suggesting that they would serve a scholastic and recreational use if they could be turned into a “tuck shop” for the community. The Conservancy also suggested that these two old buildings, along with the churches on John St. formed the heart of the North End. However, urban renewal practices of the early 1960s weren’t interested in preservation. Their plan was to raze the entire area and two old and rare architectural specimens jutting out of the flat open space wouldn’t suit the aesthetic vision so predominant during this period.

In order to achieve the open space Ferrie Street was cut in two and the homes between Hughson and John were destroyed. On the North side of Ferrie Street, at number 45, was Alderman Frank Dillon’s house. He lived there with his sister. The large brick home with an impressive veranda was built during the 1890s and had always been in the Dillon family. John Dillon was the original owner. The Dillon home was in the center of the block and the McLaughlin and Gasparri families lived on either side. The houses across the street were closer together and included the two stone cottages at numbers 60 and 62 which the Architectural Conservancy recommended saving. Around the corner on Hughson lived Antonio Buttarò. He was an old man who had just finished building his house in the late 1950s.²⁴ All of these homes were destroyed; 130 families moved away from their neighbourhood. Most went without complaint because they felt they couldn’t stand up to the officials who came to the door and told them they had to leave. The vast majority quietly negotiated the value of their houses with the City but five families refused and their houses had to be expropriated.²⁵

“And to think nobody thought we were serious,” Urban Renewal Chairman Kenneth Soble said in June of 1965 as the bulldozers dug into the sod where houses once had stood. “Nobody in the north end believed urban renewal was coming – until the first house came down.” *The Hamilton Spectator* reported on Soble’s happiness at finally achieving his goal after seven years of “confusion and controversy to get Hamilton to accept urban renewal.” The urban renewal chief was said to be surprised that the people of the north end were so reluctant to endorse urban renewal for their community. He

²⁴ Interview with resident of 24 Ferrie St by author. He didn’t want to give his name but his grandfather was Antonio Buttarò. May 19, 2004.

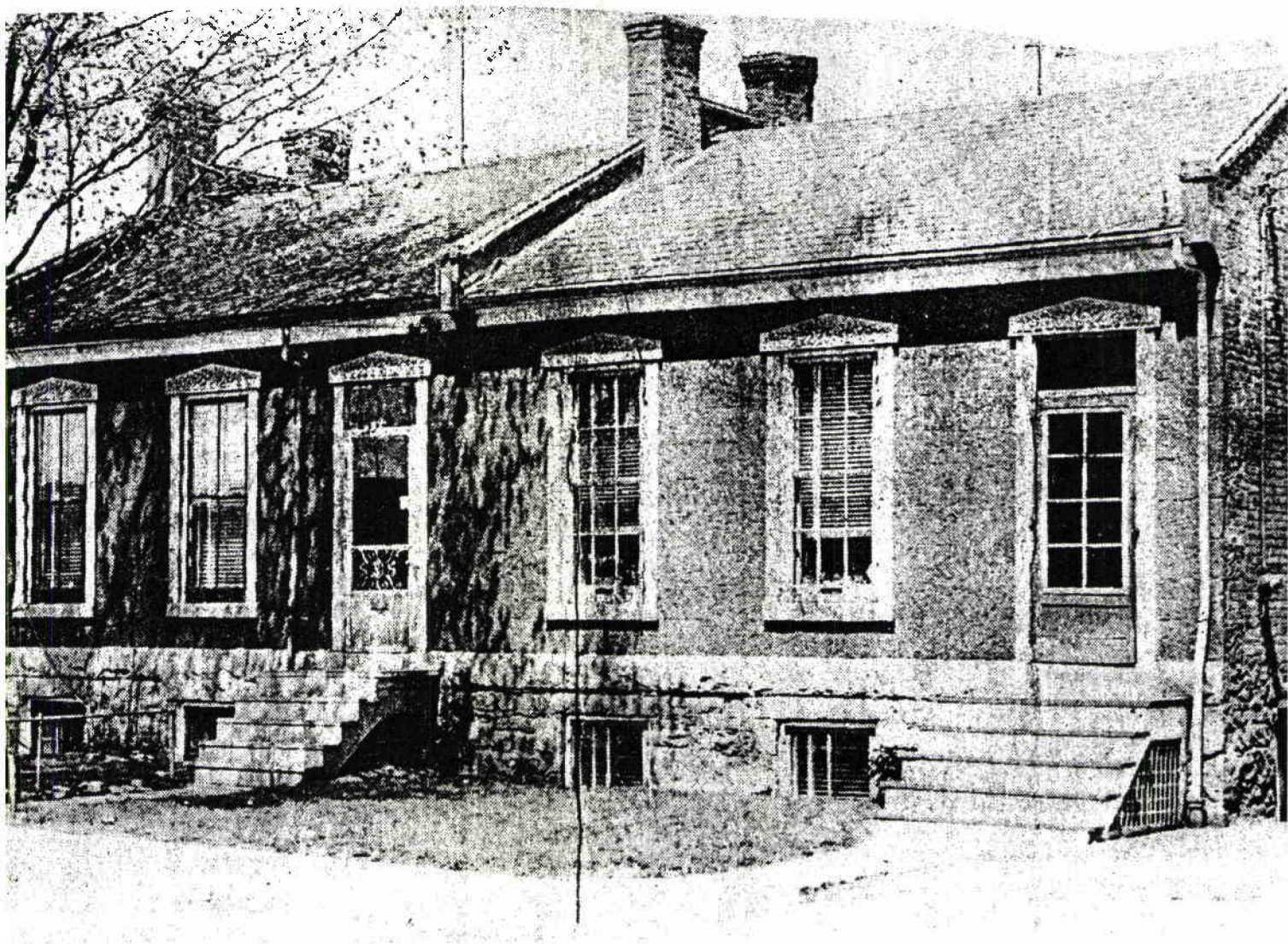
²⁵ “An Urban Renewal Dream Realized,” *Hamilton Spectator*, June 25, 1965



45 Ferrie St.

The house had always been in the Dillon family. It was the home of John Dillon in 1890 and the home of Alderman Frank Dillon and his sister Mary in 1964. It was destroyed in 1965.

"Armada Admiral Left Us a Legacy," *Hamilton Spectator*, June 27, 1964.



60 and 62 Ferrie Street

Pattern-maker James Mitchell lived in the one on the right with his wife and seven children in 1887. The stone architecture was seen as historical significant by the Architectural Conservancy which recommended that the buildings be preserved. They were both destroyed in 1965.

“Armada Admiral Left Us a Legacy,” *Hamilton Spectator*, June 27, 1964.

blamed the delays on “public ignorance” and was quoted as saying that “despite public meetings mass, mailings and an information office, the north enders could not understand urban renewal was an attempt to preserve a neighbourhood, rather than flatten it.” The sod-turning event was considered so significant that the federal minister in charge of the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation, John Nicholson and the provincial minister for Municipal Affairs, J.W. Spooner helped the bulldozers do the work by lifting some of the sod with their chromium-plated shovels in recognition of the 50% federal funds and 25% provincial funds invested in the scheme to create a large open space in the middle of the north end.²⁶

Along with the modernist desire for clearance, the Urban Renewal Committee showed a keen enthusiasm for the modernist response to congestion: more road development. Its members believed that efficient limited access highways would get the heavy traffic off the neighbourhood roads and help people to get downtown more easily. An efficient arterial road, known as the perimeter road, on the southern edge of the North End was considered essential to the district’s redevelopment.

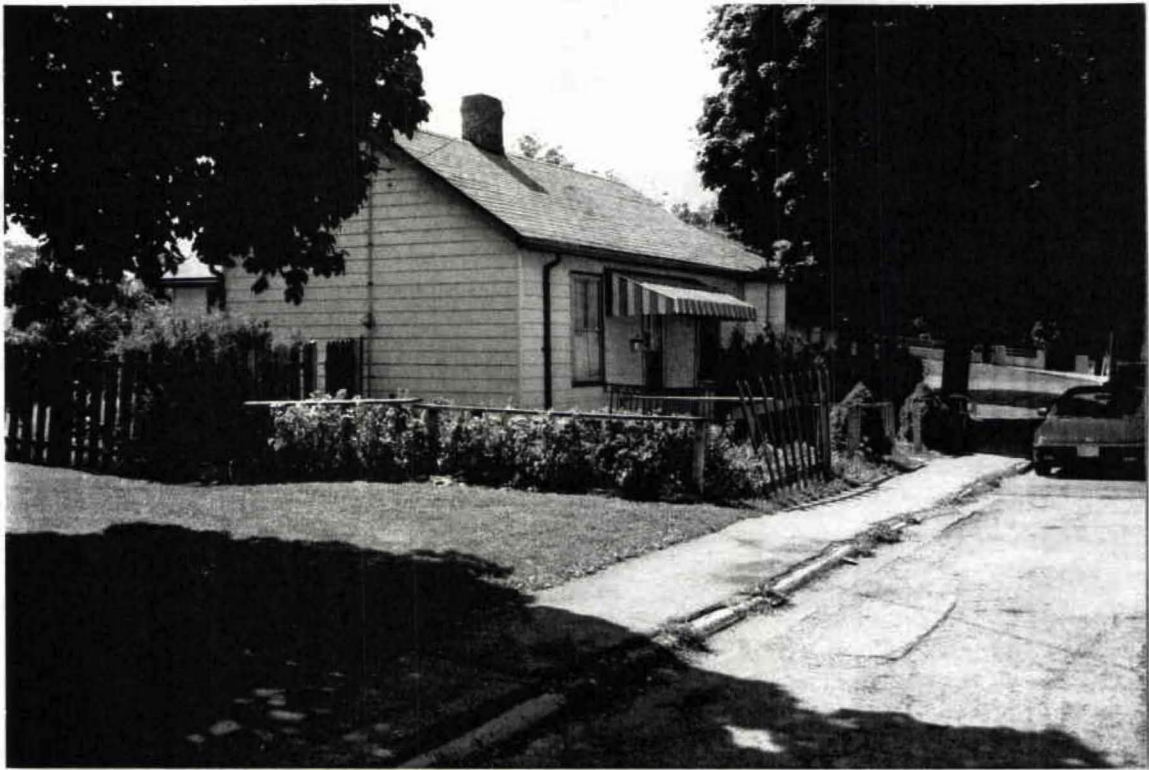
It is of great importance insofar as planning and renewal are concerned, probably equally important to the central park and school site. Both the school site and the perimeter road however are expensive features of the plan and from the financial viewpoint it appeared essential to put them into separate stages. The perimeter road was finally allocated to Stage II after consultation with the City Engineer who pointed out that certain underground services should properly be provided before the paving of such a major traffic route is undertaken.²⁷

So despite the expressed importance of the perimeter road, its construction had to be delayed until 1966. However the road was announced as an important element of urban renewal for the North End and the line on the map showed the route of the perimeter road going right through the small houses which lined Strachan Ave.

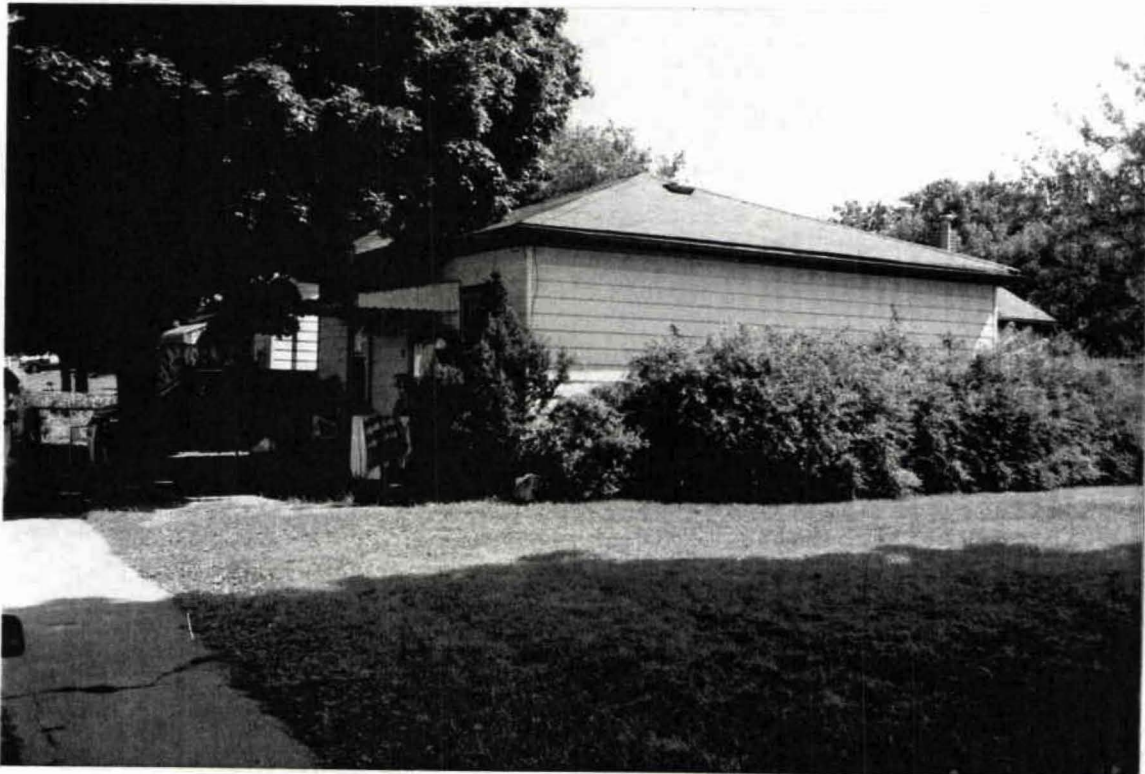
In early March, 1962 planners called for the destruction of houses on both sides of Strachan Ave, a total of 199 small homes. The plan was reworked after the community expressed its opposition to losing so many families and a compromise was accepted by the Urban Renewal Committee which called for the destruction of 102 homes from the

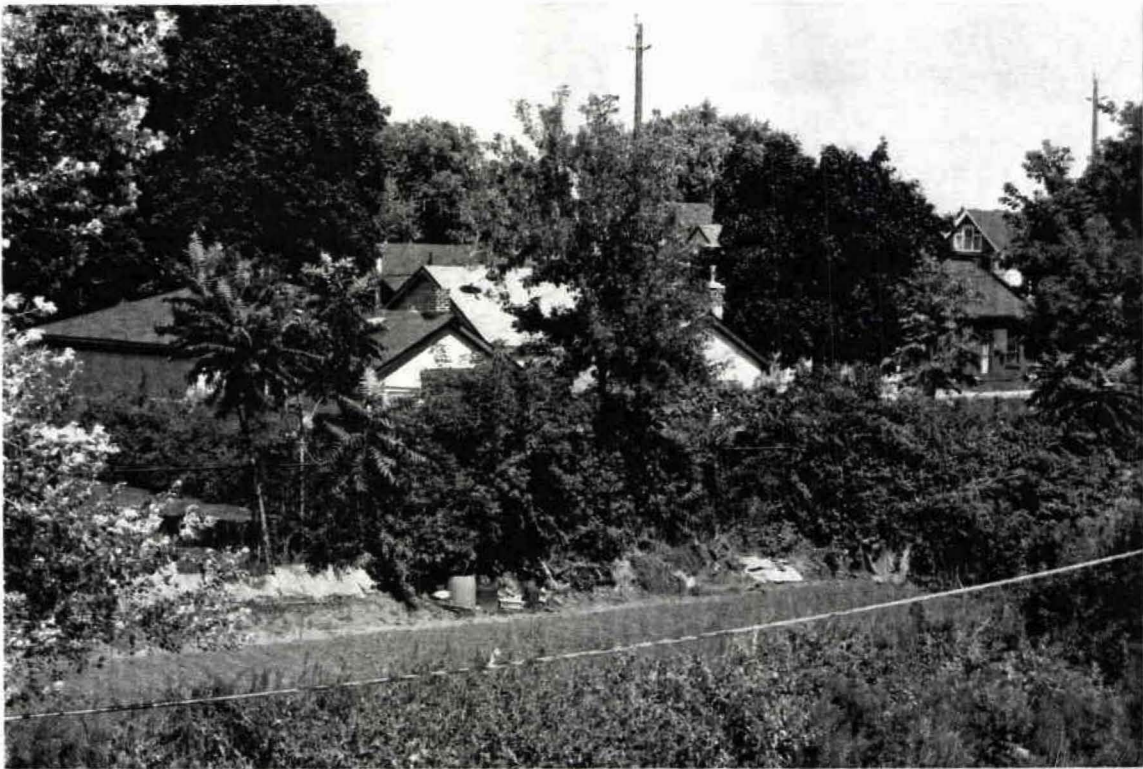
²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Hamilton Urban Renewal Committee, *North End Renewal Project*, 1963.

