

The Unworkable Program: Urban Renewal in Kilbourntown-3 and Midtown, Milwaukee

By

Matthew J. Honer

A Thesis Submitted in  
Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts in History

At

The University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire

May, 2015


Graduate Studies

The members of the Committee approve the thesis

Matthew J. Honer presented on April 27<sup>th</sup>, 2015.



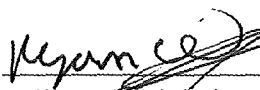
Dr. David Soll, Chair



Dr. Jane Pederson

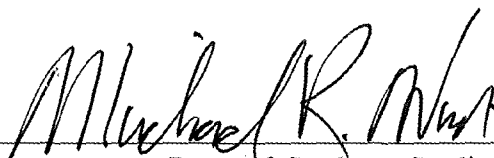


Dr. Erin Krutko Devlin



Dr. Ryan Weichelt

APPROVED:



Dean of Graduate Studies

The Unworkable Program: Urban Renewal in Kilbourntown-3 and Midtown, Milwaukee

By

Matthew J. Honer

The University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire, 2015  
Under the Supervision of Dr. David Soll

The 1954 revisions to the Federal Housing Act intended to address the shortcomings apparent in earlier urban renewal attempts. Under the “Workable Program,” a series of provisions included in the revision, cities were required to address fundamental factors that created slums and continuously show progress towards the elimination of slums while receiving federal urban renewal funds. Requirements included addressing building codes, creating a comprehensive plan, ensuring meaningful citizen participation, and having relocation resources adequate for displaced residents. Fundamental factors contributing to the creation of slums in American cities not addressed in the Workable Program included racism, segregation, and containment policies.

This paper presents evidence that the City of Milwaukee was able to effectively disregard Federal urban renewal regulations that required adequate relocation and necessary citizen participation in urban renewal planning and implementation, in order to continue racist policies of neighborhood segregation and containment. Although the Department of Housing and Urban Development had cut off urban renewal funds numerous times, the city was able to continue their policies by subverting the requirement

of citizen participation and complying with HUD only as far as it opened up funding.

Two neighborhoods, Midtown and K-3, highlight the efforts of city officials to continue urban renewal efforts without addressing the restricted housing and segregated neighborhoods of the city.



---

Thesis Advisor (Signature)

5-21-15

---

Date

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES .....	vi
ABBREVIATIONS.....	vii
INTRODUCTION.....	1
<i>Previous Studies</i> .....	4
CHAPTER ONE: A TALE OF TWO CITIES.....	9
<i>The Iron Ring of Suburbs</i> .....	10
<i>The 1949 Housing Act, Race and Housing Politics, and 1954 Revisions</i> .....	14
<i>Managing Local Control: The Workable Program and the Community Renewal Program</i> .....	24
<i>Summary</i> .....	29
CHAPTER TWO: THE CLEARANCE OF KILBOURNTOWN-3 .....	33
<i>Summary</i> .....	48
CHAPTER THREE: THE CONSERVATION OF MIDTOWN .....	52
<i>Tangible and Intangible Values</i> .....	54
<i>Conservation Abandoned</i> .....	59
<i>Housing and Street Widening</i> .....	62
<i>Summary</i> .....	65
CHAPTER FOUR: ESTABLISHING AUTHORITY IN A TRANSITIONAL NEIGHBORHOOD.....	67
<i>Access to Goods and Services</i> .....	69
<i>A Community of Their Own</i> .....	73
<i>Containing Voice, Establishing Authority</i> .....	80
<i>Community Activists</i> .....	86
<i>Summary</i> .....	90
CONCLUSION .....	92
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	98
<i>Primary Sources</i> .....	98
<i>Secondary Sources</i> .....	99

## **LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES**

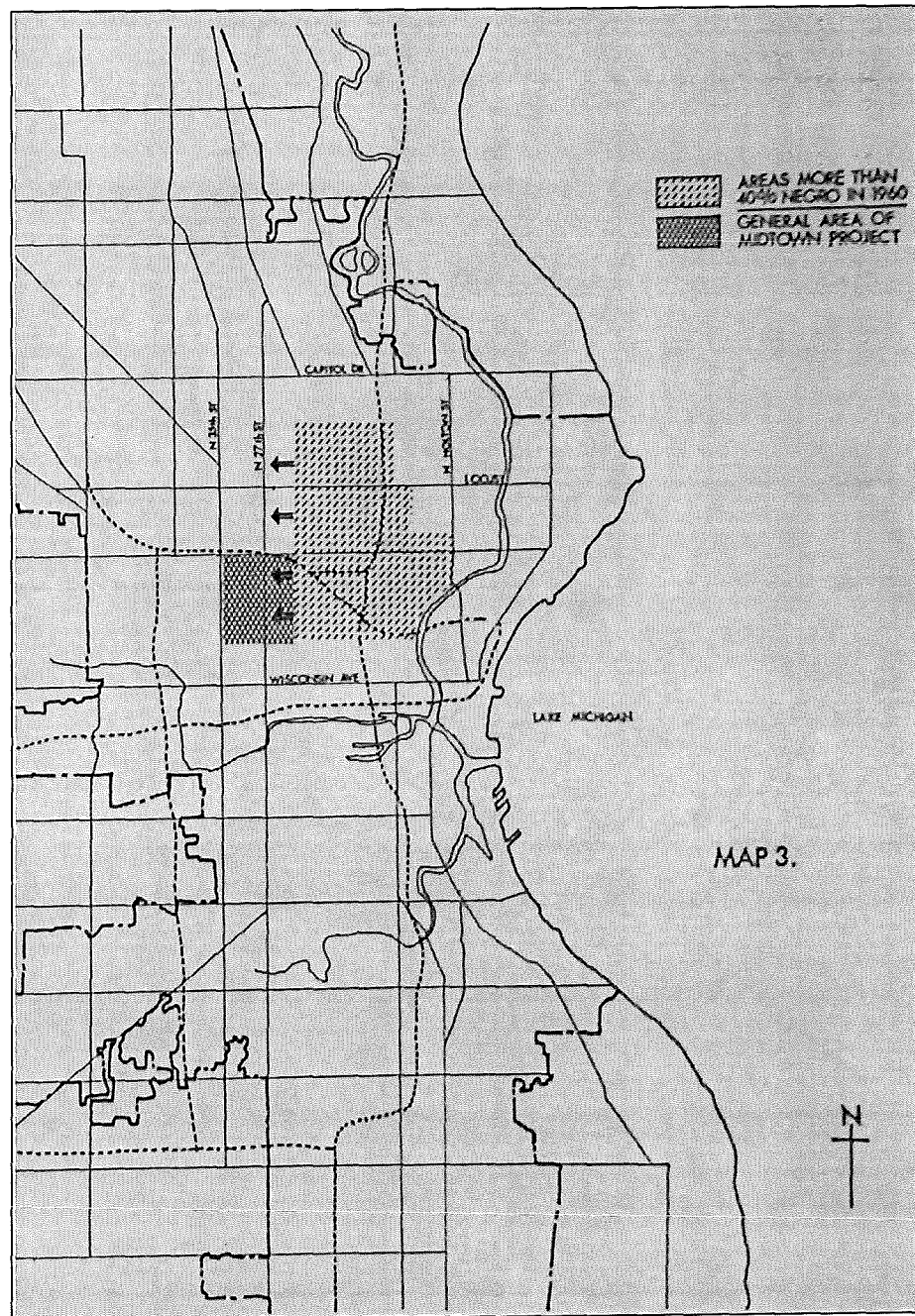
<b>Figure 1: Map 1: Milwaukee, 1960 African American Neighborhoods .....</b>	<b>viii</b>
<b>Figure 2: Map 2: Community Renewal Program Projects and Expressways .....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Figure 3: Map 3: Kilbourntown – 3 Redevelopment Area .....</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Figure 4: Map 4: Midtown Conservation Project .....</b>	<b>51</b>

## **ABBREVIATIONS**

CRP	Community Renewal Program
DCD	Department of Community Development
HUD	Department of Housing and Urban Development
K-3	Kilbourntown – 3 Neighborhood
MTNA	Midtown Neighborhood Association

**Figure 1:**

**Map 1: Milwaukee, 1960 African American Neighborhoods<sup>1</sup>**



<sup>1</sup> Daniel R. Mandelker, "Urban Conflict in Urban Renewal: The Milwaukee CRP Experience," *Arizona Law Journal (Law and the Social Order)* 4 (1971): 675.



## **INTRODUCTION**

The City of Milwaukee, like many other American cities in the post war decades, undertook major planning and redevelopment intended to address issues of inadequate and substandard housing, improve transportation networks, and redevelop inner cities. These programs were undertaken with federal assistance in what has come to be known as urban renewal. Milwaukee's urban renewal was completed through several programs, including freeway construction, assisting the expansion of major institutions, and undertaking several neighborhood projects. Neighborhood projects attempted to address deteriorating or threatened neighborhoods through clearance and redevelopment or intensive building code enforcement and rehabilitation.

Two neighborhoods that underwent urban renewal in Milwaukee were located in Milwaukee's near north side, Midtown and Kilbourntown-3. Kilbourntown – 3 was nearer the city center and in the years after WWII housed a large part of Milwaukee's African American and minority communities. The city of Milwaukee, citing poor housing conditions and poor land use, selected K-3 as a slum clearance and redevelopment area. Midtown was directly to the west of and separated from K-3 by North 20<sup>th</sup> St; it was a nearly 100% white German ethnic neighborhood in the immediate postwar years. Milwaukee, with pressure from the residents of Midtown, designated Midtown a conservation project.

Federal funds for urban renewal and public housing were made available to cities across the nation shortly after the 1949 Housing Act. Yet by 1954, it was recognized that the Housing Act's slum clearance and public housing strategy was unable to keep up with the rate at which neighborhoods were deteriorating and was ineffective at addressing long-term goals for the clearance of slums. The Act was amended in 1954 to focus on long-term urban redevelopment goals. This meant that focus was given to rehabilitation and private redevelopment rather than clearance and public housing. Additionally there was a federal oversight program put into place, the Workable Program, which required each city to prove they had adequate planning and resources available to undertake an urban renewal project. The Midtown and K-3 projects were both subject to the federal oversight of the Workable Program.

The goal of the Workable Program was to help cities undertake renewal by addressing foundational issues that directly contributed to the continued creation of slums. The Workable Program was an annually submitted document that addressed: codes and ordinances, comprehensive community plans, neighborhood analysis, administrative organization, financing, housing for displaced families and citizen participation.<sup>2</sup> Each year the Workable Program was reviewed by the Department of Housing and Urban Development and evaluated to ensure progress was being made. If HUD recognized that cities were failing to address these issues or progress was not being made, project funding was cut off.

The Workable Program largely ignored the role that race played in the creation of slums. Race, a necessary component in addressing relocation housing and citizen

---

<sup>2</sup> Charles S. Ryne. "The Workable Program – A Challenge for Community Improvement," *Law and Contemporary Problems* (Fall 1960): 685-704.

involvement in many of the neighborhoods likely to undergo renewal projects, was not factored as a foundational issue according to the Workable Program. While not a surprising oversight in the pre-civil rights era, racist housing practices and restricted housing undermined the goal of the Workable Program. Furthermore, cities that saw the Workable Program as nothing more than a series of necessary hurdles to undertake in order to receive federal money were able to abide by the Workable Program while continuing race-based planning, such as segregation and containment policies. The continuation of white neighborhood resistance, racist real estate practices, and federal redlining of minority neighborhoods assured that slums would continue to be created regardless of the unified effort that the Workable Program offered.