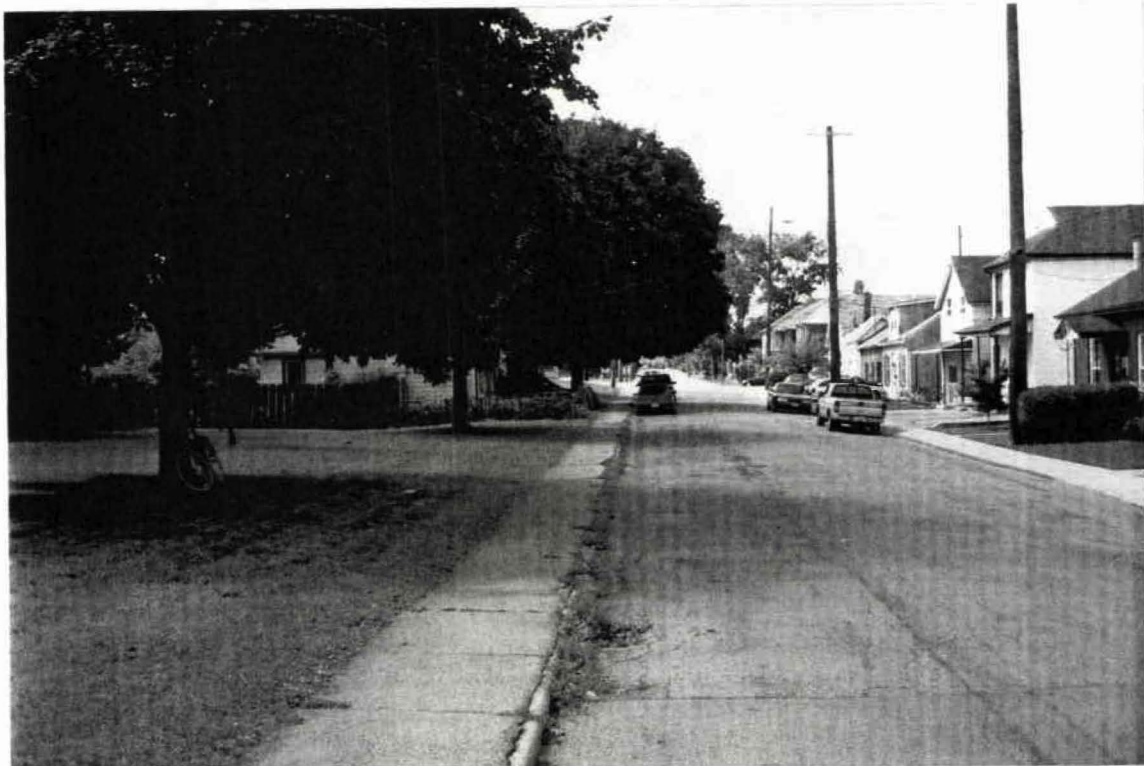


72 and 74 Strachan Ave. are the only surviving houses left on the south side of the Avenue. They stand in defiance of the city's modernist ambitions for more roads. (photos by author).





Top: The garden between Strachan Ave and the railway tracks had small houses on it before the clearance for the perimeter route. Bottom: Strachan Avenue cleared for the perimeter route on the south side, except for the two defiant houses, still standing.
(photos by author)



south side of Strachan in June, 1965, to provide the space necessary to construct a four lane bypass for through traffic from Burlington Street. The removal of families from the site began in September, 1965. Although the road was never built due to lack of funds, most of the families moved away and the houses were leveled, except for two homes at 72 and 74 Strachan Ave. Today the two cottages stand as silent sentinels honouring their original occupants' defiance of the city's plans to first create a roadway and, when that was not going to happen, a smooth open space of green. Nancy Duncan, the current owner of 72 Strachan, is proud of her house and its history. Between her house and 74 Strachan is a small alley which she was told went down to another row of houses built between the CNR tracks and her backyard which was razed during urban renewal. She bought her house ten years ago from a Mrs. Henderson whose family had owned it for 85 years. Mrs. Henderson's neighbour and best friend was Stephanie Major and it was Mrs. Major and her husband Ivan who retained a lawyer, a family friend, on behalf of the two houses. According to Nancy Duncan, the lawyer told the City that they would have "one hell of a hard time if you are going to fight if you don't have plans for the land."²⁸ And so the two small homes stand with their backs to the CNR tracks – two blips in a modernist plan for smooth, unhampered green space, since the original plan for a smooth asphalt roadway wasn't going to become a reality.

While one can easily imagine the houses along the south side of Strachan, it is more difficult to envision the houses on the now destroyed alleys between the train tracks and the street. But they were there. The fire insurance maps from October, 1947 show ten dwellings in behind the street, identified as 70A, 72A, 74A, 82A, 84A, 98A, 100A, 102A, 108A, 116A. These hidden homes vanished under the plans for a roadway which was never built.. Other buildings also disappeared which in addition to having an address on James St. North also had a non-material presence in the community. The Italian Christian Church at 399 James North was destroyed as was an Italian barbershop at 413 James North. These two buildings were important for the fellowship and social connections they forged and reflected a community's connections and cohesion, the importance of which the Urban Renewal Committee failed to recognize.

²⁸ Nancy Duncan, owner of 72 Strachan Ave., interview by author, Hamilton, Ontario, May 19, 2004.

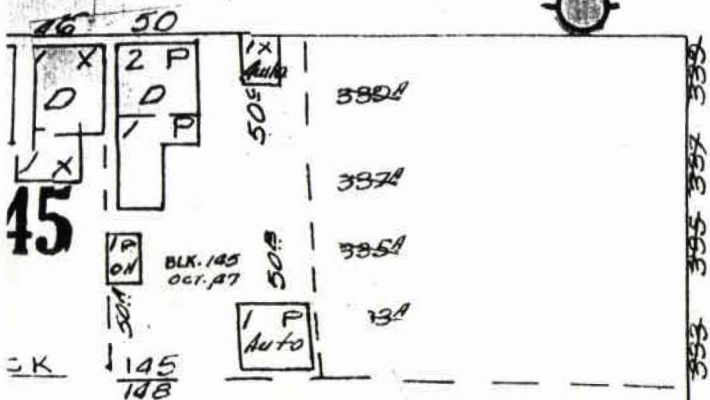
STRACHAN

(40')

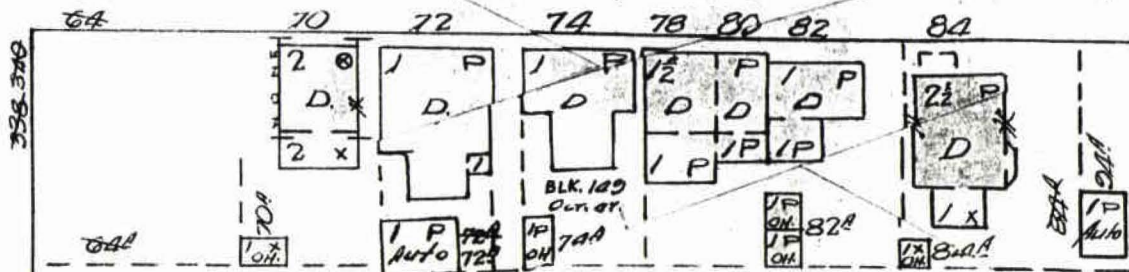
EAST

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MONTREAL AND TORONTO

66



60'



Railways

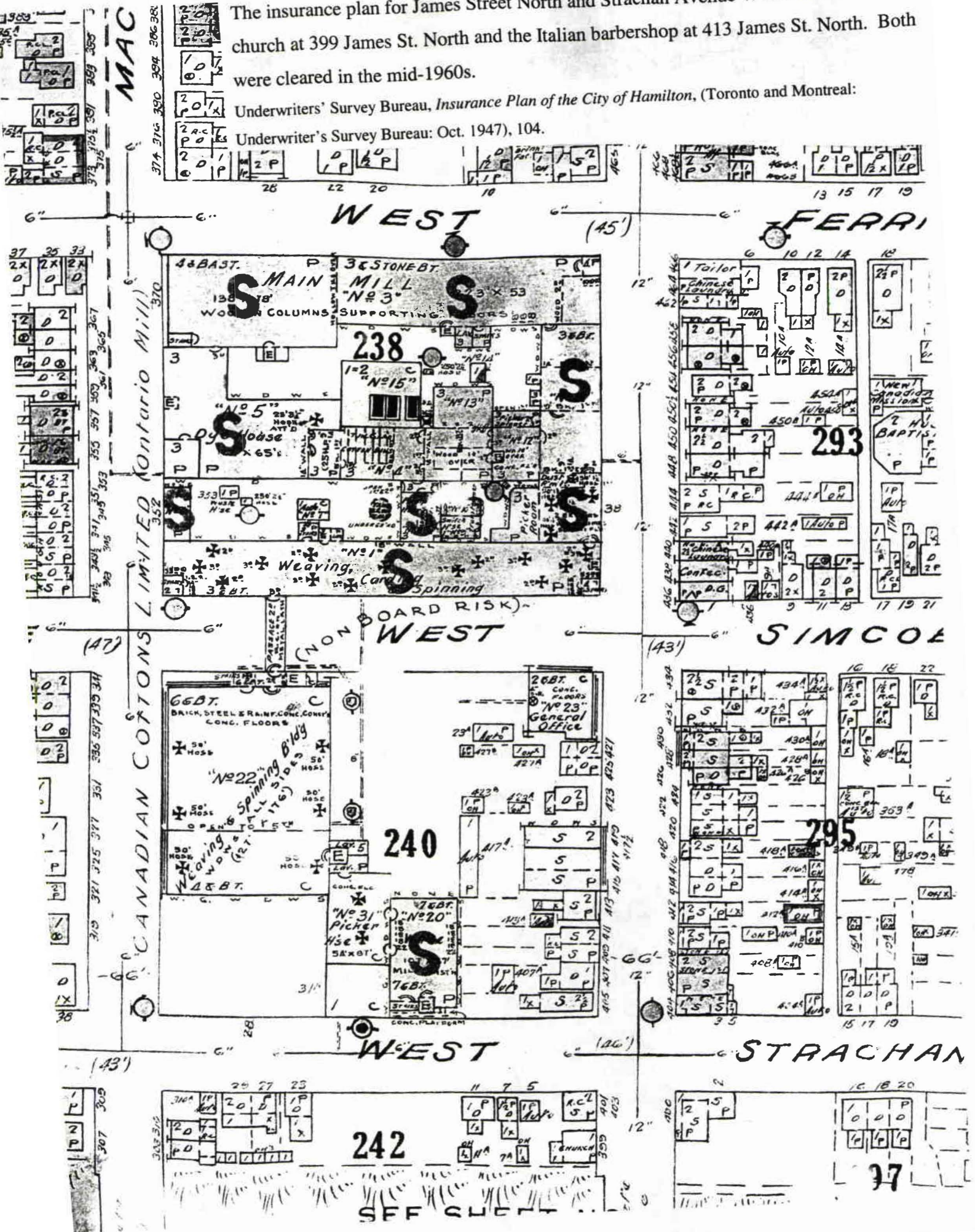
145) National

te Bridge

The insurance plan for the City of Hamilton for 1947 shows the laneway between 72 and 74 Stachan East and the small dwellings behind the houses on Strachan, above the tracks. Underwriters' Survey Bureau, *Insurance Plan of the City of Hamilton*, (Toronto and Montreal: Underwriter's Survey Bureau: Oct. 1947), 103.

The insurance plan for James Street North and Strachan Avenue West shows the Italian church at 399 James St. North and the Italian barbershop at 413 James St. North. Both were cleared in the mid-1960s.

Underwriters' Survey Bureau, *Insurance Plan of the City of Hamilton, (Toronto and Montreal: Underwriter's Survey Bureau: Oct. 1947), 104.*



In addition to the clearance of Strachan Ave and the blocks for the school and park site, the city planned to demolish the Canadian Cotton Mill buildings in the James-Ferrie-MacNab-Simcoe block. Modernist planners did not want to encourage industrial uses mixed up with residential land use. This large brick nineteenth century industrial building filled the whole block. The mill stopped production in December, 1959 and the property was sold in February, 1960 through Marshall Lounsbury Realty Ltd to undisclosed buyers. The property was resold for \$195,000 to a group of Hamilton businessmen and the sale drew protests at City Hall because the city had failed to secure the land for urban renewal. Council discussed expropriation of the mill in November, 1964 and finally expropriated the property for \$465,000 in September, 1967 at which point the large brick structure was demolished.

The mill site was joined to the Continue-flo industrial site across Simcoe Street and the combined blocks, which now stretched from Ferrie to Strachan and from James to MacNab, were used for the construction of 106 public housing units. The plan was to have these units ready to accommodate the families removed from their homes during the clearance of the central park and the perimeter road areas. Unfortunately the clearance of these areas was begun in 1965 but the low income family housing units were not ready for occupancy until 1969. Today the units are tidy monotonous brick townhouses which look like a typical public housing project from the 1960s and one cannot help but wonder what a more imaginative, and less destructive, approach to urban renewal would have given the North End and its place in history if the nineteenth century mill had been retained and converted into condominium-style units for public housing.

The Macassa Lodge site, in the Guise-Catherine-Brock-John block overlooking the bay, was also part of the first stage of the North End Renewal project. It was rezoned for multiple dwellings. The three acres of land was owned by the city of Hamilton and the plan was to sell it to private developers who would build apartments on the site. In March, 1966 the land was sold to Rescom Construction to build two apartment buildings, which would be known as Marina Towers. Council debated the sale because the harbour commission was interested in the land for future dock expansion. Urban Renewal Chairman Kenneth Soble cautioned Council against changing the Urban Renewal scheme. "I'm very much afraid if we get into anything approaching re-planning we will



Cotton Mill Site Today.

Top: Public Housing on Ferrie St. Bottom: Victorian houses on MacNab which faced the mill. (photos by author)



be in very serious difficulties,” Soble told the councilors. Any opposition was muffled for fear that the great scheme and multi-million dollar private developments for downtown’s urban renewal plans, announced in 1963, would be scuttled. “It is vital,” Soble said, “that citizens are assured they can trust city urban renewal authorities”. Soble and his Committee were unwilling to hear any other proposals which might threaten the master plan for the north end they had been working on for seven years. They suggested that the plan was finely tuned, with all the components inter-connected and that the bayfront apartment buildings were a key part of the whole north end renewal plan.²⁹

Another tower, three block from the Marina Towers, at the foot of MacNab Street was also built under the Urban Renewal scheme. Named after the Chairman, the Kenneth D. Soble Towers was an apartment building designed for 175 elderly Hamiltonians.

In addition to the large housing projects and massive clearances, the Urban Renewal Committee had individual houses of a suspicious nature inspected by Hamilton’s building, health and fire departments. If the houses did not meet the health and safety standards they would be acquired by the city and destroyed if the houses were considered beyond repair. Called spot clearance, this approach meant that substandard homes within a city block would be destroyed, a new house would be constructed, either privately or with public funds, and the expectation was that the surrounding neighbours would be inspired to keep their houses in good condition or their house might face the same fate.

A final element to the Stage I plans for the North End included the construction of a sub-trunk sanitary sewer. Up until the mid-1960s the combined sanitary and storm sewers emptied into the bay. The new sewer would accommodate the new multiple dwellings planned for the area and updated the separation of the storm sewers from the sanitary sewers in accordance with the city’s long range plans for the sewage system. The budget for the upgrading of the sewer system was \$664,000 while the budget for the budget for the land clearances an expropriations was \$576.000, giving a total cost of \$1,240,000 – half to be paid by the federal government and the rest divided between the province and the city.

²⁹ “Harbor Commission Land Bid Rejected”, *Hamilton Spectator*, March 2, 1966

These elements of the first phase of the scheme were not all complete by 1966 but at least were well underway. At this stage in the urban renewal plan a shift was occurring in the city's approach to urban renewal and in the amount of government money available to carry out urban renewal plans. In 1965 the city hired Toronto urban planner Murray Jones to study the North End block by block to determine what the first study might have ignored and if further clearance was necessary. Jones had prepared the downtown redevelopment plan which was released in 1963. In his Interim report which was released in June, 1966, he suggested that the role of his planners was to "formulate a general plan for the area and to ascertain the action which could be taken without prejudice to, or conflict with, the ultimate scheme."³⁰ The focus was still to be the condition of the buildings but the references to clearance were downplayed. He was to be "both a guide to a continuing urban renewal program and to the preparation of the overall scheme."³¹ A firm of consulting engineers had surveyed housing conditions in the North End in 1965 but Jones questioned their results and did his own survey of the district. His policy was to retain

as much as possible of the existing single-family and semi-detached housing. Removal of housing in fair or good condition is only recommended where substantial blight has affected the majority of the block and where reuse proposals are incompatible with retention of the few houses so classified.³²

Jones did not support the city's hopes for more private investment in the North End and he recommended the construction of more public housing.

When Jones began his study the City's Urban Renewal department's staff consisted of a Director of Urban Renewal, an executive assistant, a project manager, two relocation officers, a community worker, an urban renewal clerk, secretarial staff and a handy man. Jones recommended the addition of three new positions: a rehabilitation officer, a secretary and a clerk. The addition of a rehabilitation officer is significant because it marks a new concern with retaining housing rather than clearance. In previous North End reports, rehabilitation was mentioned but not given the same prominence as the

³⁰ Murray V. Jones and Associates, *Interim Report North End Urban Renewal Scheme* (Hamilton: City of Hamilton, June 1966), 2.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*, 13.

concern for blight and clearance. The 1968 report reprinted lengthy quotations concerning rehabilitation from a Metropolitan Toronto study on urban renewal, published in 1966. The section began with “the improvement of existing housing which is in a relatively poor condition is an essential component of the required renewal program”. In ten years the planners had repositioned their approach to renewal in the North End from clearance to rehabilitation. While public opposition to the tearing down of old buildings might have had some influence, financial restraints were also causing some second thought. The Jones report acknowledged Hamilton’s commitment to urban renewal through the allocation of funds in its 1967 capital budget which allowed for the continuation of the renewal work in the downtown area, York St. in addition to the North End. The report mentioned how difficult it was for the city to find the funding with so many “conflicting demands” for capital expenditures and that the city was limited by the amount of debt it could take on. The available funds, the report continued, were based on the estimate of the implementation plan from 1963, which was \$9.2 million. Jones asked for an additional \$17,680,000 for his revised urban renewal proposals.

In August, 1969, Murray Jones and Associates issued an addendum to their renewal scheme. The perimeter road, which was now part of a proposed east-west expressway, would have to be postponed for lack of funding. Instead of using the new perimeter road to divert through traffic, the planners decided to widen Wellington Street and Victoria Avenue, which were outside the North End, to keep the traffic out of the neighbourhood. “The estimated construction cost of the Perimeter Road had risen substantially in the period from 1963 to 1968 (from \$697,000 to 1,700,000) due partially to rising construction costs and also due to higher standards for the road itself and to more detailed engineering studies,”³³ admitted the addendum. The plan was reported as needing an additional \$19 million to make the improvements to the roads, upgrade the sewage system, build the dock road around Eastwood Park, new apartments along the shore and a another road along the waterfront which would be called a waterfront parkway.

Many of these ideas seemed like distant future dreams but the cancellation of the perimeter road rubbed salt into the wounds of those people who were forced to leave their

³³ Murray V. Jones and Associates, *North End Urban Renewal Scheme Addendum*, (Hamilton: Urban Renewal Committee, August 1969), 2.



Top: an example of a home built during the Urban Renewal program (on the left) beside an older home on Hughson Street. They are across the street from the cleared site.



Bottom: The corner of James St. North and Strachan Ave. were the Italian Christian Church once stood. (photos by author)

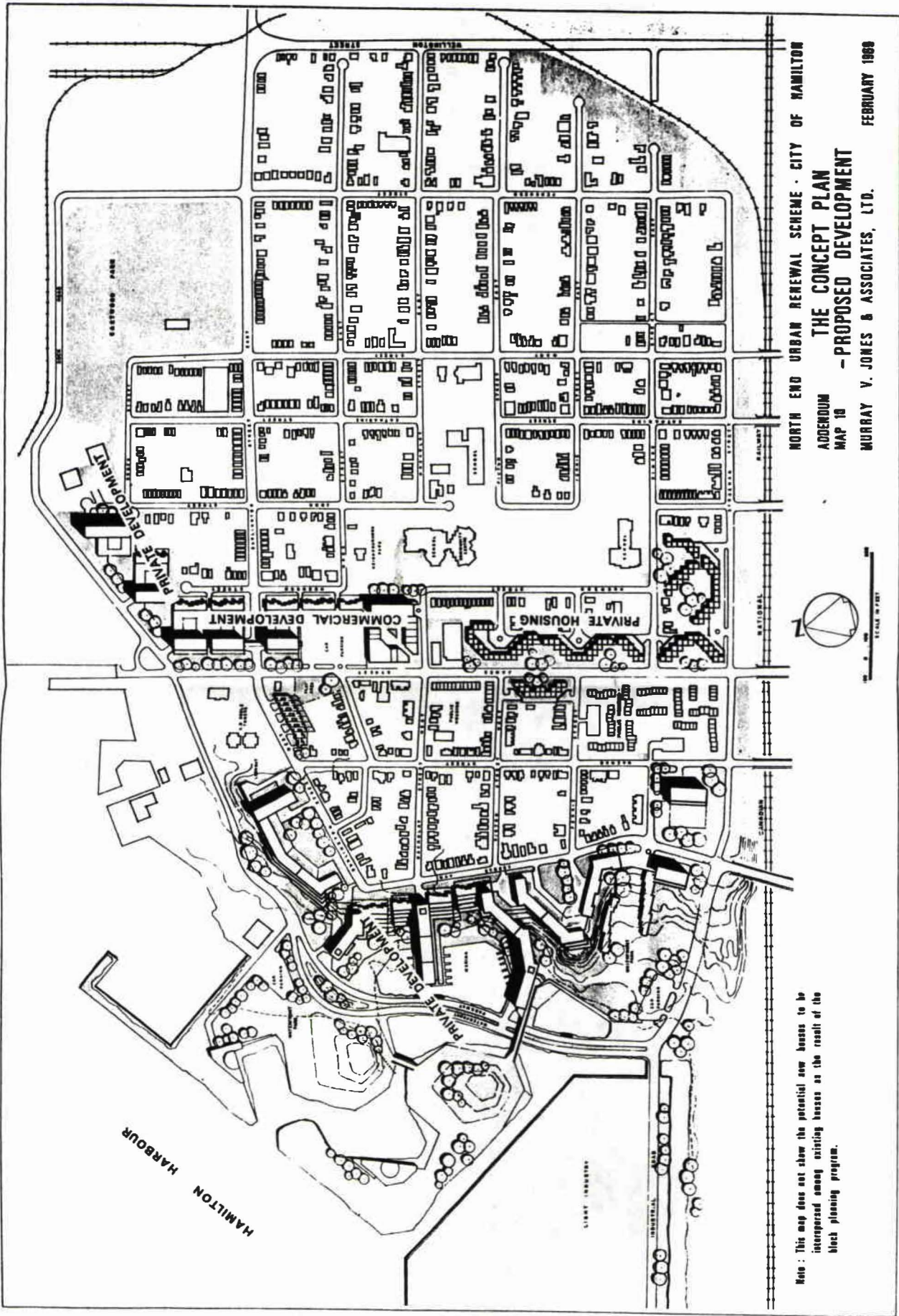
Strachan Ave. homes. "If they had put the road through it wouldn't have been so bad," Violet Burholder was quoted in the *Hamilton Spectator* as saying 1977, as she reflected on the trauma of being forced to leave her home on Strachan Avenue in 1968. Ada Hooton who also was forced by the city to leave her neighbourhood said: "You feel like you are losing half of you. All your friends are going. Everybody moves away."³⁴

McMaster University sociology professors Franklin J. Henry and Peter C. Pineo examined the experience of those north end residents forced to leave their homes for the construction of the perimeter highway. The report, entitled "The Consequences of Relocation: A Study of Hamilton's North End", was based on interviews conducted with residents before their relocation from July 1965 through June 1968 and after their relocation from June 1968 through June 1969. The study looked at the "short run effects" of the transition. It found that the relocatees believed urban renewal would bring suffering particularly for older people, home owners, the poor, those with large families and businesses in the north end. Their opinions held steady after their relocation. Seventy-five per cent of the relocatees felt the suffering was worthwhile for the construction of a school, while 61 per cent thought the building of a throughway made it all worthwhile. "If people are to be put out of their homes they will of course feel better about it if they think they are being required to move for a good reason," the report stated. It went on to say that 53 % felt that they had been treated unfairly, particularly around negotiations over the value of their homes. They suggested that the urban renewal officials behaved in a dictatorial manner, unwilling to negotiate fairly, and that the city should have given them more help in finding new homes, given that it was the city who was destroying their houses. Many relocatees told the interviewers that the urban renewal experience had made them lose faith in the integrity of city officials.³⁵

In addition to gathering answers for their questionnaire, interviewers were asked to rate the homemaker's housekeeping abilities in an effort to determine whether the houses planned for clearance were dirty, as was so often suggested in the literature on urban renewal of the time. Eighty-five percent in the pre-relocation interviews and eighty-seven percent in the post-relocation interviews were rated as being good to very good

³⁴ "A chance passed up the by city," *Hamilton Spectator*, October 15, 1977

³⁵ Franklin J. Henry. "The Consequences of Relocation: A Study of Hamilton's North End," (Hamilton: Dept. of Sociology, McMaster University, 1974), 94.



Note: This map does not show the potential new houses to be interspersed among existing houses as the result of the block planning program.

NORTH END URBAN RENEWAL SCHEME - CITY OF HAMILTON
 ADDENDUM
 MAP 10
 - PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT
 MURRAY V. JONES & ASSOCIATES, LTD.
 FEBRUARY 1968

housekeepers. Knowing that the houses were in fact well-kept one cannot help but wonder if they houses said to be substandard were really in that bad a condition.³⁶

A very interesting component of the report were 42 personal accounts of the urban renewal experience. The accounts told of inconvenience, fear, serious debt, nervous breakdowns, divorce and a great deal of unhappiness experienced by people forced to leave the street they called home. The heart-wrenching individual stories are painful and city officials responded by saying that things had changed and that urban renewal had undergone a change in philosophy. By 1973, Mayor Vic Copps was quoted as saying “we are encouraging more rehabilitation (of old houses) than demolition and this is partly because of difficulties caused for people by a large-scale type of relocation.” He went on to say that “previously a whole area had to be designated for urban renewal whether or not some homes were in reasonably good condition. This caused some difficulties, especially for older people who had their roots very deep in the area.”³⁷ Another city official, community development commissioner Reg Monaghan disputed the report saying that the individual anecdotes “have no place in what is supposedly a scholarly, scientific work.” He countered their stories with one of his own regarding a fig tree which belonged to a property owner on Mary Street who was paid \$250 by the city to cover the cost of moving the tree and the construction of a small green house around it. “It seems the resident brought the tree with him when he emigrated from the old country and it was this matter of sentimental attachment which led the city to go beyond what was required.”³⁸

Their study was funded by the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation and supported by the Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton. In many ways, Dr. Henry’s report upheld and confirmed the Council’s fears for the elderly and the poor which were expressed in its 1963 report, two years before the demolitions began.

A *Hamilton Spectator* editorial, defending urban renewal in the North End from Henry and Pineo’s report, said that the scheme “had stopped the spread of blight in one of Hamilton’s oldest neighbourhoods” and “was the first major development project in which planners talked things over with the people involved before making firm

³⁶ Ibid, 97.

³⁷ “Renewal Different now, hardship queried,” *Hamilton Spectator*, April 4, 1973.

³⁸ “Report criticized as ‘far-fetched and unscholarly,’” *Hamilton Spectator*, July 5 1973

recommendations.”³⁹ Gil Simmons, a resident of the North End, responded to the editorial by suggesting that the residents did not in effect have much opportunity to comment on what was being done to their community. The public meetings were held in the drill hall of the HMCS Star where “before 300 or 400 residents the planners outlined, and somehow these residents were supposed to comment on, maps and drawings and proposals which no professional would accept without investigation.”⁴⁰ Faced with public relations experts and expert planners, the residents felt out maneuvered. When an official came to their door to tell them they had to leave, most felt they had no other option but to pack up and go.

The North End Resident’s Organization (NERO) also conducted a door-to-door survey from November 1976 until June 1977 to try to understand how the residents were affected by urban renewal. Their results were very similar to the Henry and Pineo study. People were confused and anxious by the process; they felt cheated by the officials; and, for the most part, unhappy with the results but still devoted to life in the North End. NERO’s study discussed the issue of churches and how they suffered because members of their congregations lost their houses and left the area. The study also discussed the loss of stores along James St. North. The loss of a hardware store struck the residents as particularly ironic, given that they were being told to fix up their homes but the store with the tools was torn down.