Milwaukee's urban renewal programs in the Midtown and K-3 neighborhoods offer examples of how the federal oversight of urban renewal programs created through the Workable Program failed to effect meaningful change in cities unwilling to address the racist foundations of urban slums. The K-3 and Midtown projects were shaped, planned, and implemented in order to contain minority neighborhoods and conserve threatened white neighborhoods. While the Workable Program oversight was able to halt renewal plans on several occasions in Milwaukee, the city was able to regain control of the program by making minimal efforts on the Workable Program and gave little regard to issues of race. Milwaukee's commitment to neighborhood segregation and racist real estate practices undermined the federal oversight efforts of the Workable Program and allowed the city to utilize urban renewal funds to continue to isolate minority neighborhoods without addressing continued slum creation.

### *Previous Studies*

The history of postwar neighborhood change is well documented in cities throughout the United States. Authors such as Thomas Sugrue, Arnold Hirsch and Kenneth Jackson have written classic works relating to the changing postwar urban landscape. Thomas Sugrue's *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* is a social and political history of housing and labor inequality, which focuses on the "structural" forces of deindustrialization, racial transformation, and shifting political ideologies as the origins of the "urban crisis." Calling the forces that Sugrue writes about "structural" has two important implications: namely that these forces are the major supporting factors of change in the postwar city and that these forces are not unique to Detroit. In many instances, federal housing policy and national economic policy are the "structural" factors that spawned the urban crisis. Recent historical work on civil rights movements in the urban north has exposed these "structural" forces as major factors of inequality in many if not most urban industrial areas. The problems of Detroit that Sugrue writes about reflect the problems of nearly every northern urban center in the postwar years, and Milwaukee is no exception.

Sugrue states, "the emphasis in this study on structural forces shaping the city should not obscure the role of human agency and contingency in the city's development."<sup>3</sup> While the role of agency may seem obvious, a common trope used to describe the postwar city has been and continues to be that of an autonomous machine or infectious bacteria. Terms such as "spreading blight" and "urban sprawl" disassociate

---

<sup>3</sup> Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 11.

human decisions from the condition of the environment. This separation accepts unequal and segregated neighborhoods and populations as “natural” and “inevitable” parts of city development. Sugrue reminds us that individual and collective human decisions define and empower structural forces. In the case of K-3 and Midtown, the collective efforts of white neighborhood residents, their representatives, the Mayor, and the Department of City Development defined the plans to continue the isolation and deterioration of African American and minority communities.

Arnold Hirsch, in the foreword to the second edition of *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960*, states, “Much of *Making the Second Ghetto*’s burden was to demonstrate that the compounded shortcomings of slum clearance, urban renewal, and segregated high-rise public housing resulted not from an unfettered liberalism’s social experimentation during the civil rights era but, rather, from a conservative reaction more emblematic of the 1950s and the Cold War.”<sup>4</sup> This helps to understand how neighborhoods such as Midtown were designated conservation projects as white homeowners organized against the threat of African American neighbors in Midtown and influenced city politicians to designate Midtown a “conservation district.” The conservative reaction extended beyond Midtown’s boundaries and throughout the city of Milwaukee. Restricted housing worked to contain nearly all of Milwaukee’s African American population in the central city, what became known as the “Inner Core.”

For many of the whites in Midtown, the prospect of having “others” in their neighborhood threatened not just their property values but also their identity. As Sugrue

---

<sup>4</sup> Arnold R. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago 1940 – 1960* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), xi.

states, popular cultural perceptions of racial difference informed the desire of “not-yet-white ethnics” on what it meant to be American. Job discrimination and restricted housing reinforced racist assumptions among white ethnics that African Americans caused neighborhoods to deteriorate due to their laziness and un-acculturated lifestyles. At the same time, white, upwardly mobile, and suburban defined American.<sup>5</sup> As African Americans moved into the Midtown neighborhood, whites left, sacrificing their neighborhood for their white identity.

While much has been written in regards to urban renewal, the scholarship tends to focus on individual cities, likely due to the fact that it was a locally administered program. Each city planned and implemented its own programs of slum clearance, relocation, and public housing based on a mixture of local politics, race relations, and the state of the city in question. The Milwaukee historian John Gurda briefly discusses urban renewal in *The Making of Milwaukee*, while more specific interest in land use and redevelopment is found in Joel Rast’s article, “Critical Junctures, Long Term Processes: Urban Redevelopment in Chicago and Milwaukee, 1945-1980” and the sociological study of residents of the K-3 urban renewal area *Solidarity in a Slum* by Joseph B. Tamney. Daniel Mandelker’s “Urban Conflict in Urban Renewal: The Milwaukee CRP Experience” provided key insights into the urban renewal planning and implementation of K-3 and Midtown. Mandelker’s article was a contemporary analysis of Milwaukee’s comprehensive planning program, the Community Renewal Program (CRP). The CRP was a voluntary plan that fit with the Workable Plan requirements of comprehensive planning; cities were encouraged to use it in order to connect urban renewal projects with

---

<sup>5</sup> Sugrue, 9.

a general plan for city development. It was an early precursor to the War on Poverty's Model Cities Program, an attempt to undertake comprehensive city planning.

Mandelker's article examines the issues of race that influenced urban renewal planning, the failures of the City of Milwaukee to comply with federal guidelines, and a brief discussion of the Midtown Neighborhood Associations' role in citizen participation.<sup>6</sup>

Race, a central factor of postwar urban change, has received increased attention recently as historians explore civil rights struggles in America's northern urban centers. In Milwaukee, Patrick Jones' *Selma of the North: Civil Rights Insurgency in Milwaukee* and Joe William Trotter Jr.'s *Black Milwaukee: The Making of an Industrial Proletariat, 1915-1945*, provide previous scholarship to build upon. Trotter's work is essential in understanding the formation of Milwaukee's African American community and race relations in Milwaukee. Jones' work on the civil rights movement in Milwaukee is part of the growing focus on northern civil rights and emergence of the Black Power movement in northern urban areas, and essential to the understanding of the political climate in the Inner Core. The Open Housing Marches and civil unrest that Jones' work focuses on is only marginally addressed in this research but the stories are intertwined, including many of the same people and places. In many ways this research is meant to add to Jones' work, building an understanding of the policies that led to the open housing marches and civil unrest in the late 1960s.

My argument is straightforward: the City of Milwaukee, through its commitment to residential segregation, undermined the efforts of federal regulation to make urban renewal an effective tool to combat the creation and maintenance of slums. Chapter One

---

<sup>6</sup> Daniel R. Mandelker, "Urban Conflict in Urban Renewal: The Milwaukee CRP Experience," *Arizona Law Journal (Law and the Social Order)* 4 (1971): 669.

explores the existing housing and planning policies in Milwaukee in the immediate postwar years, before the undertaking of K-3 and Midtown. These policies shed light on how the city would undertake K-3 and Midtown. The 1949 and 1954 Federal Housing Acts, the Workable Program, and the Community Renewal Program are further explored here. Chapter two explores the K-3 clearance project. The K-3 project sheds lights on the problems that the city faced by ignoring issues of race. Of particular concern here was the city's failure to provide relocation assistance and the lack of housing available for the communities being displaced in K-3. Chapters three and four explore the story of Midtown as it became a racial transition area and the project transitioned from a conservation project into a clearance project. The change in the project forced residents and city officials to compete for control of the neighborhood. Throughout these chapters I present evidence that shows the City of Milwaukee was committed to neighborhood segregation and unwilling to fully utilize the Workable Program to achieve long term goals.



## **CHAPTER ONE: A TALE OF TWO CITIES**

“What changed over the years and changed radically, was the severity of decay in the city’s historic core and the distance between the center and the urban fringe. The gap between old and new, between have-nots and haves, grew steadily wider with time, and the story of most urban areas in postwar America is a tale of two cities.”<sup>7</sup>

In 1960, the physical and social conditions of Milwaukee’s “Inner Core,” the area to the northwest of downtown occupying the geographical center of Milwaukee, were rapidly deteriorating. To address the problems the city of Milwaukee undertook a series of studies as well as urban renewal projects over the next fifteen years. The neighborhoods of Kilbourntown-3 (K-3) and Midtown were central to addressing the issues of the “Inner Core.” The K-3 neighborhood represented one of the most deteriorated housing conditions within the city, had high rates of poverty, and a large, predominantly young African-American population. Across N. 20<sup>th</sup> St., Midtown bordered K-3 and housing conditions were generally thought of as good, with an older white ethnic population.

This chapter highlights the city of Milwaukee’s race-based housing and planning policies in the immediate postwar years. Milwaukee’s anti-public housing campaigns translated into race-based urban renewal planning. This contextualization sheds light on

---

<sup>7</sup> John Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee* (Milwaukee: Milwaukee County Historical Society, 1999), 321.

how the city of Milwaukee's comprehensive strategy towards redevelopment and urban renewal reinforced the commitment to contain Milwaukee's African American and minority neighborhoods and reinforce the white inner-city neighborhoods in an effort to protect them from racial transition.

### *The Iron Ring of Suburbs*

As veterans returned from World War II and industrial production called for more workers to provide a growing middle class with household goods, cars, and homes, cities expanded and populations exploded. Increasingly, population and home production took the form of curvilinear streets and cul-de-sacs in former pastures and crop fields. Single-family detached homes were planted row after row with remarkable conformity. A growing middle class was able (even encouraged) to choose suburban living as the answer to housing shortages. In large part this was possible due to federal housing legislation and programs.

Originating from the National Housing Act of 1934, the Federal Housing Administration intended to curb unemployment during the Depression by encouraging the construction industry and stabilizing the mortgage market. The thirty-year mortgage encouraged home buying and building by making home financing more affordable over a longer period of time. In 1944, the Veterans Administration combined with the Federal Housing Administration to encourage home ownership through federal mortgage insurance that encouraged low interest and next-to-nothing down payments. In the years after the war, it became cheaper to purchase a home in the suburbs than to rent in the

city.<sup>8</sup> Milwaukee was no exception to the increasing suburbanization of the United States. According to Milwaukee historian John Gurda, "Between 1940-1970, the number of housing units in the four-county metropolitan area almost doubled, rising from 238,514 to 449,044. At the crest of the wave in the 1950s, new homes were popping up at the rate of nearly 1,000 a month."<sup>9</sup> While the FHA backed mortgages encouraged the needed production of new homes in the postwar years, it failed to address the needs of homes already built, constituting the majority of housing in America's cities. The ready availability of new home loans encouraged owners of inner-city homes to forego repairs, sell or rent out their houses, and build on the urban fringe with the new FHA home loans. This added to the deteriorating condition of housing in cities, which had deferred maintenance during the depression and war years.

For many Americans, the growing suburbanization of America was validation that free market capitalism and democracy allowed every citizen an opportunity to work hard and achieve the dream of home ownership. For minorities and the urban poor unable to take part in suburbanization, it meant a general deterioration of their living environment. The loss of the middle class tax dollars furthered the decline in physical conditions of cities. In Milwaukee, a 1948 study commissioned by the Common Council found that fifteen percent of the city's land area was blighted; most of that area surrounded the central business district.<sup>10</sup> The movement of people encouraged the movement of

---

<sup>8</sup> Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 190-218. Gurda, 324.