During the 1970s the *Hamilton Spectator* carried articles both critical and complimentary of the urban renewal process. Criticism focused on the large amount of money spent on the scheme which did not achieve very much for the community. The misspent money to clear the houses for the road, the missed chance at not buying the cotton mill when it was first for sale, the bitterness felt by local residents and the lack of growth in the north end after the renewal process was over all were remembered in an article called “North-End Nightmare”.⁴¹ Published on the same day was another article, claiming that Urban Renewal was a great success overall despite the harm done to certain individuals. Alderman Bill McCulloch and community development commissioner Ed Kowalski said that the “most beneficial effects of renewal were the removal of blighted

³⁹ Editorial, *Hamilton Spectator*, July 12, 1973

⁴⁰ “North End urban renewal,” *Hamilton Spectator*, July 20, 1973

⁴¹ “North End Nightmare,” *Hamilton Spectator*, October 15, 1977

housing, sharply reduced traffic flow, better public housing for seniors, improved engineering services and better schools and recreation space.” Former commissioner Reg Monaghan believed that if the federal government hadn’t pulled out its funds in 1970 the renewal plans would have continued and the north end would be improved.⁴²

Clearly the opposing points of view, which were first voiced in the early 1960s when the scheme for the North End was in the planning stages, continued to persist long after the urban renewal process was over. There is no dispute however that the majority of individuals forced to leave their homes suffered financially because they had to pay more for their new accommodations, whether paying rent or a mortgage.⁴³ Henry and Pineo’s report suggested that the way the city purchased the homes was unfair because they only gave the owners the market value which wasn’t enough for residents to find suitable accommodation elsewhere, in a market full of people recently ousted from their homes due to urban renewal. The initial plan to have public housing available when the old houses were destroyed hadn’t worked out. The professors reported that sixty per cent of the results of the relocation were negative and that the city failed to provide adequate alternative housing to all those who lost their homes. Of course the money used for purchasing houses along the perimeter road was wasted because the site still stands empty of the homes which were demolished.

More than money was lost. The urban planners’ goal was to help the north end to flourish once again. They thought they could plan a residential community where people would want to live and disregarded the people who were already living there and the buildings which reflected the neighbourhood’s past. They cleared 412 buildings and provided 449 alternative dwellings. Instead of the population increasing, it decreased from 8,362 people in 1961 to 7,355 in 1971. In many ways the planners did not understand that this strong working class community functioned well and had a very real sense of neighbourhood and belonging. They projected an idealized future for the community and were not really interested in the present or past reality of the North End. The misunderstanding can be attributed to a class division and a different view of what a neighbourhood should be. The modernist planners had a model of a well-planned, clean

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ City of Hamilton, *North End Relocation summary 1965-66*.

and efficient community in mind and eventually wanted to add more highways and tall apartments to the district. A Hamilton politician expressed the planners' frustrations when he said that "in a democracy, urban renewal falls short of efficiency but that is the way it has to be."⁴⁴ The planners thought a more efficient system would have allowed for more open spaces, more highrises and another highway along the bay front, changing the neighbourhood so that it would have no longer resembled the North End, which is probably what the planners wanted in the first place.

Today urban renewal is still part of the community. Residents remember their impotence when faced with the urban renewal officials. Flat open spaces have silenced the history of some architecturally significant buildings which were part of the community's industrial past. While there is sadness in some memories for the community they lost to urban renewal, the North End remains a neighbourhood with a strong sense of its own identity. Unfortunately the urban renewal planners did not recognize the value of this working class community when they insisted on applying modernist planning ideas to improve the old neighbourhood. Their optimistic vision of the future, fueled by the business and political agenda to expand the urban renewal program into the city's downtown, and the funds which were forthcoming from the federal and provincial governments all conspired to bring clearance and disruption to the North End. Undoubtedly some of the neighbourhood's homes and schools could have used some rehabilitation and the traffic needed to be controlled, but the complete destruction of blocks of old homes was uncalled for and caused a deep wound to the community which the North End still carries.

⁴⁴ Jack Jones, Secretary of the Board of Control City of Hamilton, at a YMCA talk on 'Hamilton's Changing Urban Scene...what are the Human Implications', Hamilton, Ontario, April 16, 1968.

Chapter 5
Commercial
Modernist Dreams Turn Sour

While the Urban Renewal Program was initially about improving housing conditions, Hamilton, from the very start, wanted to find urban renewal funds to improve its downtown commercial core – an area that was in decline during the 1950s due to suburban growth and the increasing popularity of suburban shopping areas. The decline of downtown Hamilton was a major preoccupation for the businessmen's Downtown Association and for city politicians. The idea of bringing in bulldozers to rid Hamilton of its old buildings, which were blamed for Hamilton's decline, and replacing them with modern cement and steel structures was seen as a way of solving Hamilton's problems. The city believed it could turn away from its own history and project itself into the modern age; a new modern plan for the downtown would be all that was needed to guarantee a prosperous future for the ambitious city.

As early as 1957, the Hamilton Downtown Association recognized the potential which federal urban renewal dollars could offer a city wanting drastic change. Hamilton's businessmen began to lobby for an urban renewal study to be carried out as required under the National Housing Act. They believed that the money Hamilton spent on urban renewal would be regained through increased tax revenues due to the modern buildings' higher assessments and the fact that the services for development were already in place. They were convinced that they could fight the allure of the malls of suburbia by bringing pedestrian shopping centres into the urban inner core.¹

Reflecting the businessmen's concerns, Mark David's Urban Renewal Study of 1958 classified Hamilton's downtown as "blighted" and recommended that it be given second priority for renewal, after the more seriously "blighted" cottages on Van Wagner's and Crescent beaches. As a housing study, it had to highlight the housing concerns in the commercial district and reported that there were 786 buildings in the downtown core which contained 1,457 dwellings, 40 per cent of

¹ Milford L. Smith, "Looking at Business," *Hamilton Spectator*, February 2, 1957.

which were apartment units above or behind business premises. The inspectors decided that 39 percent of the buildings containing housing should be cleared.

“The mixture of industrial, commercial and residential uses on the rim of the centre forms an environment quite unsuitable for family living,” David’s study reported and went on to suggest that once the obsolete buildings were pulled down and replaced there would be little room for new homes and that the growing commercial downtown of the future would not be an appropriate place for families with children to live.²

Although recognized as blighted, the downtown was also classified as a commercial zone and so it was not identified as a redevelopment priority by Mark David and his urban renewal officials at the time. Still determined to see the downtown revitalized, the businessmen voiced their support for urban renewal efforts on the waterfront and in the North End while continuing to lobby for changes to the downtown which was described as being “on the brink of decay,”³ by William Zeckendorf, Jr., an American urban renewal expert and President of Webb and Knapp Inc., a real estate development firm. The Downtown Association invited Zeckendorf to address their annual meeting in the summer of 1962. He recommended “complete revitalization of the downtown core” by which he meant clearance. He warned that one cleared block would not solve the problem. “You should expropriate 20 to 30 acres of land in the downtown area,” he told the businessmen and then he suggested that once the old buildings were destroyed and the new constructed there would be space left over for parkland.⁴

Hamilton’s businessmen were inspired by the American experience and continued to lobby for improvements to the downtown. City politicians lobbied the federal government for changes to the urban renewal legislation. Hamilton politician Jack MacDonald, who served on the city’s Board of Control, requested that the federal government get involved with commercial redevelopment instead of only focusing on housing. Addressing the Canadian Federation of Mayors and Municipalities at their annual meeting in Winnipeg, MacDonald called for a new

² Mark P David, *Urban Renewal Study* (Hamilton: City of Hamilton, 1958), 22-23.

³ “Urban Plans ‘Not Enough’,” *Hamilton Spectator*, June 26, 1962.

⁴ Ibid

type of urban renewal which would help to revitalize a city's central business district. He recommended that businesses and governments cooperate to develop a system of guaranteed loans which would go towards block-by-block redevelopment of commercial establishments, with the individual merchants becoming part owners of an up-to-date downtown shopping centre.⁵ In 1964 the federal government would amend the urban renewal legislation to allow for the implementation of civic improvement programs but in the mean time Hamilton's businessmen continued to lobby the city for major redevelopment to the downtown's streets.

In June, 1963 the Hamilton Downtown Association presented Mayor Vic Copps with its plan for future development in the city's core. The elaborate document entitled "Enrich Our Leisure Hours" shows a young female student, a mother holding a baby, a steelworker wearing a white hard hat and a teenage boy with skates over his shoulder all standing in front of a vast expanse of steel mills on Burlington Bay. These people are meant to be good Hamiltonians who need to be culturally enriched and entertained. The Downtown's Association's intention was to start a foundation which would provide the citizens of Hamilton with cultural, scientific and athletic buildings in the centre of the city. Their document called on the "Ambitious City" to

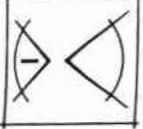
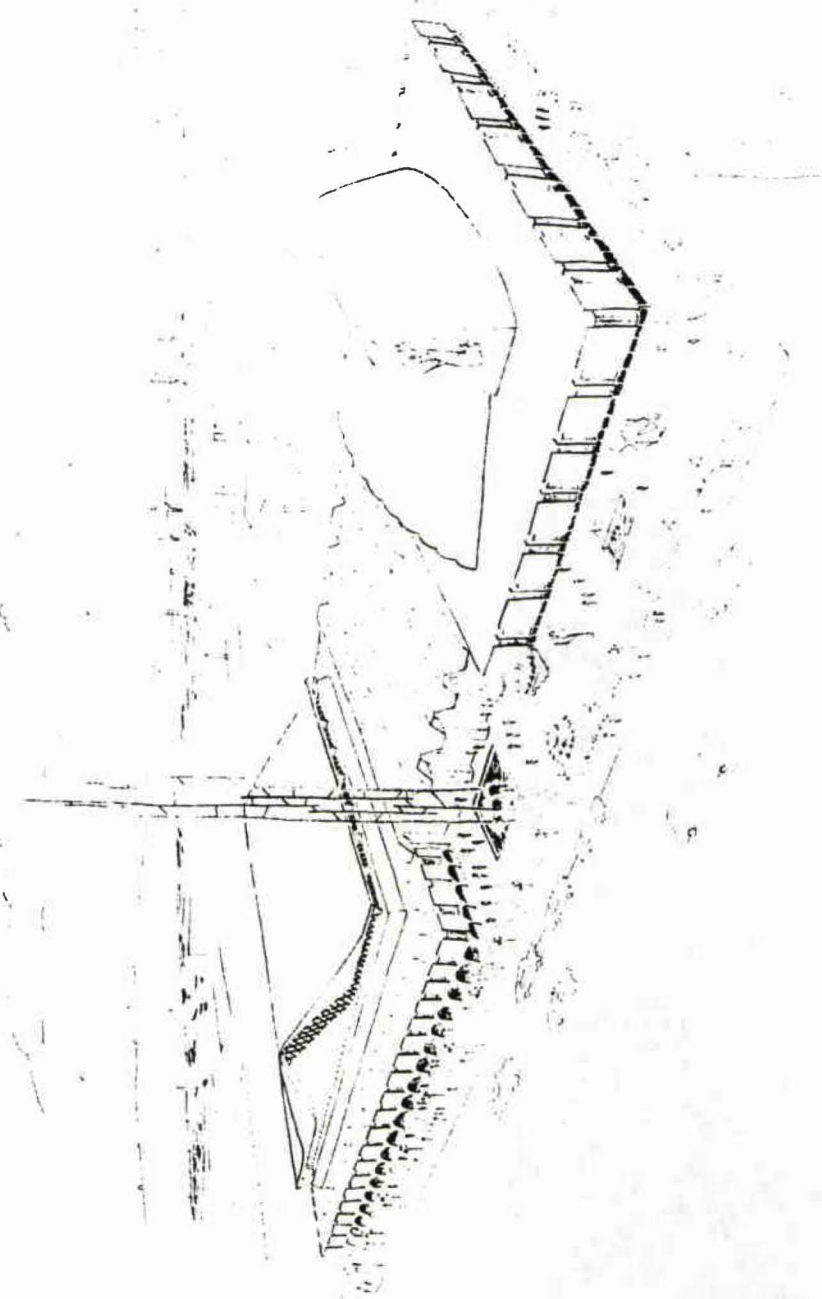
seek fulfillment of its destiny by planning a fully-integrated community whose facilities provide broader opportunities in Hamilton's commercial life, recognize this city's achievements in the field of science and technology and answer the growing need for the cultural development and physical improvement of its people in their leisure hours.⁶

The Association had worked on these plans for two years and hired engineering and architectural consultants to help them design an urban square which would house: an athletic centre with an arena and a bowling alley; an auditorium; a national science and technology centre; and a planetarium. The designs included a steel pylon reaching high above the athletic centre and auditorium reminding

⁵ "Returning the Charm to Downtown," *Hamilton Spectator*, June 14, 1962.

⁶ Hamilton Downtown Association, "Enrich Our Leisure Hours", a presentation to Hamilton City Council, Hamilton Ontario, June, 1963.

ICE-AUDITORIUM AND ATHLETIC CENTRE WITH STEEL PYLON



CIVIC AUDITORIUM - ARIMA
HAMILTON ONTARIO

ROSCOE & M. C. IYER
ARCHITECTS
158 JAMES ST. S. HAMILTON ONT.

everyone of the importance of steel to the industrial city while it reached skywards. The intent was to provide a link to the future and the exciting sky where the Apollo space race to the moon was underway. This pylon would appear in later urban renewal plans. It symbolically connected Hamilton's industrial prowess to the future. The businessmen of the city were grasping at images of the future and of modernity in an effort to save the dying commercial heart of the old industrial city.

This businessmen's scheme was presented two years before the city would officially announce its own urban renewal plans for the downtown core. Two months prior to the Downtown's Association's presentation the city had rejected another plan for a downtown civic centre because the 10 acres needed for the development would have to be expropriated and "the horrible truth" was that the city didn't have the necessary money.⁷ However, the federal government's amendment to the National Housing Act in 1964 allowed for federal money to enter into the equation and Hamilton's City Council formally requested funding from both the federal and provincial governments so that the city could begin an urban renewal study of 1150 acres of central Hamilton. After a long wait and much planning, the realization of the city businessmen's dreams of an urban renewal scheme for the downtown core was suddenly within reach .

While these dreams were fixated on future prosperity and reaching for the stars, the plans for the downtown were very much based in earthbound politics and financial deals. The Salada Tea company was involved in the early plans for the downtown's new civic square. The company had planned to sponsor a planetarium near the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto but when another investor took over the project, Hamilton's Urban Renewal Commissioner Ken Soble suggested that Salada build its planetarium in downtown Hamilton.⁸ The planetarium idea was modern, in fact futuristic; "a platform to the stars" was how the Downtown Association characterized it. It fit in very well with the plan to eradicate the old blocks and create a new urban space with large open areas

⁷ "Horrible Truth' Sinks Civic Plan," *Hamilton Spectator*, March 29, 1963.


⁸ Reg Wheeler, interview by author, Hamilton, Ontario, Thursday June 1, 2004.

surrounding modern buildings filled with offices, shops and hotel rooms in addition to a public library, a theatre-auditorium, a parking garage, an art gallery, a library and an education centre. Mayor Vic Copps called the urban renewal project “the most exciting thing that’s ever happened to Hamilton” and declared that he was so pleased to be able to provide the green space which he claimed was a feature of many European cities.⁹ Unfortunately once the expropriation of land started the process slowed down and Salada ended up withdrawing its promise of \$1 million for the planetarium because the city was not able to keep to its timetable.¹⁰

With or without the planetarium, the city still had aspirations for a grand modern civic square where citizens would gather and around which private developers would want to open new offices and businesses. Toronto planner Murray Jones presented preliminary plans for the Civic Square to city council on April 8, 1965. His plans included the redevelopment of 43 acres in the oldest part of the city. The city endorsed his vision and boldly began with the building of an education centre on Main St. West, across from the newly built city hall. Hamilton made a special arrangement with senior levels of government and the Ontario Municipal Board to begin expropriation of land for the Education Centre in 1965 before the final urban renewal cost-sharing agreements had been worked out for the Civic Square. The education centre on Main and Bay would be the south-western anchor for the development which would extend east to James and north to York St. York street, which had always been the main entrance for Hamilton, would be transformed into a more suitable boulevard for the new improved and very modern city. Widened it would now lead visitors not to the city hall and farmer’s market but to the steel pylon and the civic square, which were to be the new heart and soul of the revived downtown. The rush of enthusiasm coupled with community and business support for this modern civic expanse reflected a promise that the urban renewal plans for the future would benefit the whole community.

⁹ “Blueprint for a city’s dream,” *Hamilton Spectator*, April 9, 1965

¹⁰ Reg Wheeler interview



Surprisingly very little opposition was voiced to the wholesale destruction of 12 blocks of downtown real estate, which included many buildings dating back to 1846 and many more of the late nineteenth century in addition to the removal of a major meeting place and commercial hub known as market square.¹¹ Market Square was where Hamiltonians had shopped and connected with each other in the large farmer's market since the mid-1800s, and it was watched over by the venerable old city hall, which had been built in 1890. The urban renewal planners were determined to build over the square and that section of York St. which pushed the renewal area's boundary to a neat square edge at Merrick St. After listening to the new plans Alderman Stan Dudzic, who had a law office on York St. which was slated for urban renewal, joined the enthusiastic response by calling the plan "exciting" and then expressed his regret for the destruction of so much history with a touch of resignation which seemed to naturally accompany the advance of modernity. "The disappearance of York St. between Bay and James will mean the end of an era in Hamilton," he said. "A lot of tradition and history will be lost but it had to come".¹²

The planners' disregard for Hamilton's historic downtown was further made evident in the Urban Renewal Study for Central Hamilton which was presented to the city by Murray V. Jones in September, 1965. The study area encompassed Victoria Avenue in the east to Highway 403 in the west; approximately 1,150 acres which included most of downtown Hamilton and the west end. This study area included most of the neighbourhoods which Hamilton's first urban renewal study of 1958 had recommended for redevelopment. This time 11 per cent of the houses were categorized as "poor" while 74 per cent were deemed "fair", a classification which was very broad and included those buildings "needing only a coat of paint to those requiring extensive rehabilitation if not outright clearance."¹³ The planners examined land use in the study area and the conditions of the buildings in order to recommend future urban renewal projects. While

¹¹no reports of opposition found, confirmed by Herman Terpstra interview, June 2, 2004.

¹²"Blueprint for a city's dream," *Hamilton Spectator*, April 9, 1965.

¹³ Murray V. Jones and Associates, *Central Hamilton Urban Renewal Study*, (Hamilton: Urban Renewal Committee, September 1965), 43.

acknowledging that the renewal area consisted of some of the city's oldest neighbourhoods with many of the buildings constructed over a century before, the planners saw no interest in preserving them despite their long history in the city. "Virtually all of these are of little or no historical or architectural interest and their preservation cannot be recommended on these grounds alone."¹⁴ The planners managed however to again recognize the Architectural Conservancy's concern for some buildings which were the best architectural examples of their type and list these ten buildings in their study. The list included Whitehern and Dundurn Castle as well as the Rae Brothers warehouse at 154 York St which was built in the 1850s as a warehouse and was a "good example of a commercial building in a late Georgian style of architecture."¹⁵ Clearly being recognized as worthy of preservation was not enough to guarantee survival, for the old Georgian warehouse was in the way of the expanded boulevard.

*
what to
save?

At this point it must be pointed out that urban renewal alone was not to blame for the destruction of some of the finest old buildings in Hamilton's downtown core. City politicians were perfectly capable of destroying treasures without urban renewal funds: the Birk's building on the corner of King and James, was built in 1870 and was an example of Gothic revival architecture and came down quickly to avoid any controversy;¹⁶ the market stalls and buttery building were destroyed in 1959; and the beautiful red brick city hall which was built in 1889 was destroyed by the city in 1968. Perhaps the destruction of these buildings had inured people to future destruction or perhaps it was the promise of modernity and the allure of progress which stopped people from considering what they were losing. Former mayor and politician Jack MacDonald embodied the modernist spirit. A young man in 1960, he had no time for sentimental feelings regarding the Victorian buildings. He thought the Birks building was "as ugly as sin" and called the old City Hall a "dreadful building".¹⁷ He wanted an well-run city hall and felt that if you wanted to preserve a building you should "take a picture of it

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¹⁴ Ibid, 4

¹⁵ Ibid, 5

¹⁶ Reg Wheeler, interview

¹⁷ Bill Freeman, *Hamilton: A People's History*, (Toronto: James Lorimer and Co. 2001), 156

The five proposed urban renewal areas for the centre of Hamilton

Jones, Murray V. and Associates, *Central Hamilton Urban Renewal Study*, (Hamilton: Urban Renewal Committee, September 1985).

and put it on the wall” but a city needed to be stream-lined and efficient.¹⁸ The *Hamilton Spectator* envisioned the old Hamilton growing up into “the modern, attractive, clean and pulsating giant it has long been destined to become.”¹⁹ This sense of destiny and future greatness convinced everyone that a major disruption to many citizens’ way of life and the destruction of an historic downtown was worth it. “Nothing should be allowed to stand in the way of making the dream come true in our lifetime.”²⁰

The dream, as presented by planner Murray V. Jones, consisted of: an east-west freeway along Barton Street, the Civic Square Plan and the York Street scheme, in addition to three more possible future urban renewal areas put forth for consideration for redevelopment by Jones’ survey of central Hamilton. For the purposes of the study, the Barton freeway was considered non-negotiable and was printed on all renewal maps as an accepted and important way of moving people across the city. The buildings standing on land required for the freeway’s right of way were not included in the study. Although never built, it was accepted by modernist planners as a necessary artery to move people across the city efficiently. Jones’ plan explained that the two renewal areas “most urgently in need of renewal” were the Civic Square plan and the York Street plan. Both schemes already had detailed plans accompanying them and would have their own studies completed as required by the legislation. In addition Jones presented three other possible areas for renewal. According to his study, two required urgent action: the area south of King and west of Locke St, between Canada and Breadlabane Streets and the area north of King St. to Robert St and east of Mary St. to Ferguson. The additional area north of Main to the railway tracks, between Wellington and Catherine, was presented as being an area worthy of consideration for renewal. This “magnificent plan”, as the *Spectator* called it, was presented at a golden moment for urban renewal in Hamilton.

The spring, summer and fall of 1965 were urban renewal’s glory days. Confederation Park had opened to replace the blighted Van Wagner’s and

¹⁸ Jack Macdonald, interview.

¹⁹ “A Plan to Inspire,” *Hamilton Spectator*, October 27, 1965.

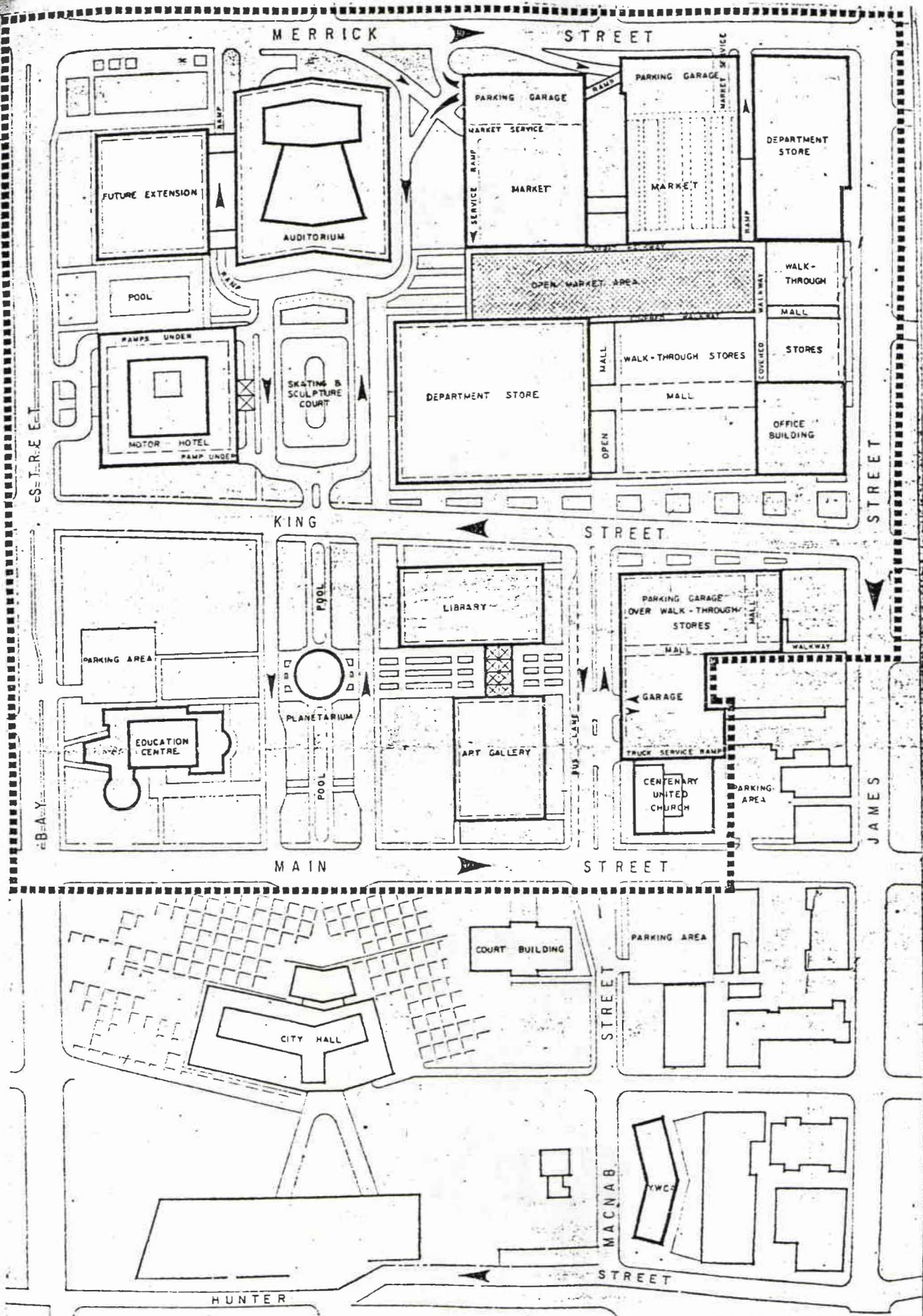
²⁰ Ibid.

Crescent Beaches, the bulldozers were clearing out blocks of houses in the North End so new schools and a clean, modern play area could be established and five new schemes were in the works for central Hamilton, which had been the businessmen's intent all along and recognized as a priority by city politicians. Old buildings were coming down to be replaced by modern structures which would be surrounded by clean open space. Freeways were planned to whisk citizens across the city. The future, for everyone who wanted to believe in progress (and just about everybody did), seemed very rosy. The Jones' plan was going to "leapfrog Hamilton into the 21st century".²¹ Projections were made that the city's tax revenues would go up because Hamilton was replacing old, blighted buildings with new ones and most importantly the new civic square would offer the city a new focus for civic life. The tall office buildings would tower over trees, long pools of water and lovely gardens. The planning consultants had said that the open spaces were vital to the project because they would allow fresh air into the downtown core.²²

While the city enjoyed projecting its modernist aspirations onto a prosperous future, the politicians were faced with new difficulties around expropriating properties, finding a developer to take on the task of building the Civic Square and dealing with three levels of government bureaucracy. The city watched and waited for action in the downtown core, sustained by the unmitigated enthusiasm which the plans engendered. It was not until November of 1967 that a final cost-sharing agreement was signed by the three different governments and the city could start purchasing land and demolishing the buildings. The education centre, which through a special government arrangement was built before the other buildings, opened the day before the cost-sharing agreements were announced. A 1967 *Spectator* editorial reaffirmed the newspaper's belief in the possibility of a transformation for the downtown core and dismissed any concern for the

²¹ "Bold Downtown Plan Unveiled," *Hamilton Spectator*, April 9, 1965.

²² Ibid.



vic Square Plans, 1965. Note: pools, gardens and open air market.

"Old Downtown Plan Unveiled," *Hamilton Spectator*, April 9, 1965.

Victorian blocks. "It is the core that has been rotting and whatever nostalgia there might be for the buildings of another era, there could be none here."²³

The city chose a Hamilton contractor Joseph M. Pigott, president of First Wentworth Ltd which was connected to his family's Pigott Construction Company to build the square instead of the more experienced David Philpott of Triton Centres Ltd, the builder of Toronto's successful Yorkdale Mall. The politicians chose the hometown boy whose father had constructed the Pigott office tower on James St. and whose grandfather constructed the old city hall.²⁴ Given that destroying slums was the key to understanding urban renewal, Pigott said the right thing about his hometown: "I wouldn't be exaggerating to say that downtown Hamilton was a slum. It's dirty, shabby and rundown."²⁵ And then, of course, he promised to change the city's future by rebuilding the civic square like the city of Pittsburgh did 15 years earlier. "If it's done right, the centre of the city will have a continuous flow of architecture which complement each other, rather than a hodge-podge of creations." He pinned his hopes for the downtown's revival on a 20-storey office building which he said would help "densify" the core. His family firm had just finished constructing Mies van der Rohe's modern Toronto-Dominion Centre in downtown Toronto which gave Hamilton even more encouragement that the city was on the right track.