<sup>9</sup> Gurda, 326.

<sup>10</sup> Joel Rast, "Critical Junctures, Long-Term Processes: Urban Redevelopment in Chicago and Milwaukee, 1945-1980," *Social Science History* 33, no. 4 (Winter 2009): 406.

businesses, further shrinking the city's tax base. Milwaukee's property tax revenue declined by 50 percent from 1930 to 1947..

Milwaukee's physical decline was also a product of its socialist city politics. Socialist Mayor Daniel Hoan stressed a pay-as-you-go policy for infrastructure improvements in the city. Although this allowed the city to avoid debt, it also contributed to the physical deterioration of the city.<sup>11</sup>

When Frank Zeidler took office in 1948, as the city's third socialist mayor, he addressed the increased suburbanization by growing the size of the city, and to a lesser extent slum clearance and public housing. Between 1948 and 1956, the city of Milwaukee annexed an average of 1,338 acres annually, mostly on the northern and western fringes of the city.<sup>12</sup> Zeidler encouraged residential and industrial development in the newly annexed land to prevent Milwaukee from becoming surrounded by suburbs. One of the greatest appeals of the newly annexed land was that it was considerably cheaper for developers to connect to the city water network than to drill their own wells, encouraging suburban style housing patterns within the city limits of Milwaukee.<sup>13</sup> Yet even with the annexation plan the percentage of residents in Milwaukee County that lived in the city continued to fall.<sup>14</sup> The annexation also expanded land available for industrial uses. Although it still allowed companies to decentralize, it kept jobs and a tax base in

---

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Gurda, 339.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 343. Milwaukee's population in 1940 = 587,472, in 1950 = 637,392, in 1960 = 741,324. In 1920, city residents accounted for 85.3% of Milwaukee County population. That dropped to 76.6% in 1940 and 71.6% in 1960.

the city, a rare occurrence in major northern cities. According to Joel Rast, "From 1950-1960 Milwaukee gained 2,500 manufacturing jobs, while manufacturing employment in Chicago fell by 90,000 workers."<sup>15</sup> Much of the city's annexation was possible due to Title I of the Federal Housing Act of 1949, which funded land purchases with federal loans.<sup>16</sup> Milwaukee's ability to grow through annexation in the postwar years makes it somewhat distinct from many other American cities in the postwar years. The ability to hold onto some residents and their taxes had a remedial effect on the general trends of suburbanization, but likely further contributed to the problems of Milwaukee's inner city. Annexation encouraged businesses and residents to move to areas outside of the inner city, removing jobs and services from residents living in the city center. Many of those residents were unable to move due to restrictive housing which further contributed to the segregation of the city.

Mayor Zeidler intended to utilize the 1949 Housing Act to undertake slum clearance and public housing in addition to annexation. Although his annexation plan received considerable support from the city's realtors and developers, he did not receive the same support in regards to public housing.<sup>17</sup> Considered the most controversial aspect of the 1949 Act, public housing was a major reason why the bill took four years of struggle to pass Congress.<sup>18</sup> In Milwaukee, the public housing provisions of the bill exposed underlying racial tensions that would influence the renewal of the city.

---

<sup>15</sup> Rast, 408.

<sup>16</sup> Rast, 408; Ashley A. Foard and Hilbert Fefferman, "Urban Renewal Legislation," *Law and Contemporary Problems* 25, no. 4 (Autumn 1960):653.

<sup>17</sup> Rast, 409.

<sup>18</sup> Foard and Fefferman, 650.

### *The 1949 Housing Act, Race and Housing Politics, and 1954 Revisions*

The Congress hereby declares that the general welfare and security of the Nation and the health and living standards of its people require housing production and related community development sufficient to remedy the serious housing shortage, the elimination of substandard and other inadequate housing through the clearance of slums and blighted areas, and the realization as soon as feasible of the goal of a decent home and suitable living environment for every American family thus contributing to the development and redevelopment of communities and to the advancement of growth, wealth and security of the Nation.

– Housing Act of 1949.

The 1949 Housing Act established the goals of redeveloping American cities after the Great Depression and World War II. The act called for urban renewal, the clearance of slums, the construction of public housing, and an increase of the Federal Housing Administration's mortgage insurance. Although slum clearance and housing bills were passed as part of the New Deal, specifically The National Housing Act of 1934 and the Housing Act of 1937, New Deal legislation dealt more with "priming the pump" of the economy and slowing the rate of foreclosures. The 1949 Housing Act intended to redevelop cities by addressing the housing shortage through private development, public housing, and slum clearance.

Title I of the 1949 Act provided for loans of one billion dollars and grants of five hundred million dollars for urban redevelopment planning. The Federal Government paid two-thirds of aggregate net project costs. This made it financially advantageous for a community to plan redevelopment and quickly sell land to developers at a low cost.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> Philip Schorr, *Planned Relocation* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1975), 73.

To address the relocation and housing of those displaced by clearance, Title III authorized the construction of 810,000 public housing facilities. National trade organizations engaged in the construction, financing, and dealing of real estate expressed continued resistance to the public housing aspects of the bill, although they surely benefited from the increased authorization of Federal Housing Authority mortgage insurance, which encouraged new home construction.<sup>20</sup>

The struggle over public housing in Milwaukee influenced urban renewal planning over the course of two decades. The Zeidler administration intended to utilize the 1949 Housing Act to, “combine the demolition of substandard buildings with the relocation of inner-city residents to integrated public housing constructed throughout the city.”<sup>21</sup> Zeidler’s intentions were thwarted by The Milwaukee Board of Realtors, the Certified Rental Operators’ Alliance, and the Milwaukee County Property Owners Association, who opposed public housing and insisted that the private sector was best suited to rebuilding the inner city and provide housing.<sup>22</sup> Between the years 1948 – 1951, Zeidler succeeded in building several integrated housing projects, including one in an all-white neighborhood. His success in public housing was short lived; the Housing Act of 1949 exempted federally financed housing projects from local property taxes, something that the opposition to public housing used to rally opposition to public housing. Taking advantage of the anti-Communist feelings of the time, the Milwaukee realty groups called

---

<sup>20</sup> Scott Greer, *Urban Renewal and American Cities: The Dilemma of Democratic Intervention* (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company Inc, 1965), 17.

<sup>21</sup> Kevin D. Smith, “From Socialism to Racism: The Politics of Class and Identity in Postwar Milwaukee,” *Michigan Historical Review* 29, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 78.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

public housing socialistic and led the fight to include a referendum question on the 1951 municipal election ballot that required any proposed housing project that would enjoy tax-free status to be submitted to voters for approval.<sup>23</sup> Zeidler was reelected but the referendum question passed and the Milwaukee Common Council gained conservative members who further empowered Milton McGuire, the council president, and his anti-public housing campaign. The Common Council undertook a campaign to disband the Milwaukee Housing Authority (a public housing and development division established under Zeidler's socialist predecessor John Bohn) and succeeded in passing a bill that authorized the sale of public housing by an act of Congress or a referendum. This law and the 1951 municipal referendum brought Zeidler's urban renewal plans to a standstill. As historian Kevin D. Smith states, "Insisting on the provision of public housing for those displaced by redevelopment projects but unable to afford private-sector housing, Zeidler refused to proceed with substantial slum-clearance projects until accommodations could be secured for all of those whose dwellings were to be razed."<sup>24</sup>

The inability of Zeidler to build public housing blocked any major urban renewal efforts in Milwaukee and allowed inner-city conditions to further deteriorate. Milwaukee was not alone in its failures to adequately take advantage of the provisions of the 1949 Act. While the act worked toward its goal of housing production and slum clearance it did little in the ways of "related community development" and "the realization as soon as feasible of the goal of a decent home and suitable living environment for every American family." Nearly three and one half years after the Act, at the end of President Truman's

---

<sup>23</sup> Smith, 79.

<sup>24</sup> Smith, 78, 80-81.



second term, only 60,000 of the 810,000 public housing units authorized were under construction and only twenty-six urban renewal projects had begun. This was due to conservative restraints on appropriations.<sup>25</sup> In his book on relocation, Philip Schorr argued that, "The elaborate administrative processes required to make Titles I and III operative, a growing public indifference resulting from an easing of the housing shortage for veterans during the 1950s, and the never-ending opposition of the real estate groups, all diminished the initial enthusiasm and support engendered by the passage of the Act."<sup>26</sup>

In Milwaukee, the successful effort to frame public housing as socialistic effectively removed race from the conversation, although areas that continued to deteriorate were majority African-American. According to Smith, "Between 1943 and the mid-1950s the influx of southern African Americans reached massive proportions, encouraged by general prosperity, the opening of new industries to black labor, and the development of kinship networks that connect the rural South with the industrial North."<sup>27</sup> It was also during this time that Milwaukee's black ghetto emerged. In his book *Black Milwaukee: The Making of an Industrial Proletariat*, Joe William Trotter Jr. argues that although African-Americans had experienced racial segregation due to discrimination in housing and jobs throughout the first half of the twentieth century, a black ghetto would not emerge until the postwar years. In 1930, in the two most heavily African-American concentrated wards of Milwaukee, African-Americans made up only

---

<sup>25</sup> Richard M. Flanagan, "The Housing Act of 1954: The Sea Change in National Urban Policy," *Urban Affairs Review* 33 (1997): 271.

<sup>26</sup> Schorr, 73.

<sup>27</sup> Smith, 82.

22.2 percent and thirteen percent of the total population. “Black residential areas continued to be significantly interspersed with white residential areas.” Yet, as early as 1926, the Milwaukee Urban League noted that housing was a major issue for Milwaukee blacks, conditions were poor, and there was a high incidence of disease.<sup>28</sup> Not yet highly segregated, African Americans still experienced discriminatory real estate practices in Milwaukee in the first half of the twentieth century. Racially restrictive housing covenants were contract agreements, often made within the deed, to restrict the sale or lease of the property to certain races. Mutual agreements made among a neighborhood residents and real estate agents enforced the continuance of these covenants. One study found that restrictive covenants covered ninety percent of the plats filed at the Milwaukee County Register of Deeds.<sup>29</sup> In 1920, an ordinance zoned the southern half of Milwaukee’s black district for commercial and light manufacturing. Restricting new residential structures in favor of new commercial developments caused landlords to allow buildings to deteriorate while they attempted to get the most rent from them as possible, foreshadowing the urban renewal of the 1960s.