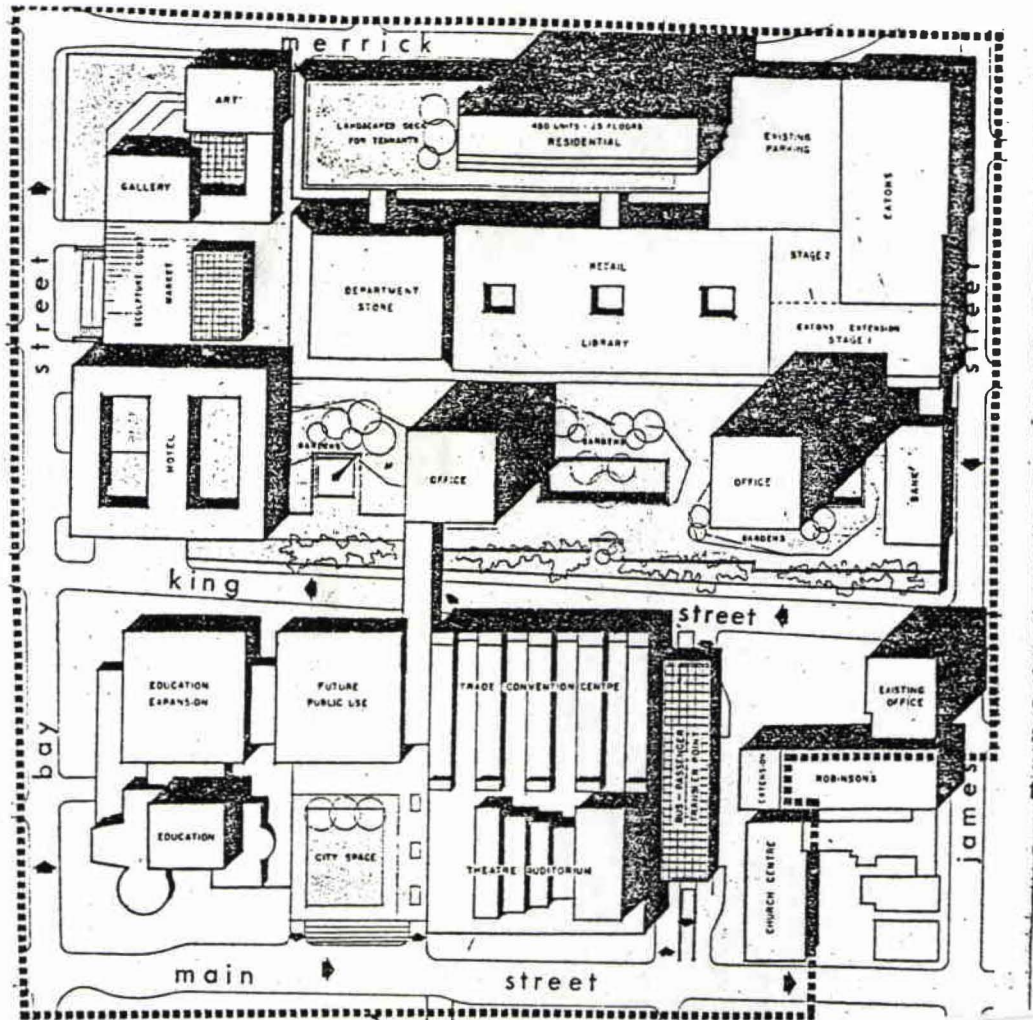
In June, 1968, merchants and tenants along King Street were informed that they had six months to vacate their buildings. Most occupants had been aware of the city's plans since 1965 when the urban renewal plan for central Hamilton was published but because of the bureaucracy's changing plans and timetables they were surprised and quite bitter that they had to leave with such short notice.²⁶ The types of business which were to close to make room for the office tower included: restaurants, banks, barbershops, bookstores, shoe stores, a bakery, butchers, a grocery store, a corsetry, a milliner, hardware stores, optometrist, clothing stores

²³ Editorial, *Hamilton Spectator*, September 9, 1967.

²⁴ Jack Macdonald, interview by author, Hamilton, Ontario, June 5, 2004.

²⁵ "We've got to densify; City Centre a Slum", *Hamilton Spectator*, December 14, 1967

²⁶ Robert Harry Riddet, "Urban Renewal as a Catalyst of Change in Retail Business: The Case of Civic Square, Hamilton, Ontario" (master's thesis, University of Western Ontario, September 1969), 42.



Civic Square Plans, 1969 Note absence of pools, gardens and open air market.

"Hamilton square with square a heartache for some residents,"Globe and Mail, May 6, 1969

and beauty salons. Robert Ridett, who studied the two city blocks along King St which were expropriated in 1968 and 1969 for his MA thesis, described the buildings as “functionally obsolete in their original residential uses and had been converted with varying degrees of success to commercial and industrial uses.”²⁷ The old buildings did not have enough storage space or parking facilities and they were not able to expand vertically above the first floor so they were not seen as economically viable and no one complained about their demise.²⁸ Sadly no one considered how to make use of the buildings to preserve them for what they were and for what they represented by creating a pedestrian mall or turning them into interesting office blocks while allowing the old merchants to continue their businesses. “The stores and residents will go, but so will the filthy back lanes, the grubby roof tops and the decrepit faces of the second and third floors,” reported the Spectator, “And like a phoenix rising from the ashes will grow a concrete skyscraper – the temple of the 20th century living.”²⁹ Hamilton’s view of the twentieth century had no place for the old and Ridett’s master’s thesis concluded that urban renewal deprived the old business merchants of the advantages they had incurred having developed their businesses over many years. In fact, after urban renewal 55 per cent of the old owner-occupied businesses failed, while only 29 per cent of the new businesses and chain stores failed to survive their removal from their downtown sites. It was difficult for an independent barber or bookstore to relocate to a mall; as much as they would have liked to move their store into the mall, they weren’t permitted to.³⁰

Ironically, the city provided the merchants with a temporary steel mall on both sides of Park St. between King and Main during the construction period. The Spectator boasted that Hamilton was the first Canadian city to try to locate stores into temporary buildings during urban renewal construction.³¹ Called “Civic Square Mall”, Park street was closed to traffic and the 11 businesses located in the 500 square feet units, planned to move into the new shopping complex when

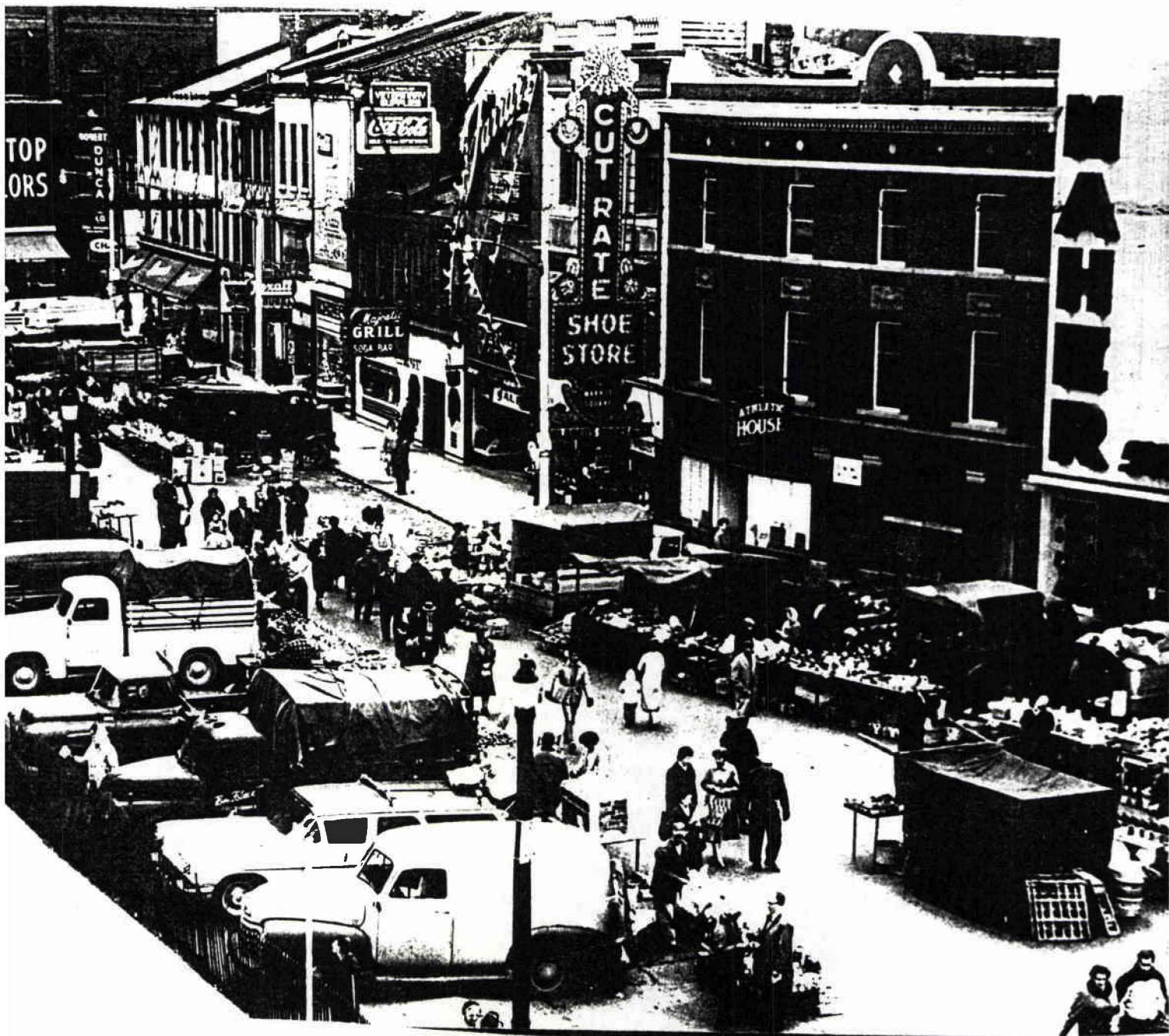
²⁷ *ibid*, 23

²⁸ Herman Turkstra, interview by author, Hamilton, Ontario, June 2, 2004

²⁹ “Time, Gentlemen Please,” *Hamilton Spectator*, Feb. 1 1969

³⁰ Riddett, “Urban Renewal as a Catalyst of Change,” 73.

³¹ “Shopping Mall Effect Sought in Relocation”, *Hamilton Spectator*, Feb. 2, 1969

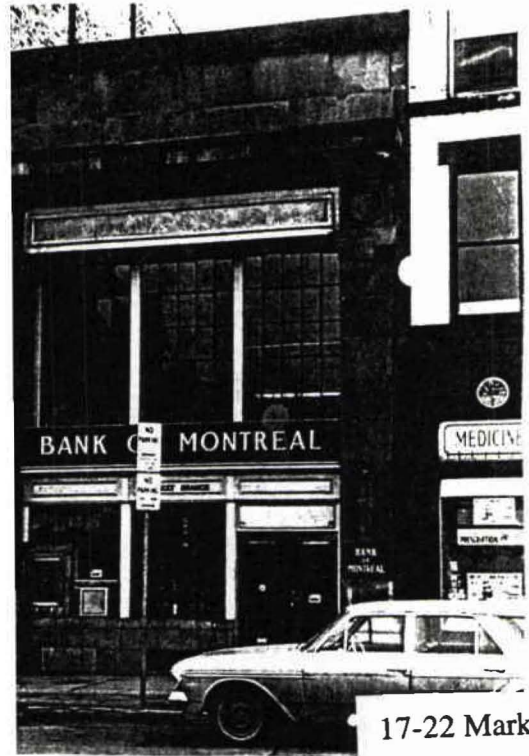
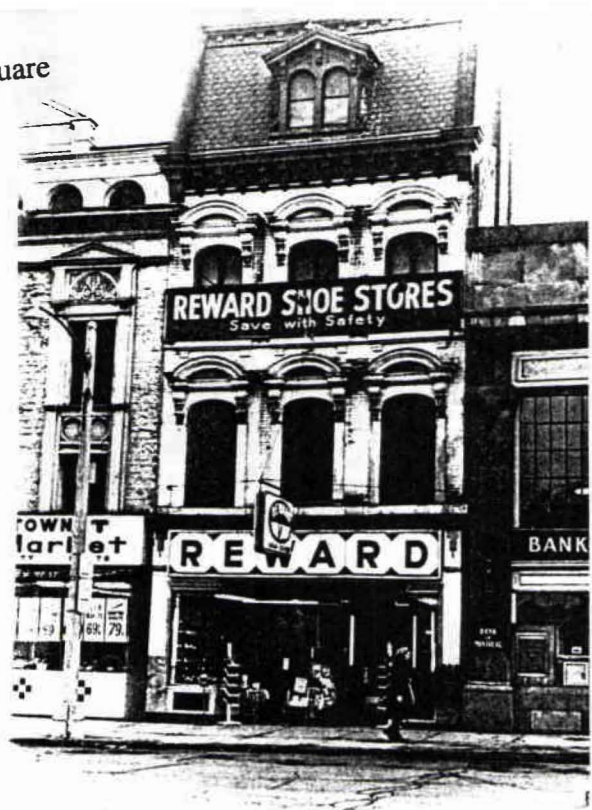


Market Square 1959 – Destroyed for Civic Square



11-12 Market Square

15 Market Square



17-22 Market Square

Market Square Buildings

Special Collections, Hamilton Public Library



14 Market Square



16 Market Square

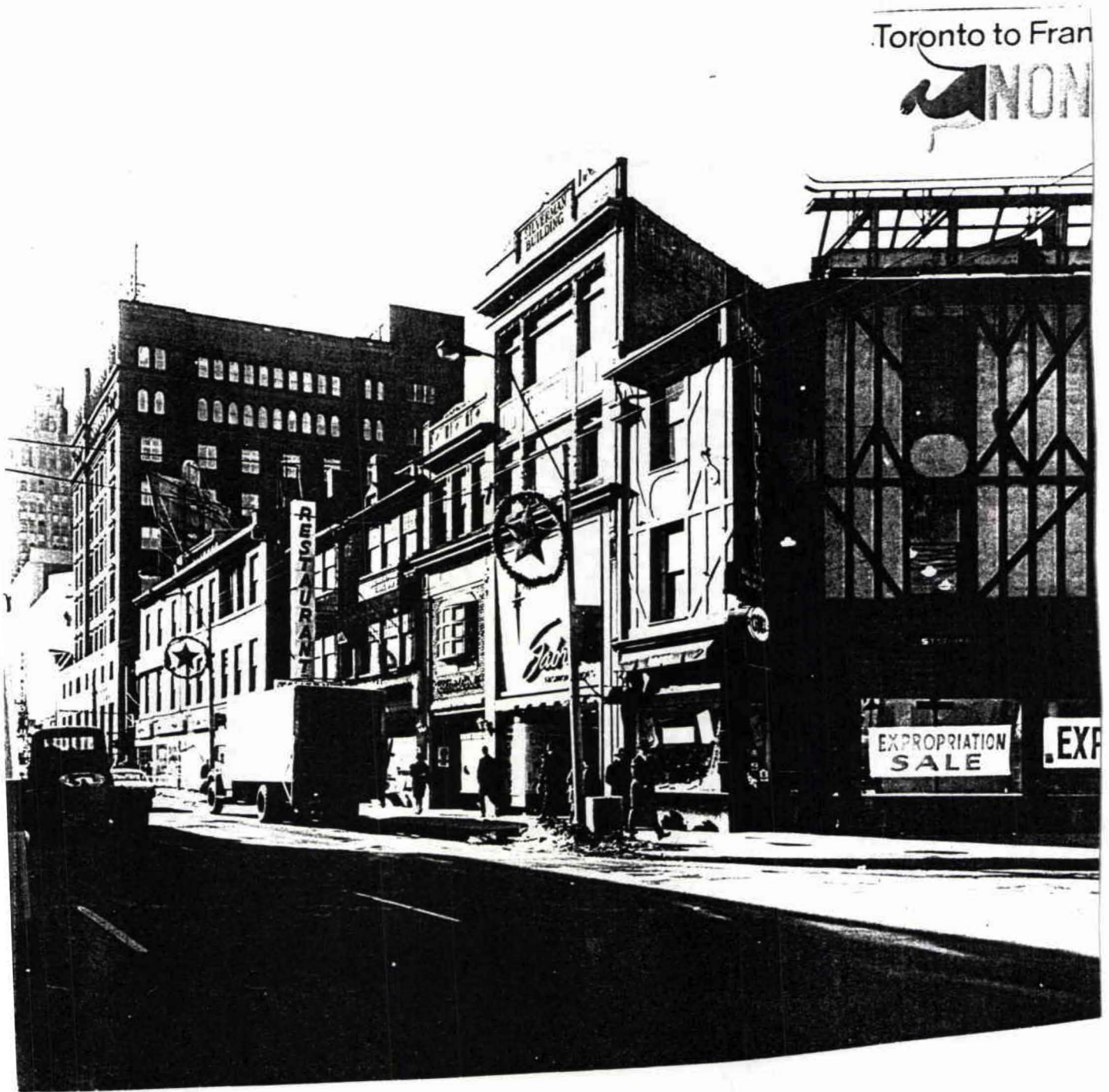


King George Hotel, corner MacNab and Market Square.
Special Collections, Hamilton Public Library



Market Square 1968

Special Collections, Hamilton Public Library



James St. North, west side. 1968

This block was demolished for Civic Square development.

Note "Expropriation Sale" sign.

Special Collections, Hamilton Public Library

completed by First Wentworth. The units were not very appealing and it was said that the mall looked like a building site.³² In total, the city had to purchase and destroy approximately 251 buildings and relocate 500 families and businesses. Five old hotels would go – Fischer’s, the King George, the Triton, the Iroquois and the Whitmore. The downtown would be unrecognizable but it was considered all worthwhile if the modernist plans could help Hamilton shake off its debilitating “lunch box” image.

In October 1968, a 90-page document was prepared by an American consulting firm, Arthur D. Little, Inc., for Hamilton’s new Economic Development Commission in order to help the ambitious city find the key to future growth and prosperity. The report pinpointed three areas which contributed to Hamilton’s failing health: its proximity to the Toronto market; the poor condition of its downtown; and the “lunch box” image the city had of itself and shared with outsiders. The report predicted that the redevelopment of the city’s Civic Square would help improve the city’s prospects and that the city should ensure downtown buildings outside the square be renovated and that the York Street renewal project be fast tracked.³³ The report went on to recommend that the city’s industrial buildings be painted in bright contrasting colours and that air pollution be reduced – among other suggestions – but the public clung to the idea of the new civic square as being the way to get the city “swinging” again, as the *Spectator* wrote in 1968.³⁴ The old “lunch-bucket” image makers were seen to be moving out of the way for a more youthful, positive generation. “Hamiltonians still can’t believe they’re going ahead with the square; it’s bigger than anything else in North America now under way: it’s bigger than the United Nations was when they assembled it,” gushed Jack Moore, the city’s economic development commissioner. It appeared that the entire city had fallen under the spell of urban renewal and was committed to the dream of prosperity and city pride once their beautiful modern square was built.

³² Ibid, 56

³³ Arthur D. Little, *Commercial Development in Hamilton*, (Hamilton: Hamilton Economic Development Commission, October 1968), 2.

³⁴ “Memo to Hamilton: You’ve Got to Swing,” *Hamilton Spectator*, December 28, 1968.

Of course, dreams don't always come true and there were some strange political dealings going on between Pigott and City Hall which threatened the modern plan. In his account of the city's political machinations entitled *Their Town: The Mafia, the Media and the Party Machine*, Bill Freeman has characterized the dealings between City Hall and Pigott as being compromised because of the politicians' ties to the development industry. According to Freeman, Pigott was trying to increase his profit margins by gaining more civic square space for commercial interests and less for cultural buildings. The city, fearful of being left with blocks and blocks of empty downtown land, would give in to his demands and new plans for the square were continually being released. Jack MacDonald, who was closely tied to Pigott and enthusiastic about urban renewal remembers Murray V. Jones as saying that his urban renewal plans for the civic square were just "broad strokes" and that they should be changed when considered necessary.³⁵ But that isn't what the public and the merchants thought. They had accepted the dream of a beautiful, civic square with lots of open space as originally described. By the end of 1968 and early 1969, the public began to suspect that things were changing for the worse. Complaints were issued to the *Spectator* and Sheila Zack, the wife of a well-known businessman, organized a protest committee called SOS, Save Our Square. Here one can see the power of the modernist ideal. Hamiltonians were not protesting the loss of the beautiful historic buildings, they were protesting the loss of open space. Zack and her committee believed in the plan for a large, welcoming open square where the cultural buildings were separated by big expanses of publicly owned green space where citizens could gather. It would be a place where people would want to be and around which private interests would want to invest.³⁶ Pigott's First Wentworth revised plans were going against the modernist ideal as put forth by Jones during the initial planning process. The SOS committee tried to stop Pigott and the city at the Ontario Municipal Board hearings but the revisions prevailed.

³⁵ Jack MacDonald interview, June 5, 2004

³⁶ Herman Turkstra interview, June 2, 2004

Pigott and First Wentworth however were finished. Despite numerous extensions and promises, the company was unable to secure financing for the development of the square, which by 1970 was a growing pile of rubble. Vic Copps and Jack MacDonald accompanied Pigott to Paris to try to secure financing from a German financier but the deal failed. In the end City Council terminated its agreement with Pigott, leaving the city with no urban renewal developer and acres of vacant prime downtown land.

Trouble was also brewing on a national level. The federal government was no longer supportive of the urban renewal program. Hamilton member of parliament John Monroe warned the city early in 1969 that it should not invest any more money in urban renewal schemes.³⁷ The Federal Task Force on Housing and Urban Development had traveled across the country and was disappointed with urban planning in Canada. "To the Task Force, it seemed urban renewal, with its standing offer of federal bills for locally-raised quarters, was becoming as much a matter of municipal financing as municipal planning."³⁸ The Task Force criticized the lack of concern for social and cultural aspects of redevelopment. It also criticized the way the citizens were left out of the process and complained that urban renewal was "not a good example of participatory democracy nor public dialogue" because the "bureaucrats kept their plans locked away in their minds and filing cabinets."³⁹ The federal government no longer endorsed destruction but called for the rehabilitation of houses and buildings.⁴⁰

←
precedent?

This change in the federal government's attitude must have caused a great deal of fear in Hamilton's City Hall and one would think that it would be time to reconsider one's direction. But as politician Reg Wheeler remembers "we were so far over the urban renewal cliff, we had to keep going."⁴¹ Interestingly, the city began publishing its glossy urban renewal newsletter in April, 1969, trumpeting the achievements of the plan and showing off the dramatic modern

³⁷ "What about the rubble?" *Hamilton Spectator*, Feb. 17 1969

³⁸ Canada, *Report of the Federal Task Force on Housing and Development*, (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, January 1969), 13.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 65.

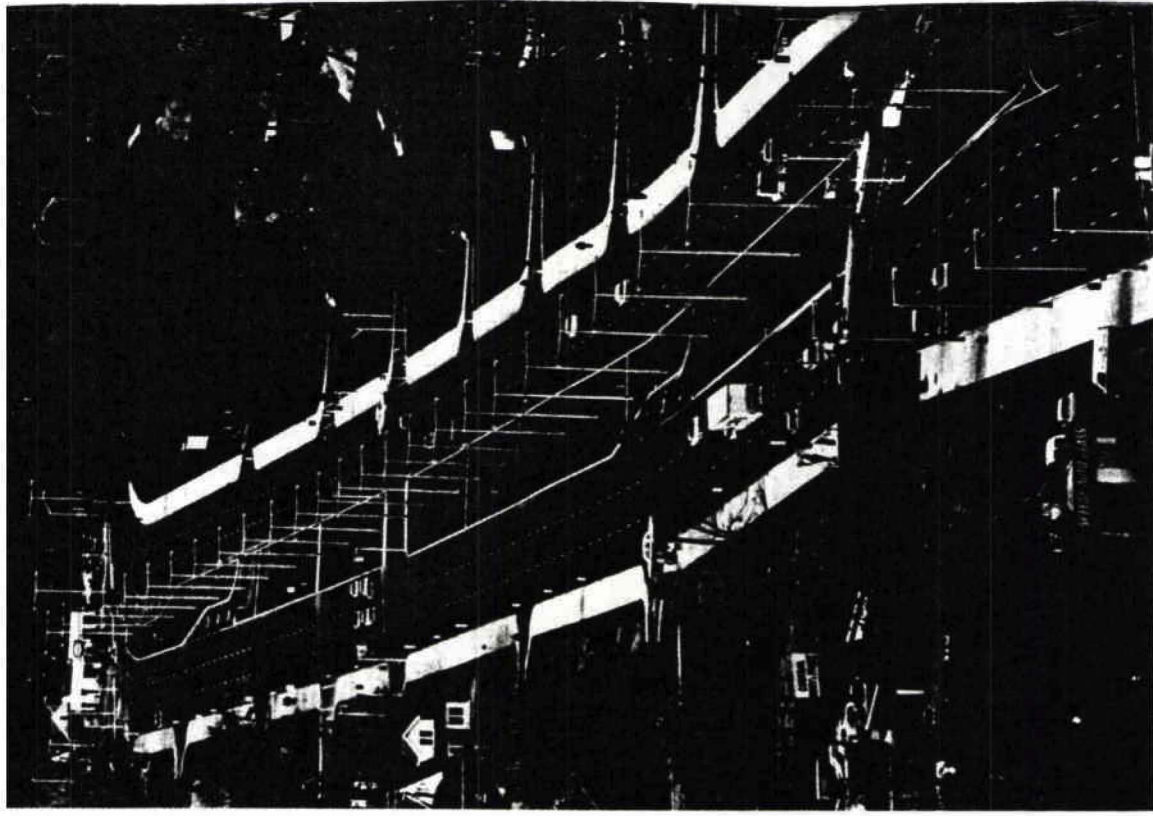
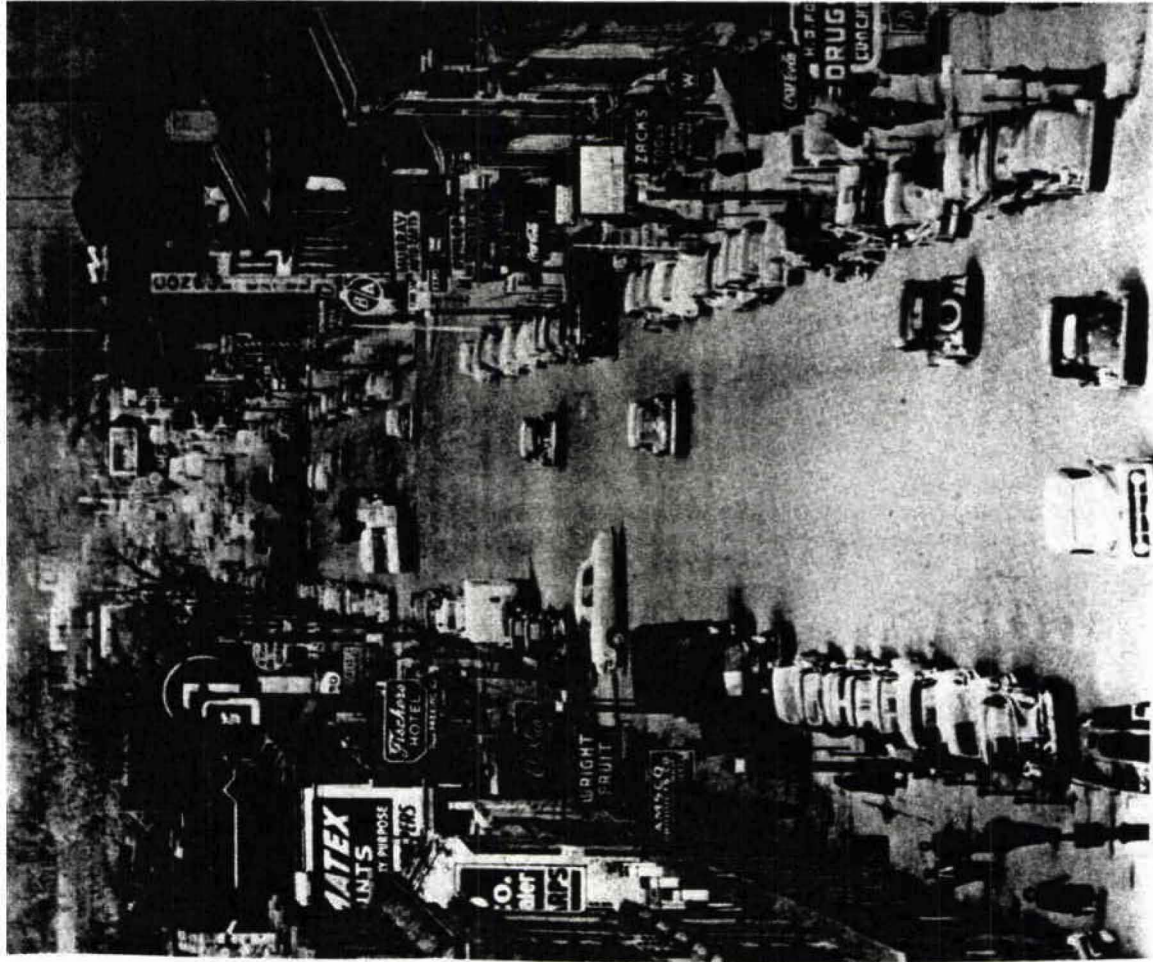
⁴¹ Reg Wheeler, interview

buildings and plans the city had in the works. Clearly they had listened to the federal government's concern regarding poor public relations and the city was intent on providing its citizens with as much information as possible, perhaps trying to make up for all the secrecy and confusion which had gone on before. Three newsletters were produced but the one which came out in July 1970 focused on the North End and not on the fact that a new developer had been found to develop the downtown core.

Montreal-based Yale Properties and its president, Salim Mashaal, saved the day for Hamilton. Working with Standard Life Assurance Company as their principal financier Yale Properties was able to take over the project. Once again, the *Spectator* could report that the city was poised to blast into the space age.⁴² However, Yale was not going to be adopting the original plans that promised the open space, instead its proposal had the civic buildings even more cramped together than before. Yale would keep the 18 acres which First Wentworth had negotiated for their commercial interests instead of reverting to the original 10.4 acres. In the end the cramped civic square with the theatre-auditorium, art gallery and Board of Education building would not be surrounded with open space. The revised plans put the park land on the roof of the commercial mall where few people, other than skate boarders and the occasional drug dealer, dare to venture in 2004. It wasn't at all what the original plans had presented and by most accounts the renewal area is a failure. It didn't bring in many new investors and empty sites mocked those who thought the destruction of the old buildings would bring prosperity. Finally in 1978, the provincial government announced that it would build the \$35 million trade and convention centre and a provincial office tower to complete the square.

There was no ambitious steel pylon reaching for the stars at the foot of York St. to mark the transformed square and urban renewal had lost favour both internationally and nationally but still the city wanted to continue with its grand boulevard plans for the urban renewal of York St. The modernist siren call of the day had bewitched the politicians into believing that the grandiose urban renewal

⁴² "How our downtown core will take shape," *Hamilton Spectator*, September 12, 1970.