By 1940, African Americans were becoming highly segregated in Milwaukee’s inner city. “78.2 percent of the Afro-American population lived in the seventy-four blocks bounded by W. Brown, W. Juneau, N. 3<sup>rd</sup>, and N. 12<sup>th</sup> Street,” yet even in this area African-Americans only made up a little more than half of the population.<sup>30</sup> By 1944, the

---

<sup>28</sup> Joe William Trotter Jr., *Black Milwaukee: The Making of an Industrial Proletariat, 1915-1945*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 66-70.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 178.

entire African American residential area, comprising census tracts 20, 21, 29, and 30 was designated “blighted” by the Milwaukee commissioner of health after a study of housing conditions. “Although blacks and whites in the area shared similarly aged housing, they experienced drastically different conditions.” One of the most telling characteristics as to why African American housing conditions were deteriorating was that in the 1940 census, African Americans occupied 2,488 dwellings in Milwaukee, yet only forty-one owned their property.<sup>31</sup> More than sixty-seven percent of the city’s African American population lived in dwellings that were “unfit for use”, compared to thirty-four percent in Detroit and thirty-six percent in Buffalo.<sup>32</sup>

As the population of Milwaukee grew from 587,472 in 1940, to 637,392 in 1950, to its record high of 741,324 in 1960 so did the African American population from 3.4 percent in 1950 to 8.4 percent in 1960, to 14.7 percent in 1970.<sup>33</sup> When the growing African American population became more visible to the white population of Milwaukee during the 1950s and 1960s, reasons for opposition to public housing and urban renewal changed. No longer was “socialism” the main basis for opposition to public housing. The president of Milwaukee County Property Owners Association let it be known what the real opposition to public housing was in the city, stating, “They talk about a big blanket redevelopment in the 6<sup>th</sup> ward. If there is more housing there, more people will move into Milwaukee. The only thing that has kept 10,000 – aye, 20,000 – Negroes from coming up here is the lack of housing.” The Property Owners Association was

---

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 179.

<sup>32</sup> Gurda, 358.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 343, 361.

advocating for a good housekeeping bill to force owners to upkeep their property, although it was widely recognized that many of the buildings in the African American Inner Core were beyond repair.<sup>34</sup>

In 1956, Zeidler's annexation plan allowed for the redistricting of the city, resulting in the creation of the second ward in the African American community. Vel. R. Phillips was elected as alderwoman to the Common Council and became the first African American and first female member. A supporter of urban renewal, she advocated, as did Mayor Zeidler, for responsible renewal through the creation of public housing to resettle those who were displaced by slum clearance. She was aware that the issue of public housing had moved beyond the cover of "socialism" and was openly an issue of race. She proposed public housing projects in 1958 and in 1960, but both were defeated, thanks to the 1951 public housing referendum, which allowed residents to vote down public housing in their ward. Phillips argued, as did Mayor Zeidler, that public housing should not be concentrated in the inner city but dispersed throughout the city. When the second housing project was proposed to be located in the almost exclusively white working class south side, residents voiced their objections at a meeting called by the South Side Citizens' League. When someone declared that, "We do not want the colored people on the south side, and believe me, that's the whole thing" the crowd responded with cheers.<sup>35</sup>

As opposition to public housing grew and urban renewal stalled, the inner city continued to deteriorate. The Housing Act of 1949 accomplished little of what it set out

---

<sup>34</sup> William J. Manly, "End of Blight is Favored – How Is Issue," *The Milwaukee Journal*, May 13, 1952.

<sup>35</sup> Smith, 88.

to do and in response to the growing criticism it was amended in 1954. The 1954 Act made what to that time was known as urban redevelopment into “urban renewal.” An emphasis on individual slum clearance projects and large-scale public housing gave way to the rehabilitation of larger areas, minimal public housing, and an emphasis on working with private developers.<sup>36</sup> The slum clearance and public housing programs of the New Deal had evolved into urban renewal by the 1954 Act.

The 1954 Act brought about a new focus on conservation of existing housing and planning for new construction. It was readily apparent that some neighborhoods were not candidates for conservation. As the 1950s came to an end, a well-established African American ghetto had emerged in Milwaukee’s near northwest side, just outside of the Central Business District. In addition to ghetto establishment, race relations in Milwaukee deteriorated rapidly when twenty-two-year-old African American Daniel Bell was fatally shot by a Milwaukee police officer in February 1958. This incident encouraged the organization of a “prayer march” by Reverend Raymond L. Lathan, pastor of New Hope Baptist Church, a fast-growing African American congregation. At the urging of the mayor, the march was cancelled in fear of a riot similar to Detroit.<sup>37</sup> In response, Zeidler commissioned a study of the “Inner Core.” The report that awaited newly elected Mayor Henry Maier found that,

One theme underlies the entire report: There is a manifest and critical need for total community action directed toward the amelioration of the physical and social problems of the study area and similar tracts elsewhere in the city. Physical rebuilding of the area and acculturation of many of its citizens are the key problems. A continuing structure is required to constantly review the nature of the problems presented, to propose and test solutions,

---

<sup>36</sup> Schorr, 74.

<sup>37</sup> Smith, 89.

and most important it is essential to take an aggressive, immediate and positive course of purposeful leadership toward their solution.<sup>38</sup>

The report found that the area had 14,686 residential structures (1,768 structures with 2,883 dwelling units would be removed for expressway construction), the population density of the area was nearly double that of the newly developed areas in the city due to the construction of two or three structures on narrow lots, and it was populated by young, non-white residents. In part due to the poor land use and overcrowding, the conditions of housing in the area were highly deteriorated. Poor conditions included the need for interior renovations, broken window panes, rat and vermin infestation, defective plumbing, and “poor housekeeping,” and all were at least one hundred percent higher than in other areas of the city.<sup>39</sup> The report, while acknowledging that the conditions of the houses in the area stemmed from their age, absentee landlords, and poor land use resulting in overcrowding, also blamed the current residents,

It is thought that one of the many reasons Inner Core homes are in neglected condition is that Negroes customarily put no high prestige value on the visiting pattern which would make cleanliness and orderliness of homes a matter of pride. Most of the inter-personal relationship between colored people in the area takes place in bar rooms, halls and on the streets. This naturally accelerates the deterioration of homes.<sup>40</sup>

This statement, along with the “There is no evidence of racial discrimination” in regards to home sales, exonerated the city of responsibility for conditions within the Inner Core. Instead, the report implies that the conditions are apparently due to neighborhood

---

<sup>38</sup> Mayor’s Study Committee on Social Problems in the Inner Core area of the City, Final Report to the Honorable Frank P. Zeidler, Mayor, City of Milwaukee, Milwaukee, April 15, 1960, 2.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 18.

life-cycles and the practices of un-acculturated newcomers from the South, and their inability to adapt to urban life.<sup>41</sup> In fact “Acculturation” was the first recommendation made to address the problems of the area.<sup>42</sup> Other recommendations included encouraging additional education, because there is “adequate opportunity” but a lack of “motivation.”<sup>43</sup> The fourth recommendation for the area was in regards to housing. It was proposed that the city make a “full scale study” to determine what urban renewal program would be effective, and that issues of zoning, ordinances, and property taxes be examined. It also recommended that the city develop an education program to do three things: “a. Disseminate the nationally known and recognized facts regarding the Negro Housing market, b. make known experiences in open occupancy housing, and c. explode the myths regarding racial factors as related to property values.”<sup>44</sup>

The report explained problems of the Inner Core as internal issues, originating and taking place in the Inner Core. This allowed the city to ignore city-wide civil rights issues such as open housing and job discrimination; it also allowed recommendations to focus on acculturation and reconstruction.<sup>45</sup> The recommendations of acculturation and reconstruction removed racism from the conversation. Structural issues contributing to the problems of Inner Core were not considered or addressed in the report. When Mayor Henry Maier took office in 1960, he found the report to be “an incontrovertible and

---

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>45</sup> Jones, 39-40.

almost indigestible mass of facts, figures, statistics, and bleak reports.”<sup>46</sup> The report did not guide the policy decisions of the Mayor because he mostly ignored the report, as well as issues of racial inequality. The report and Mayor Maier’s response to it give insight into how the city viewed issues of race and how it addressed planning. The general consensus that problems of the Inner Core could only be addressed by addressing the Inner Core and not the city as a whole affected how the city approached its urban renewal planning. Future urban renewal plans attempted to address the entire city, in theory, but projects were still neighborhood defined and city-wide issues of racism and inequality continued to be ignored.

### ***Managing Local Control: The Workable Program and the Community Renewal Program***

The 1954 Housing Act amendments reflected the conservative power shift on the national level. The new emphasis for urban renewal was to lower the federal cost by moving away from clearance programs that were expensive and towards conservation programs. By allowing private enterprise a greater share in redevelopment areas, cities could be more aggressive in addressing problems. To hold cities accountable for the new level of responsibilities and take measures to prevent the continued creation of slums, the Workable Program required cities to address a variety of issues considered foundational.<sup>47</sup> This new accountability measure was the “Workable Program to

---

<sup>46</sup> Gurda, 365.

<sup>47</sup> Foard and Fefferman, 656.



Eliminate and Prevent Slums.” Urban renewal under the Workable Program was to take place as part of a comprehensive plan that involved increased contributions from developers, local government and private citizens.<sup>48</sup> The Workable Program intended to address issues of codes and ordinances, comprehensive community plans, neighborhood analysis, administrative organization, financing, housing for displaced families and citizen participation. These issues had been overlooked previously and were seen as major failures of previous urban renewal projects. All projects in the city were accountable to HUD approval of its Workable Program. If a city failed to address these issues or make progress towards goals of these issues, funds could be withheld from all projects.

In support of the Workable Program a revision to the Housing Act made in 1959 encouraged the creation of a city-wide strategy, a requirement of the Workable Program. The Community Renewal Program (CRP) was the precursor to the better known “Model Cities” program; both were intended to address physical and social problems of America’s cities by approaching them through a city wide strategy. The CRP intended to study and develop a plan that moved away from the tendency of cities to undertake urban renewal on a project-by-project basis. Although it was a voluntary provision of the 1959 Amendment, it helped fund community wide planning, which was a requirement of the Workable Program. Milwaukee was one of the first cities to complete their CRP, in 1964.<sup>49</sup>

---

<sup>48</sup> Greer, 19.

<sup>49</sup> Mandelker, 635.

In Milwaukee, the CRP laid out and prioritized projects taking place throughout the city including several major projects taking place in the Inner Core. Law Professor Daniel Mandelker argued in 1971 that Mayor Maier wished to use the CRP as a distinguishing policy between himself and outgoing mayor Zeidler. To strengthen his role in urban renewal planning, Maier created the Department of City Development (DCD) in 1961, by consolidating city planning, housing, and community development. The new director of the DCD had formerly led the city's housing and urban renewal projects. Richard W.E. Perrin had a track record of minimal public housing and opposition to the previous Mayor Zeidler's renewal plans that the Common Council and Mayor Maier approved. Perrin's position on renewal becomes even more evident when some accounts state that he was against the CRP because through its implementation HUD would have greater regulation of Milwaukee's renewal plans. He warned that HUD would not approve the CRP and that it would be ineffective, even though it brought additional funding to his office.<sup>50</sup> Milwaukee's CRP application proposed, "To identify and measure in broad, general terms the total need for urban renewal action in Milwaukee, to relate this need to the available resources and to develop a long range program for urban renewal action."

Mandelker, who analyzed Milwaukee's CRP program, noted that the argument had been made that the CRP presents a containment strategy for Milwaukee's African American community. Mayor Maier's electorate was the

---

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 646.

working class white community of Milwaukee. Maintaining the African American ghetto concentrated his opposition and protected his electorate.<sup>51</sup>

The CRP, contained several studies to evaluate the city's need and direction for urban renewal funds. The city, with the help of consultants, undertook studies on blight, relocation, and land use. These studies were done on a city wide basis as the federal intention of the CRP was undertake urban renewal programs as they fit within a greater city wide plan. The goal was a city wide plan that guided and informed the use of urban renewal funds. Fitting with the goals of the Workable Program, the CRP was to prevent the creation of slums due to poor planning. The final product of the CRP gave a city wide account of conditions and prioritized projects throughout the city. Areas of blight and priority neighborhoods are outlined and the general plan presented is that of a city wide effort that takes into account issues of relocation, blight, and land use. Yet a closer look at the CRP reveals that the city had no intention of following the plan outlined in the CRP and completed the plan only to account for the requirements of the Workable Program.

In the CRP, redevelopment projects and renewal projects were often paired together. Yet areas of rehabilitation and building code enforcement were concentrated on the south and north sides. Areas of the minority inner core were almost completely redevelopment and clearance. Midtown and K-3 were the second priority set according to the CRP, but they were the first to be submitted and were the only projects undertaken as part of the CRP. It was likely that these

---

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 647.

neighborhoods were the first priority all along due to deteriorating conditions in K-3 and the neighborhood call for conservation efforts in Midtown. The reason the CRP presented them as it did was that federal regulations were looking for projects to fit within a larger picture of city wide development. Scheduled before it was a very large rehabilitation project on the far north side and a smaller redevelopment project on the eastern edge of the “Inner Core.” These projects if completed would have assisted in the relocation of residents from K-3. K-3 and Midtown were likely first priority all along as it was the area in greatest racial transition.<sup>52</sup>

According to Mandelker, the blight study and the relocation study were the most telling as to the city’s actual renewal intentions. The blight study did not deal with specific neighborhoods and was vague in terms of blight determination. Mandelker notes that within the blight analysis there was extensive blight on the south side of the city yet no urban renewal programs were scheduled for the area that represented a large part of Mayor Maier’s electorate.<sup>53</sup> Additionally, the relocation study was optimistic; expecting that those is neighborhoods of renewal could easily find housing in other parts of the city. This was a problem due to a lack of public housing and a general shortage of housing in the city. Furthermore, it failed to take into account issues of economic status and race, which were especially problematic in a highly segregated city such as Milwaukee. The relocation study did not relate to specific neighborhoods and data was based upon

---

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 650.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 649.

currently approved projects, actually excluding any projects to be undertaken as part of the CRP.

The self-imposed limitations that are evident in Milwaukee's CRP allowed the city to meet all federal guidelines for their plan, while the evidence supports that there was never an intention to undertake the plan as laid out in the CRP. The CRP was created with select figures to shed a favorable light on Milwaukee's plan, in order to open up funding and abide by the conditions of the Workable Program. The fact that the Midtown and K-3 urban renewal plans were being reviewed and considered by HUD at the same time as the CRP could have exposed the uncertain elements of the CRP, the likely reason why the Department of City Development was opposed to undertaking the CRP.

The general plan outlined in Milwaukee's CRP was quickly abandoned; efforts were focused on the racial transition areas of K-3 and Midtown. Although Milwaukee's CRP was approved by and consistent with the federal guidelines when written, actual intentions of Milwaukee's Department of City Development were inconsistent with the goals of the CRP or with federal regulations.

### *Summary*

In Milwaukee, the Workable Program and the CRP became areas of contention between the City and Federal Government. Milwaukee did not undertake any large-scale renewal projects until the 1960s, later than many other cities. This was due to the racialized nature of public housing. Mayor Frank Zeidler refused to undertake any slum clearance project without a complimenting

public housing program. Zeidler believed that public housing needed to be located throughout the city, not in concentrated areas. Race-based fears of public housing resulted in several legislative measures that killed public housing for the city of Milwaukee, including neighborhood approval for public housing and the authorized sale of public housing to private companies. The result of the public housing impasse and racial housing policies was a highly segregated and deteriorated residential pattern in Milwaukee, including an established African-American ghetto.

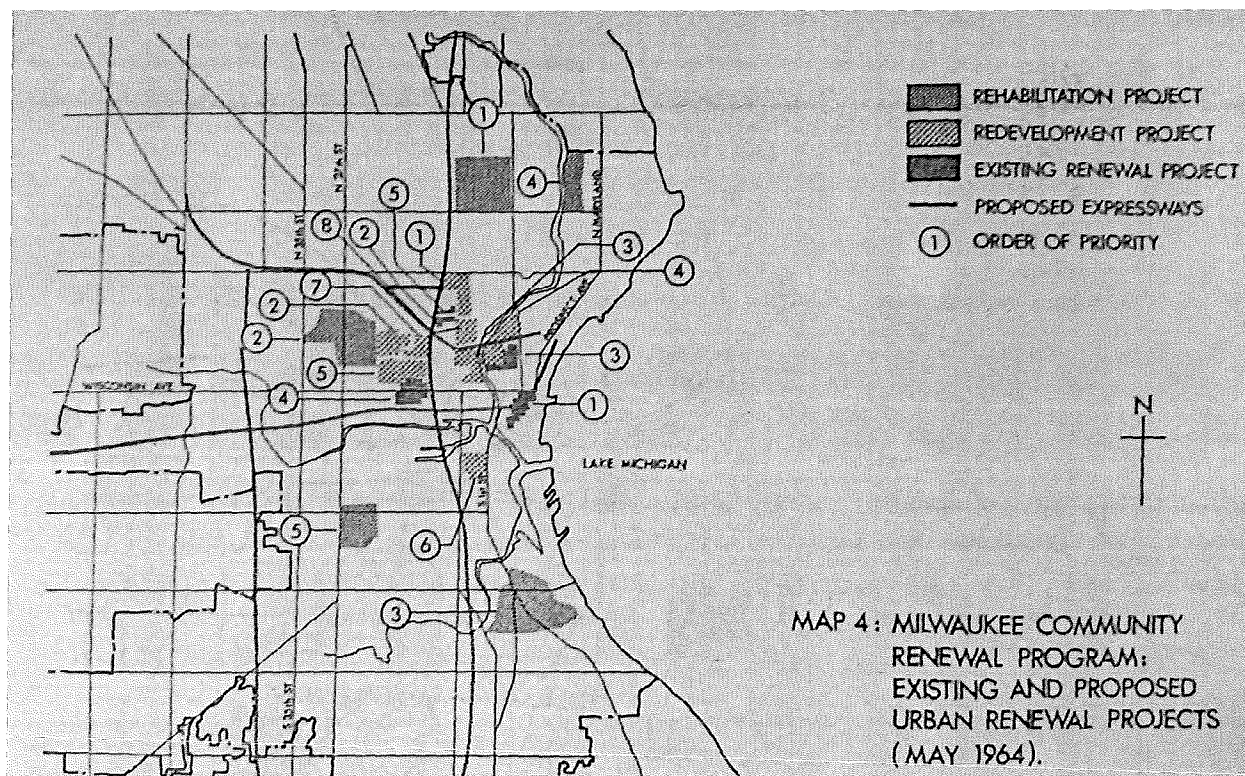
In 1960, Mayor Henry Maier was elected to office. Rather than address the growing racial tensions by focusing on civil rights, he focused his efforts on increasing his power in relation to the common council, concentrating the city's housing, planning, and community development programs into a single office that he could oversee, the Department of City Development. Mayor Maier's Administration and the newly established DCD office was willing to undertake urban renewal programs and began planning urban renewal projects as well as the Community Renewal Program.

As the city began its urban renewal activities, it became apparent that the planning set forth in the CRP was nothing more than vague statements meant to appease the federal government. Federal guidelines, intended to protect communities from excessive hardships created by displacement, were easy to agree to and just as easy to ignore for the city. The 1954 and 1959 amendments intended to curb local abuses of urban renewal. The immediate modification of the CRP plan to focus on the clearance of K-3 and the conservation of Midtown,

indicates that the city intended to contain the growing African-American population by creating a racial border between K-3 and Midtown. This focus and the lack of real attention given to relocation show that the city intended to use urban renewal projects to continue a racial housing policy. This policy became immediately evident to residents as well as HUD once the city undertook the K-3 clearance project.

**Figure 2:**

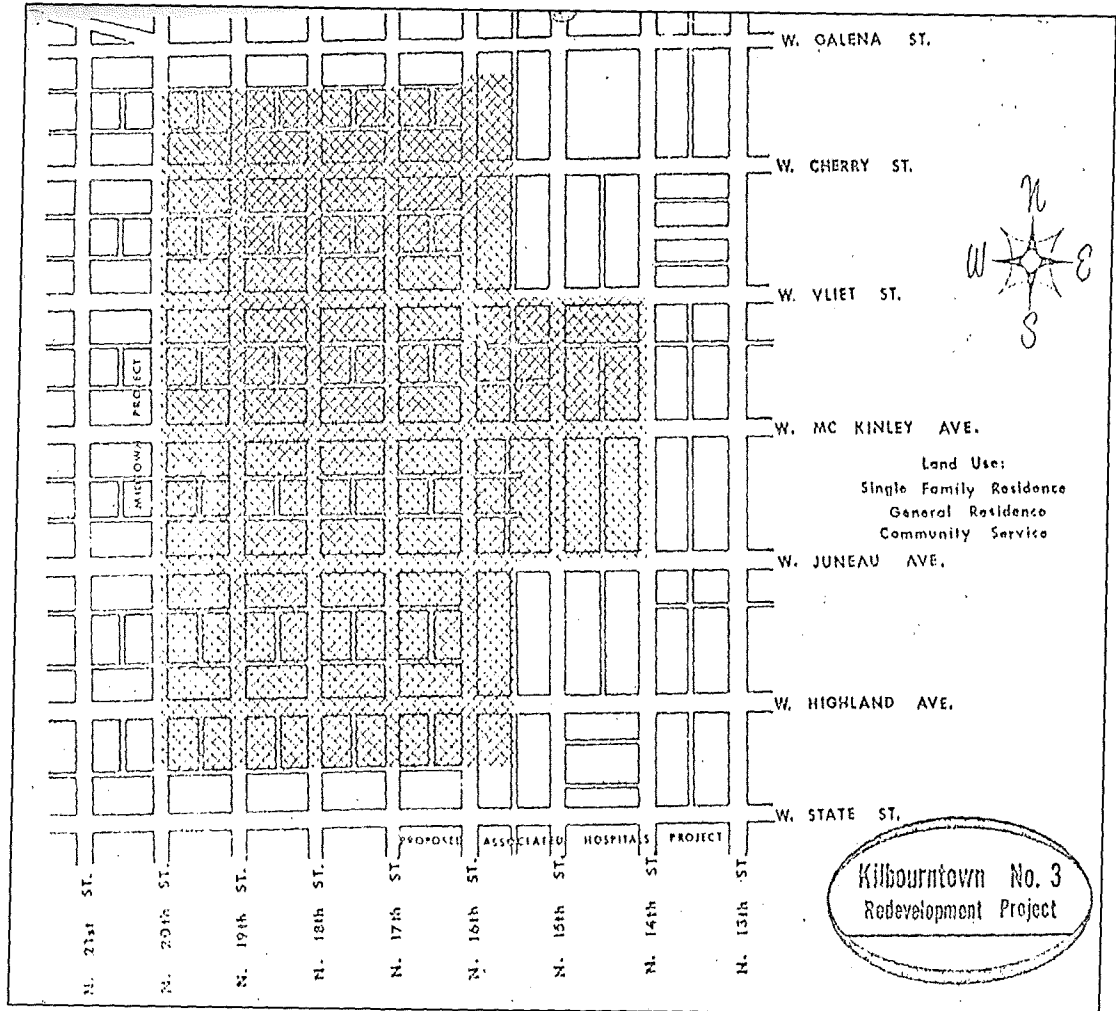
**Map 2: Community Renewal Program Projects and Expressways<sup>54</sup>**



<sup>54</sup> Mandelker, 676.