York Street to York Boulevard, 1953 to 1975

John C. Weaver, *Hamilton an Illustrated History*

plan was still worth pursuing even though it would cause heartbreak for a neighbourhood and the destruction of more heritage buildings.

Again, blight was presented as the motivating factor for the destruction of the shops and houses along the street and its widening to a six-lane expressway with a thirty foot median. In October 1971, Mayor Vic Copps said York Street had “the worst blight and decay we have in the city of Hamilton. I’m ashamed it has taken this long to get something done.”⁴³ He was still an urban renewal enthusiast, convinced that the urban renewal projects had helped change Hamilton’s “lunch bucket” image and was certain that a new look and a new pride were heading Hamilton’s way after it had cut away “the rot of the Victorian age.”⁴⁴ A *Spectator* editorial said that the widening of the road was “a traffic solution for an urban renewal problem” and suggested that the street was a victim of the federal government’s decision to drop large scale urban renewal developments.⁴⁵ Instead, a widened road would clear out the street’s old buildings.

This time there was widespread opposition and protest. Many people agreed with Toronto architect Colin Vaughan who spoke out against the plan and suggested that the street was being cleared in order to “take people back and forth from a prestige development.”⁴⁶ A citizen’s group was formed to oppose the plan and called themselves the York Opposition Union or YOU. They stood against the widening because it would mean the eviction and expropriation of low income families and small businesses and YOU claimed that the rundown condition of the street was the result of the longtime threat of expropriation, a threat that had hung over their heads since Murray V. Jones presented his urban renewal study of 1965. The merchants and the community around York St. rallied to protest with hay rides through the city, petitions and in August 1972, 70 people, ranging in age

opposition
group

⁴³ “Only 4 on council opposed as York widening approved,” *Hamilton Spectator*, Oct. 27, 1971

⁴⁴ David Proulx, *Pardon My Lunch Bucket*, (Hamilton: Corporation of the City of Hamilton, 1972)

⁴⁵ “Enhance York Street’s Value”, *Hamilton Spectator*, Nov.2, 1971

⁴⁶ “Plans for York Street called cynical viewing”, *Hamilton Spectator*, Dec. 3, 1971



**Foreman's Lunch Counter and Confectionary, 252 York St.
Expropriated 1971.**

**A neighbourhood is more than buildings but the buildings help people to connect
and build their community.**

Special Collections, Hamilton Public Library

from six months to 76 years old, barricaded the street, blocking the heavy trucks from proceeding towards the highway.⁴⁷

The reason that the city needed to destroy the street, the planner Murray V. Jones told the Ontario Municipal Board at its hearings in April 1974, was “to meet traffic demands of the future.” He told the board that he had originally chosen to widen York St back in 1964 because “of its historic and functional role as an exit and entry to and from the city.”⁴⁸ The street was going to have to succumb because the modernist need to create efficient transportation corridors was considered more important than the citizens who lived along the streets. The Barton Street freeway which had seemed so essential in 1964 was cancelled in 1970 because of the cut backs in federal urban renewal funds and the realization that the city couldn’t destroy hundreds of homes.⁴⁹ The perimeter road along Strachan Avenue in the North End was still expected to be built and would be linked to the York street freeway.

The opposing voices had their say during the eight days of OMB hearings in April 1974. Dr. Huston Wade described the area as having “something beautiful” and as “a nice homey place despite the decay that has been mentioned.” The proposed expressway was described as a monster on the neighbourhood’s back. An NDP brief suggested that the city wanted to build the expressway “to woo commercial development to the civic square” and didn’t want low income people living along the route to their prestigious development.⁵⁰ Others protested that a very old and historic area would be demolished. However the city’s decision to make York St into an essential western link in the cross-town street system prevailed. The Ontario cabinet upheld the OMB decision and the Spectator wrote that it was too late for the city to turn back.⁵¹ Shops and restaurants like John Boleantu’s shoe repair shop, Foreman’s lunch counter and the Wilson House, which had seen 125 years as a beverage room, would be demolished. The city expected to destroy 249 properties and relocate approximately 500 families.

⁴⁷ “Truck Protest Blocks York,” *Hamilton Spectator*, Aug. 30, 1972

⁴⁸ “York Street must be Wider,” *Hamilton Spectator*, April 2, 1974

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ “York St. unfinished link in \$10 million road program,” *Hamilton Spectator*, April 5, 1974

⁵¹ “York St. Reprise,” *Hamilton Spectator*, March 27, 1975

Some people refused to move. Harry Mitsui who operated an upholstery business and lived above his store had to be physically removed by police. They handcuffed him and carried him out of his house in red boxer shorts with a blanket over his head to the police cruiser. His house was destroyed in 1976. "I went to jail for five days on a matter of principle," remembered Mitsui, "because I was fighting to stay in a home I lived and worked in for 28 years."⁵²

Most of the merchants expected that their businesses would be rebuilt along the new boulevard but "the city couldn't have done a worse job if they had tried," remembers Hamilton lawyer Albert Foreman whose parents owned and lived above their confectionary and lunch counter at 252 York St. which was expropriated in 1971. The city ran out of money and didn't widen the street enough to allow for future stores.⁵³ City planner Vladimir Matus decided that the York Boulevard sidewalks should have canopies over them and all new buildings were forced to provide the three metre canopy to cover pedestrians. The planner was trying to create the idea of a streetscape, rather than isolated buildings.⁵⁴ Photos of the era show that a streetscape already existed on York St. before they demolished it. The new road was considered a losing proposition for businesses, according to realtor Jimmy Wilson. Not only were the sides too narrow for most buildings but the street was divided by a median, and considered as two one-way streets which made it difficult to attract customers.⁵⁵ To add insult to injury, former residents and merchants were suspicious of how the expropriated properties had been handled by the city. They complained that the city hadn't shown any respect for their rights and that they had been treated in a cavalier manner. As former York Street print shop owner Tom Moerman said, "the cards were stacked against the little man."⁵⁶

When it came to urban renewal the little man could not stand in the way of the grandiose modern plan. The plan was much too big and held too many aspirations and expectations to be stopped. Hamilton with its pathological desire

⁵² "Harry bitter after being uprooted again," *Hamilton Spectator*, June 26, 1978

⁵³ Albert Foreman, telephone interview by author, Hamilton, Ontario, June 3, 2004

⁵⁴ Tami Paikin Nolan, "York Boulevard, Part 3," *Hamilton Spectator*, Tuesday, October 14, 1986.

⁵⁵ "York St. bad for business: Realtor," *Hamilton Spectator*, November 10, 1977

⁵⁶ "York St. residents living in past: MacDonald", *Hamilton Spectator*, November 15, 1977

to compete with Toronto, as the self-proclaimed Ambitious City, seemed prone to fall again for the promises of the grand modern scheme even though the previous modern schemes were not considered very successful. The residents of the North End suffered a great deal of disruption and many downtown merchants lost their businesses because of urban renewal. The city had lost hundreds of historic buildings and familiar roads and the market square were wiped away. However, the city still persisted with the grand plan for York Street even though people protested, funds were limited and most North American cities had already learned the lesson that urban renewal practices were not going to stop the decline of the downtown core. Hamilton politicians couldn't give up the dream. For them the modernist impulse still offered a prosperous future and the clean, straight lines of modernity were so easy to achieve if you had a bulldozer at the ready and a construction crew standing by.

Modernist city planning was believed to hold the key for the Ambitious City to move ahead. The irony, of course, is that the city had the key to its future prosperity locked in the priceless old Victorian buildings it so enthusiastically tore down. Sadly it was Hamilton's ambitions to keep up with Toronto and what was happening in the United States, in addition to its great fear of suburbia's expansion, which led the city to want to grasp hold of the forces of modernity, to embrace urban renewal in all its conformity and to destroy the very buildings which might have brought about a prosperous future but have instead forced the city to try to redesign and rebuild the bleak walls of concrete which now line many of its major downtown streets.

Epilogue

Hamilton's experience with urban renewal was prolonged and full of expectation. The Ambitious City in the 1950s and 1960s assumed that the future belonged to it and the lure of modernist urban planning projects were too enticing to resist, even after most of North America had turned away from urban renewal as the solution to their problems in the early seventies. Hamilton received the most money per capita in Canada for urban renewal projects from the federal and provincial governments and the older parts of the city remain scarred to this day because of the clearances and redevelopment undertaken at that time.

Modernist planners had no respect for the past. As Le Corbusier had suggested, old buildings were seen as a problem for an efficient modern city. Efficient cities needed straight and fast thoroughfares which would link commercial, residential and recreational areas. Planners believed that these areas should be separate, and modernists did not like to encourage mixed uses for the separated districts. When these ideas were mapped on to a city which had initially developed during the nineteenth century, the obvious response would be to clear great tracts of old buildings in an attempt to make the city conform to modernist ideals. This is what happened in Hamilton.

Hamilton's urban renewal practices are interesting because of the extent to which they were adopted across the older lower city and because the city really did attempt to follow modernist planning practices by segregating the different land uses into specific areas. Van Wagner's and Crescent Beaches were to be made purely recreational and so almost two hundred dwellings were destroyed. The North End was to be a residential neighbourhood and so the large cotton mill had to be destroyed. A perimeter road was seen as a necessity and so over a hundred families lost their homes. Finally the downtown core was to be a commercial district and so apartments above stores would not be replaced. The city aggressively attempted to replace the old with the new: destroying cottages, schools, homes, stores, a mill, unique heritage buildings and a network of familiar downtown streets. It embraced clearance practices and seriously disrupted and, in some cases eliminated, four separate neighbourhoods: the Van Wagner's and Crescent Beach area; communities in the North End; the downtown merchants' neighbourhood and the York St community. While the loss of one's home and one's neighbours was

particularly wrenching at the time of urban renewal, today citizens regret the loss of the old buildings which helped them to connect to the city's past and the memories of the generations which preceded them. Gone is the fine carpentry and stone work which represented another time period; gone are the stones and bricks which reflected the very ground the building materials were taken from; and gone is the magic of knowing people from another era once shared the same home or workplace – the mass destruction of old buildings severed the modern city from a lot of its past. The optimistic hope that modernist planning principles would bring progress and growth to the city was so persuasive that the citizens of Hamilton allowed their beloved Market Square, which had been a focal point for generations, to be destroyed and paved over. Urban renewal destruction was happening throughout North America but because of Hamilton's small size and the vigour with which the politicians adopted the modernist plans, urban renewal has left a huge mark on the city.



The modernist dream was particularly powerful for the city of Hamilton and its enthusiastic response to urban renewal can partially be explained by the city's view of itself. Hamilton felt it had to compete with larger urban centres, like Toronto. It wanted to be in the big leagues and was vulnerable to big league mistakes. The Ambitious City began to decline in the late 1950s, while its suburban communities grew. Citizens raised in an atmosphere of progress and success were surprised that their city was losing ground and the business leaders and politicians were anxious to turn things around. They thought they found the cure for the downtown's problems when they heard modernist planners and American real estate developers promote urban renewal. Hamilton politicians were anxious to follow the modernist prescription particularly when the Canadian and Ontario governments were willing to provide the funding to first prepare the plans and then undertake the massive clearances and redevelopment. The city wanted to be considered an equal to the larger centres and was willing to adopt the urban renewal projects which were so fashionable across North America. The old Victorian buildings were seen as a handicap and once they were destroyed, the future would belong to the Ambitious City - or so the business leaders and politicians believed and repeatedly stated.

has
this
changed?

Protests were made against the destruction of the homes in the North End but the city politicians did not take them very seriously. They believed they were doing something good for the citizens of the community, despite what the people losing their homes might think. While a lot of public relations went into appeasing the North End, the downtown scheme was where most of the city's attention was directed. The other urban renewal schemes, in the North End and at Confederation Park, were seen as important precursors to the grand plan for the ailing downtown. The modernist Civic Square plan was well received in the mid-1960s. It promised open space, gardens, museums and fountains. It was a modern square which people looked to with great hope, but sadly the Ambitious City was not going to deliver on its promises. The modernist plan was compromised by deal-making developers and politicians who negotiated away the public aspects of the plan. Then, too, urban renewal was beginning to lose its allure both in Hamilton and in North America generally. Hamilton's politicians, however, maintained that the promises of urban renewal were still viable in 1970. They had no other choice; they had a downtown full of rubble, the remains of the downtown's destroyed Victorian buildings, and ended up having to accept whatever design a developer was prepared to offer. The planners thought they could elevate the public space on to the top of some commercial buildings, but the space remains a wasteland to this day and the downtown an ugly assortment of concrete buildings, except perhaps for the Education Building which hints at what might have been if the original plan had been carried out.

In many ways the modernist planners were selling a dream, an unrealistic dream of the future. They thought they could cut away the past and prepare for prosperity with modern designs and plans achieved in steel and concrete. They ignored the importance of neighbourhoods and the connections that residents nurture in their communities. The dream was too grand to be achieved by a small city like Hamilton, which failed to insist on quality redevelopment. The dream also failed to materialize because of economic realities, which in many ways was a good thing. The anticipated east-west and north-south highways, the perimeter road and the waterfront parkway were not constructed because the funding was no longer available. Plans for more redevelopment in the central area of the city were also not carried out because of financial restrictions, which meant that many older buildings were saved from destruction.

Planner Murray V. Jones, who was responsible for the majority of Hamilton's urban renewal schemes, was able to change his plans over and over again. It seemed that the main impetus behind urban renewal was the destruction of the old buildings and then the new plans could be adapted to the political and financial realities of the day. Here is where modernist planning seems to be the most suspect. Large amounts of government funds went to preparing elaborate plans which rarely were completed as the drawings recommended. The destruction was simple to achieve but the redevelopment of urban Hamilton held many challenges. Most observers now agree that the modernist vision had its limitations and Hamilton's experience with urban renewal is a clear example of how disappointing the results could be.

The allure of modernism's promises was very difficult to ignore for politicians even after the city's many disappointments with urban renewal. The destruction of the York St. neighbourhood and the widening of the street into a modernist boulevard were begun after the government funding had dried up and when the public was beginning to finally organize protests. Despite these roadblocks, the city had a plan and it was determined to see it completed. The result, predictably, was disappointing and a further example of how modernist plans, even without the urban renewal funding, could destroy a neighbourhood and replace it with a modernist wasteland of sterile asphalt.

The City of Hamilton was transfixed by the grand idea that urban renewal could save its downtown from further decline. The idea, as promoted by American real estate developers and supported financially by the federal and provincial governments, was too tempting to ignore for a city determined to improve itself. The modernist ideas behind urban renewal were supported by influential planners and architects. The government was willing to fund the studies and subsidize the projects. New jobs were created. The promise of renewed prosperity had politicians and city boosters promoting urban renewal with enthusiasm. The destruction of the Victorian city was accepted by everyone who was anxious to embrace future prosperity. The irony, of course, is that the many priceless buildings lost to urban renewal might have helped to usher in a renaissance for the city, in this post-modern world where ornamentation and historic associations are admired. Instead Hamilton remains a city with a downtown in decline and a sense of loss for all that was destroyed to make way for the advance of modernity.

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