Figure 3:

Map 3: Kilbourntown – 3 Redevelopment Area<sup>55</sup>



<sup>55</sup> Franks.



## **CHAPTER TWO: THE CLEARANCE OF KILBOURNTOWN-3**

“Nobody wants these people in their neighborhood”

– Richard Perrin, Director of City Development

Between the years of 1952 and 1976, the City of Milwaukee conducted seven urban renewal projects (mostly clearance) and completed an expansive expressway system. The last urban renewal clearance project that the city conducted was known as Kilbourntown-3, or K-3. K-3 was also the first project undertaken as part of Milwaukee’s Community Renewal Plan (CRP), which guided the redevelopment of Milwaukee’s Inner Core through several urban renewal projects, including the Midtown conservation project. K-3 was intended to clear 104 acres in the lower Inner Core of Milwaukee to make way for new multi-family residential units. K-3 was part of Milwaukee’s “urban renewal” but was suggestive of earlier “urban redevelopment” efforts in that its intention was slum clearance and private development. The area was predominately residential and was the largest clearance project planned by the city. It involved the relocation of over 1,000 families, more than the previous five renewal projects combined.<sup>56</sup> The stated goal was to make the land area marketable to developers by clearing the deteriorated housing conditions in the area, hoping that a blank

---

<sup>56</sup> United Community Services of Milwaukee. “Second Quarterly Report of the Kilbourntown #3 Social Service Coordination Program.” March 7, 1968. Milwaukee Urban League Records, 1919 – 1979. Box 7, Folder 20, Mss EZ, Milwaukee Area Research Center. Milwaukee, WI.

slate would bring investment back to the inner city. The clearance also intentionally created a racial buffer zone.

Eventually, the city was able to clear the K-3 area and several private housing developments were built in its place. Yet, the experience of K-3 exposed existing racial inequalities and the city's reluctance to address those inequalities. The K-3 clearance project actually exacerbated inequalities of Inner Core residents by allowing complete deterioration of the neighborhood and it failed to provide adequate relocation to residents of K-3; both were a result of the city's commitment to restricted and segregated housing.

The K-3 project was located in a racial transition area of the city. The boundaries of the K-3 urban renewal area were North 14<sup>th</sup> St. west to North 20<sup>th</sup> St. and W. Highland Ave. north to W. Galena St (See Map 2). This area is partially located within the Inner Core of Milwaukee, an area of the city characterized in the 1950s and 1960s by low-income housing and recent African American, Latino, and American Indian migrants. The Inner Core became increasingly segregated through the 1950s and 1960s due to housing discrimination and population migrations. It was estimated in 1959 that 90% of Milwaukee's nonwhite population lived in the area.<sup>57</sup>

Absentee landlords and discriminatory real estate practices caused the physical conditions of the Inner Core to continue to deteriorate into the 1960s. Due to the redlining of the area, banks refused to provide home improvement loans and there was a general disinvestment. A lack of mortgage financing for the area forced many who wished to buy or sell a home to do so through land contracts. Housing was restricted for

---

<sup>57</sup> Mayor's Study Committee on Social Problems in the Inner Core area of the City, Final Report to the Honorable Frank P. Zeidler, Mayor, City of Milwaukee, Milwaukee, April 15, 1960,.

African Americans in the rest of the city, inflating prices in the Inner Core. Land contracts and inflated prices forced minority buyers to default on the contract, allowing owners to sell the property again, while white owners and landlords failed to maintain properties.<sup>58</sup>

The area contained 898 structures, 76% considered blighted, and an additional 8.4% were considered to be in a condition that contributed to the deterioration of the neighborhood.<sup>59</sup> The prominent design feature of the residential structures of K-3 was the porch, in close proximity to the sidewalk. Houses were generally two stories high and varied in sizes, design, and color. Although the city found it in their interest to label 76% of the structures blighted, other reports stated a greater variance, noting that residences “range from drab, decrepit masses of peeling dirty white to structures of bright, freshly-painted trim and newly re-sided walls.” There was a “wide range in quality of residences. Some homes were decaying, while others indicated mighty salvage efforts”<sup>60</sup>

The area had many mixed-use areas. Grocery stores and bars were scattered across the area; Vliet St. was considered the main business district. Joseph Tamney, chair of Marquette’s Sociology Department, presented one of the few descriptions of the neighborhood directly before the widespread razings of buildings, in his spring 1966

---

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Roger L. Franks, “The History of Urban Renewal in Milwaukee” (master’s thesis, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, 1976), 34.

<sup>60</sup> Joseph B. Tamney, *Solidarity in a Slum* (New York: A Schenkman Publication/John Wiley and Sons, 1975), 15. This book was made possible by a grant from the United Community Services of Milwaukee. UCS was a county governmental service that was used to help relocate people in the K-3 area. This book presented the evidence of a survey of the neighborhood to sociological study of Involvement and Alienation in the K-3 neighborhood. The people interviewed in the study were all “homemakers.”

sociological study of the area, *Solidarity in a Slum*. He stated that Vliet St, is not a “stroll street.”<sup>61</sup> Businesses he lists are general shopping stores and community meeting places; such as a hat store, a shoe store, a pet store, two restaurants, a coffee shop, fifteen bars and three churches. The other type of business he refers to are those that are not neighborhood oriented and tend to be more industry-focused such as a restaurant machinery store and a plumbing supply store. The author sees the businesses occupying two extremes, “The centers of liquor and religion and the non-neighborhood businesses- with little of the in-between types of establishments.”<sup>62</sup> Throughout this study, the author downplayed the importance of the local community. He used statements such as, “Most intermediary institutions are unimportant – however, with the strong exception of the religious institution”<sup>63</sup> and “It seems evident to us that at least some people would feel alienated in neighborhoods like Kilbourntown because of the absence of unity or structure in their neighborhood social relations.”<sup>64</sup> Tamney seeks to portray K-3 as an alienated community. At one point he states that the facts from his questionnaire, “suggest an aggregate of people who are in the world but not of it, of people who keep their selves to themselves.”<sup>65</sup> It is difficult to gather the same conclusions from his data. His narrow focus on the homemakers of the area and questions that are rather open ended without real relation to the community can hardly account for a true study of a

---

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 96.

community relations. His study also took place long after the first mention of clearance. Tamney noted the problems of heavy traffic in the area and used it to argue against involvement in the community; heavy street use tears the neighborhood apart and along with the non-neighborhood stores, attracts strangers uninterested in the residents of the area.

Jane Jacobs might have come to a different conclusion regarding the K-3 neighborhood. The mix of establishments encouraged the movement of people throughout the area, with plenty of interactions and what Jacobs refers to as “public street civilizing service.”<sup>66</sup> As much as Tamney attempts to down play the role of community, places such as corner groceries, taverns, churches, and coffee shops all provided a sense of community. The greatest of Tamney’s failures was his timing; by the time he was working on his study in 1966 the area was already suffering from the prospect of “renewal.”

The K-3 area at the time of the initial renewal studies contained 1,345 families. By the time acquisition began, 1,022 families needed to be relocated, 743 were nonwhite and 279 were white, as well as 268 individuals, approximately half non-white.<sup>67</sup> Primarily a family area, children represented more than half the population and 29% of the residents were separated or widowed, yet few were divorced. Nearly half of the families in the area earned under \$3000 per year, while the median household income for Milwaukee County in 1969 was \$9,696. Over half of the families had 4 or more

---

<sup>66</sup> Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961; repr., New York: Modern Library, 2011), 53.

<sup>67</sup> Franks, 32.

members.<sup>68</sup> Another major social characteristic of the K-3 neighborhood was the relative mobility of families; nearly two-thirds had moved in the last five years.

The physical and social condition of the K-3 area made it a viable area for urban renewal. The project was first conceived in 1958 and the common council approved a request for a survey and planning grant from the federal government in 1960. The proximity of the K-3 area to the central business district surely had an influence on the choice of urban renewal. One of the overall goals of urban renewal was to bring the middle-income population back to the inner city, along with their tax base and consumer institutions. Specifically the stated goals of the K-3 urban renewal project were to eliminate substandard housing and properly rehouse the present residents of the area, redevelop the street system to eliminate or consolidate through traffic in order to minimize the adverse effects on residential land use and pedestrian traffic, provide needed public utilities to support a new desirable neighborhood, provide an improved site for a public park and recreational development, and provide improved sites for development of private rental and sales housing.<sup>69</sup>

The elimination of substandard housing was to take place over 54 months. This long-term acquisition schedule was intended to aid in the relocation efforts. The large need for public housing in the K-3 area, and the generally low availability of public housing in the city meant that only a certain number of units would become available per

---

<sup>68</sup> Untitled report on relocation efforts for Kilbourntown. Lloyd A. Barbee Papers, 1933 – 1982. Box 143, Folder 8, Mss 16, Milwaukee Area Research Center, Milwaukee, WI. (Hereafter cited as Untitled Report, Lloyd A. Barbee Papers). Income data from US Census.

<sup>69</sup> Franks, 33.

year.<sup>70</sup> In order to properly rehouse the residents of Kilbourntown-3 the residents of the area needed to be informed of their right to relocation fees, relocation offices needed to be adequately staffed, community residents had to be consulted, and available standard housing needed to be available, all according to the Workable Program.<sup>71</sup>

The redevelopment of the area included building 985 dwelling units in the area. 119 single-family dwelling units were constructed to house moderate income families earning \$6,000 to \$14,000 annually. 239 rental units were made available in the Apollo Village Apartments, 159 one bedroom and 80 two-bedroom units, at a price range of \$102 - \$111. 100 one-bedroom and 50 two-bedroom apartments were made available at Callahan Court in the price range of \$128 - \$157 per month. Meadow Village provided 68 three-bedroom and 22 four-bedroom units at \$189-\$206 per month. The three apartment buildings all provided a 20% subsidy for low-income residents.<sup>72</sup>

As for the plan to redevelop the street system, little evidence is available to understand how city planners attempted to go about this, other than relying on the construction of the Milwaukee County Expressway System. The Milwaukee County Expressway System, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, was in the process of acquiring and clearing lands to the north of K-3 for the construction of Park Freeway section of the system. This section, along with the North South Freeway, would relieve the heavy vehicular traffic in the K-3 area. Other improvements to be made to the K-3 area included the construction of a county park, the construction of two schools that were just

---

<sup>70</sup> Untitled Report, Lloyd A. Barbee Papers.

<sup>71</sup> Greer, 15.

<sup>72</sup> Franks, 38.

outside of the renewal areas, as well as new utility systems such as water, sewer, and streetlights.<sup>73</sup>

The K-3 urban renewal project was a lengthy process; partially this was due to the bureaucratic nature of the national urban renewal program at the time. The initial red tape of urban renewal was compounded in the case of K-3 by HUD's rejection of the original planning and issues regarding relocation. The project was first conceived by Milwaukee's common council in 1958, yet it was not until December of 1960 that the common council requested funds to plan the project. The process of acquiring federal funds was a two-step process. First, cities applied for funds to assist in the planning of an urban renewal project. After planning funds were received, a detailed plan was prepared and sent to the regional HUD office for approval. Once approved by HUD, the project received federal funds and grants to carry out implementation. The initial grant request for planning was done in December of 1960; it was not until 1967 that the city began acquisition.<sup>74</sup>

The problem with the long acquisition process was best described by long-time Wisconsin Representative of the 5<sup>th</sup> district (Milwaukee) and two-time Milwaukee mayoral candidate Henry Reuss. In a letter to Milwaukee's Director of City Development Richard Perrin, Reuss cited two problems with the lengthy administration of the K-3 urban renewal project, "1) the buildings in the area are subject to vandalism which threatens to diminish the price which property owners receive for them, 2) the buildings,

---

<sup>73</sup> Franks, 37.

<sup>74</sup> Alice Gernetzke, "Milwaukee Redevelopment Authority Renewal Projects 1958 – 1976" Milwaukee Redevelopment Authority, June 14, 1977. Legislative Reference Bureau, City Hall, Milwaukee, WI.



many of them abandoned, are a blight on the city – at once a hazard to safety, a haven for rats, and an attractive nuisance for children.”<sup>75</sup> Reuss became an advocate for speedy administration and acquisition of urban renewal projects as he was consistently reminded of the problems of the area by people who lived or owned property there. A letter from the owner of five K-3 rental properties, Peter Panos, showcased the problems, “I have had at least 3 fires in two of the properties, the city has served notices and I must tear down two of the properties, four of these properties have been completely removed of any valuables including plumbing, water meters, heating units and other materials by thieves.” Panos goes on to explain the problem in regards to the entire neighborhood and city:

The paper has been continually referring to this area as one to be acquired by the city, people have been moving out of the area; most properties are boarded; the city is only interested in the land anyway and the boarded properties cause the entire lower west side to appear like a salvage or junk yard. Further, if there remains a respect for property rights, for the city to come along after not having policed this area, in anticipation of its purchase, and slap the owners in the face by telling them that since their property no longer exists or has been so badly mutilated and they have no rent coming in, that the city has to apply federal administration rule and steal their property... If it weren't for the fact that I know better, I would think that the city was attempting to actually wear the owners of these properties out and make acquisition by the city less difficult by encouraging the K-3 area to become blighted.<sup>76</sup>

Part of the planning involved city appraisal of the properties in an area of renewal. The initial plan was submitted to HUD in March of 1961, but it was denied on the grounds that the boundaries were not sufficient. So in 1961 many

---

<sup>75</sup> Henry Reuss letter to Richard Perrin, September 20<sup>th</sup>, 1967. Henry S. Reuss, Papers, 1837 – 1998, Box 59, Folder 20, Mss 112, Milwaukee Area Research Center, Milwaukee, WI.

<sup>76</sup> Letter from Peter Panos to Henry Reuss, June 28<sup>th</sup>, 1967. Henry S. Reuss, Papers, 1837 – 1998, Box 59, Folder 20, Mss 112, Milwaukee Area Research Center, Milwaukee, WI.

people received the first appraisal of their properties, a confirmation for many that the city was intending to undertake a massive urban renewal effort.<sup>77</sup> It wasn't until 1967 that the city began to acquire properties and, as Peter Panos referred to in his letter, houses were once again appraised based on current conditions. This meant that many people who owned houses in the area lost a considerable amount of value as the neighborhood began to rapidly deteriorate and became a target for violence and vandalism. Those that owned rental property in the area were unable to rent houses as people left the area. This worked in the favor of the city. Initial grants by the federal government reflected initial appraisals, but by the time the final appraisal was completed, the city was acquiring property more cheaply, enabling the city to make the land cheaper to developers.

The lengthy problems of administration also contributed to the social disintegration of the neighborhood. A story in the *Milwaukee Journal* highlights the problems of a family living in the area. "It is a great injustice to people when a city declares an area to be an urban renewal project," said Mrs. Robert Mann. The Manns were an African American family with eight children living in the K-3 area. The article stated that the Mann family lived in fear of vandals and thieves, as well as the fires. There were 10 fires on the block where the Mann family lived in the year before the article was written. Many of those fires were likely part of the 1967 civil unrest in Milwaukee, much of which took place in the K-3 area. The Mann family also stated that those who could leave did so quickly, and those that come into the area, did so only temporarily for a few months. This

---

<sup>77</sup> Letter to Henry Reuss from Don Hummel, April 14<sup>th</sup>, 1967. Henry S. Reuss, Papers, 1837 – 1998, Box 59, Folder 20, Mss 112, Milwaukee Area Research Center, Milwaukee, WI.

encouraged a social breakdown, because people no longer care about the neighborhood they live in.<sup>78</sup>

The Manns' experience highlights another failure that the city of Milwaukee experienced in the K-3 urban renewal project: relocation. Between 1960, and the beginning of the K-3 acquisitions, 11,000 low income housing units were destroyed to make way for urban renewal, schools, and the expressway, according to the *Milwaukee Journal*. In addition to the lack of low-income housing, up until K-3, urban renewal projects in Milwaukee were located in white middle-income areas.<sup>79</sup> The relocation problem in K-3 can be seen as a culmination of inadequate staff, a "crash" acquisition program, and a lack of low-income and minority housing.

In a letter to the city, residents of K-3 stated, "People in the K-3 area are seen by the city only as an impediment to instant physical renewal."<sup>80</sup> Relocation office employees, who were K-3 residents, wrote a similar letter to the HUD's national office outlining their grievances. The Director of City Development, Richard Perrin, replied to the grievances by firing the director of the relocation office in K-3, Robert Osheim, but Perrin also complained that a HUD requirement forced him to hire people from K-3, noting, "Unfortunately, the people that we got showed little competence. Some are barely able to count to 10."<sup>81</sup> This

---

<sup>78</sup> Charlie House, "Stranded by Blight, Family Faces Perils," *The Milwaukee Journal*. February 25<sup>th</sup>, 1968.

<sup>79</sup> Untitled Report, Lloyd Barbee Papers; Charlie House, "Stranded by Blight, Family Faces Perils," *The Milwaukee Journal*. February 25<sup>th</sup>, 1968.

<sup>80</sup> "K-3 Staff joins protest against relocation officials," *Milwaukee Courier*, Week of January 27<sup>th</sup>, 1968.

<sup>81</sup> "K-3 File 'Mess' Brings Staff Shuffle," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, February 10, 1968. Henry S. Reuss Papers 1839-1998, Box 59 Folder 21, Mss 112, Milwaukee Area Research Center, Milwaukee, WI.

suggests that Perrin saw the requirements of HUD and the people of K-3 as impediments to his department's clearance efforts.

The residents in K-3 were unhappy with the relocation efforts of the office. In a list of grievances compiled by the Organization of Organizations on behalf of K-3 residents, the first three of the nine complaints are directed at the relocation office. The complaints were that displaced residents were provided with substandard housing, the relocation office was not following up with emergency relocation cases, and the office failed to inform residents of compensation available to defray moving expenses.<sup>82</sup>

Even before HUD began to receive resident complaints, it was aware of the deficiencies with Milwaukee's program. HUD had reviewed the application for loan and grants in early 1966. After review, HUD requested that Milwaukee develop a "firm" plan for the relocation of non-white families. The approval of the loan and grants was agreed to by HUD on the grounds that the actual plan would remedy the deficiencies in the relocation plan. These issues would not be resolved until April of 1967.<sup>83</sup>

After the delayed administration of the K-3 project due to grant denials and red tape, the project was ready to get underway. The plan called for a 54-month acquisition process to acquire homes and relocate families through 1971. The plan intended to take advantage of the turnover rates in private and public housing. Families like the Manns

---

<sup>82</sup> "Grievances of People in the K-3 Area and Solutions for Them," Henry S. Reuss Papers, 1837 – 1998, Box 59, Folder 20.

<sup>83</sup> Letter from Don Hummel to Henry Reuss, Henry S. Reuss Papers, 1837 – 1998, Box 59, Folder 20.

were not uncommon in the K-3 area.<sup>84</sup> A considerable number of families that qualified for public housing were large families. Large families presented a problem for the city because few public housing options could accommodate them. Many homes that were adequate were the older homes in K-3, which were being demolished. In the area there were 103 families composed of nine or more people; 89 of those families required at least five bedrooms, and virtually all of those families were eligible for public housing. Yet, on average, only three five-bedroom units of public housing became available per year.<sup>85</sup>

It is unclear if the proposed acquisition plan was scrapped for a compressed version due to immediate developer interest in the area, the violence displayed in the 1967 riots, or the rapid deterioration of the area, but the once 54-month plan was reduced to 9-12 months. In the spring of 1968, up to 20 properties were being purchased per day, and by the end of the first year only 50 of the 687 parcels were still required to be purchased. It would still be several months, the spring of 1969, before any of the land was sold to developers.<sup>86</sup>

This rapid acquisition complicated the relocation efforts, putting an incredible strain on the housing resources of the city. Coinciding with this was also the acquisition and clearance of the Park Freeway to the north of K-3. Two clearance and acquisition programs taking place in minority neighborhoods in a highly segregated city complicated the relocation efforts. HUD suspended further funds for urban renewal, based on the

---

<sup>84</sup> Untitled Report, Lloyd Barbee Papers. States there were ninety-five non-white families with nine or more members.

<sup>85</sup> Untitled Report, Lloyd Barbee Papers.

<sup>86</sup> Franks, 36; Untitled Report, Lloyd Barbee Papers.

city's failure to adequately accomplish the goals set forth in the "Workable Program," specifically the failure to provide adequate relocation efforts and community participation. African Americans in the city were forced by a racist restricted housing policy to move into overcrowded and substandard living conditions, in neighborhoods often not much better than the ones they came from.<sup>87</sup>

Richard Perrin acknowledged that failure of staff in his office was part of the problem, but he also pointed to issues in the city of Milwaukee. "There is not enough public housing," he observed, leading the department to try to buy large houses and duplexes, remodel them and make them available for displaced residents of K-3. In February of 1968, the DCD purchased thirteen houses with federal funds, and Perrin was authorized to buy sixty-four more for public housing. The purchase of these houses was an attempt to alleviate housing shortages and actively try to relocate citizens from K-3. Yet, the purchase and rehabilitation of these houses didn't necessarily make the relocation process easy. "Nobody wants these people in their neighborhood," Perrin said, when referring to the fact that HUD wanted these houses purchased throughout the city, in an attempt to integrate the city.<sup>88</sup> The unwillingness of the DCD and the white residents of Milwaukee to allow K-3 residents into their neighborhoods, and the destruction of K-3 caused the creation of rapid transitional areas. Those areas were where upwardly mobile African Americans had already made inroads, the housing stock was older, and there was an already established outmigration of white residents.

---

<sup>87</sup> Franks 36.

<sup>88</sup> "K-3 File 'Mess' Brings Staff Shuffle," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, February 10, 1968, Henry S. Reuss Papers 1839-1998, Box 59, Folder 21.

The final failure of the K-3 urban renewal program was the inability to provide for adequate affordable housing. The developments planned to take the place of the homes razed in the K-3 area were intended to provide housing for moderate income and small families, not the former residents. The housing needed was for larger low-income families, those that were being displaced. The goal was to develop the area with 985 dwelling units. The city accomplished this, but failed to provide for the needs of African American families.

Developers constructed 119 single-family residences, designed for residents with annual incomes between \$6,000 and \$14,000. Of the former residents of K-3, only 13% of non-white residents, and 27% of white residents earned enough money at the time they were removed to qualify for these homes. Nearly a third of the families removed from K-3 required four-bedroom units. Of the three apartment project developments, only twenty-two of the 479 units had four-bedrooms. The majority of apartments created were 1-2 bedroom units.

Of the 743 nonwhite residents who were removed from K-3, the city initially recognized that 655 existing units were available and only seventy-eight new public housing residences were needed to adequately re-house the entire non-white population. It quickly became evident that this was untrue, as people struggled to find new housing. Once again, the Mann family highlights this story. In K-3 the Mann's occupied a seven room/four-bedroom unit and paid \$85 in 1962, although their rent went down considerably during the deterioration of the K-3 neighborhood. If the Mann's chose to relocate in the new developments of K-3, their best option would be a four-bedroom unit, part of Meadow Village Apts. Rent at Meadow Village was \$206 and under Section 236

a 20% rent subsidy would be available for the Mann's if they qualified. Even with this subsidy the Mann's would be forced to pay nearly double what they had been paying for an undersized unit.<sup>89</sup>

### *Summary*

The Mann family story exemplified the problems created during the K-3 project. The greatest obstacle that the city faced was the relocation of families displaced by the project. K-3 required the relocation of over one thousand families, many of whom were African American. Prior urban renewal projects had a fraction of that amount of families to be relocated and they were usually white neighborhoods. African Americans had a much harder time finding housing in the city of Milwaukee as residential segregation and redlining presented them with few housing options, especially when the neighborhoods that they had traditionally occupied were being bulldozed. Yet the greatest contributor to the problem of relocation was the city itself. The city's failure to give serious attention to the relocation study in the Community Renewal Plan, meant that relocation was going to be a major problem. Furthermore, the city's active opposition to public housing during the previous twenty years meant that there was no existing infrastructure to accommodate relocation efforts.

The failures of K-3 had several major implications. The long administration caused the neighborhood to become highly deteriorated and a site of abandonment, pilfering, and violence. Those who lived in this neighborhood until they were forced to

---

<sup>89</sup> House, *Milwaukee Journal*, February 25<sup>th</sup> 1968; Franks, 37-39.



move did so because restricted housing gave them few other places to go. This ghetto formation was an impetus to the civil unrest in 1967. The Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, also known as the Kerner Commission, reported that the national wave of civil disturbances between 1965-1967 was a result of “frustrated hopes” and “unfulfilled expectations.”<sup>90</sup> Throughout the 1960s numerous open housing bills were introduced and voted down in Milwaukee. The open housing marches and the civil disturbances in Milwaukee, many of which took place in the K-3 area, were intended to bring attention to the injustices of those living in the Inner Core. The city refused to pass open housing legislation until a national bill was passed in April 1968. The rapid acquisition and demolition in K-3 was an attempt to suppress the voice of Inner Core residents.<sup>91</sup> The rapid acquisition and failure of relocation efforts in the K-3 project caused HUD to demand that Milwaukee abide by the requirements of the Workable Program, including adequate housing and citizen involvement. The Open Housing Marches and urban unrest convinced Mayor Maier and city officials in the Department of City Development that citizen involvement would be at odds with their goals.

The redevelopment of the K-3 area involved new housing through private development, a new park, modern utilities, and new infrastructure. The new housing developments were designed to offer housing for smaller moderate-income families, when the real housing need was for low-income large families. This placed the burden of

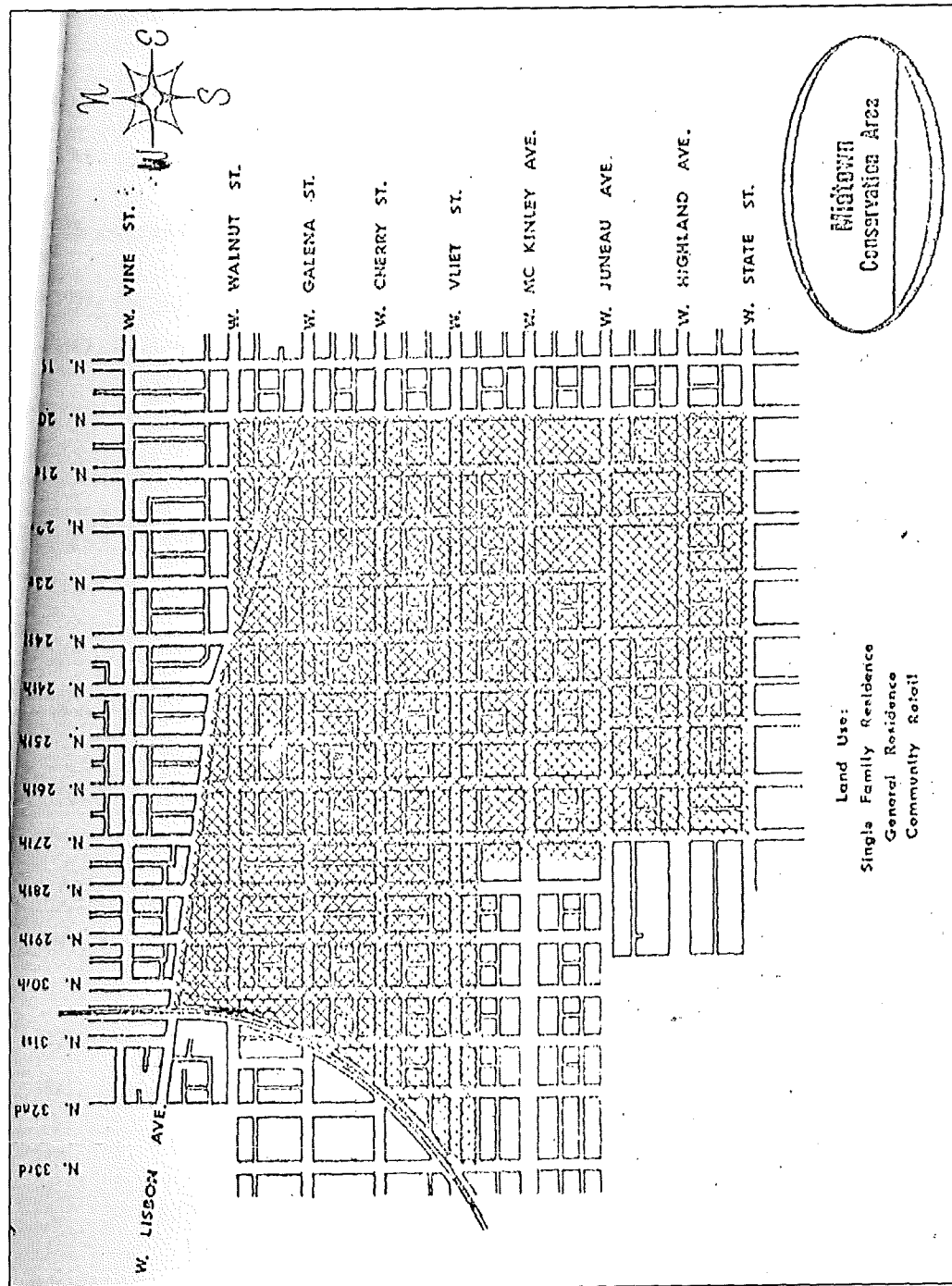
---

<sup>90</sup> Jones, 162.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

finding a home for the relocated residents on other neighborhoods, such as Midtown, which was in line for Milwaukee's next renewal project.

Figure 4:  
Map 4: Midtown Conservation Project<sup>92</sup>



<sup>92</sup> Franks.

### **CHAPTER THREE: THE CONSERVATION OF MIDTOWN**

The Housing Act of 1954 encouraged the use of conservation as an urban renewal tool. The immense cost of clearance and the realization that demolition and reconstruction did not clear neighborhoods faster than deterioration overtook them, encouraged the use of conservation. Intended to stop the spread of deterioration and to reverse the beginning stages of deterioration in some neighborhoods, conservation appealed to cities as an economic alternative to clearance. While it was explicit that conservation programs were intended to curb the physical deterioration of neighborhoods, conservation also protected the racial and class composition of neighborhoods (it might be worth highlighting here that this was a federal initiative—so the feds were somewhat conflicted on the race issue, or at the very least they adopted programs that could be twisted to accomplish certain racial goals.. Reflecting the growing “neighborhood improvement” movement in white neighborhoods, conservation programs encouraged current residents to privately fix up their homes and keep neighborhood pride strong in order to retain the current residents. Can you add a citation here about neighborhood improvement? Conservation, in the case of Midtown, was the last line of resistance that white neighborhoods had to racial integration.

The Midtown Conservation Project was the second project undertaken as part of Milwaukee’s Community Renewal Program (CRP). Like Kilbourntown-3, the project followed the civil unrest in the summer of 1967, was part of the city effort to rebuild the central city, and was plagued by long delays. Unlike Kilbourntown-3, the Midtown

Conservation Project originally intended to preserve the Midtown Neighborhood generally as it was. The goal was removal of deteriorating homes and land uses, in order to create greater neighborhood pride and stop white flight to the suburbs. Longtime Midtown residents were the original proponents of neighborhood conservation. During the 1960s Midtown began to be defined by the changing characteristics of its residents. The displacement of African-Americans and other minorities throughout the inner city due to expressway development and urban renewal projects such as K-3 forced them into the Midtown neighborhood. Milwaukee's implicit urban renewal goals of racial containment and segregation appeared to have failed, and the neighborhood transitioned into a younger multi-cultural neighborhood. Longtime residents of Midtown and the City of Milwaukee no longer viewed conservation as the best land use in Midtown once the neighborhood lost its white homogeneity.

This chapter is intended to show the complications of conservation in Midtown as it transitioned from an older, working-class white neighborhood into a multi-cultural neighborhood. I argue that based on Milwaukee's CRP Program and the initial designation of Midtown as a Conservation Area, the Midtown Conservation Project was based on protecting the residential characteristics rather than the physical conditions of the area. The city wished to protect the white neighborhood and to continue to racially segregate neighborhoods. Secondly, I argue that as the residential composition of Midtown changed, the city's goals in Midtown changed. The conservation of Midtown began as an effort to preserve the largely white working class neighborhood, halting the spread of minority neighborhoods and the exodus of Mayor Maier's and the Common Council's white electorate. As the racial boundaries in the Midtown area changed, due to

the relocation of residents from the Kilbourntown-3 clearance project and the Park Freeway clearance to the north of Kilborntown-3 and Midtown, so did the goals of the Midtown Conservation Project. Almost as soon as the project began, the city became interested in clearing and redeveloping Midtown, abandoning conservation. In part they were interested in doing this to continue the racial neighborhood segregation in the city and secondly to profit from private development.

### *Tangible and Intangible Values*

According to the Community Renewal Program, “The major objective of conservation may therefore be summarized as the restoration of value to basically good areas through a balanced program of public and private improvements for all types of land uses.” In order to restore value, the CRP stated that the City had to consider the tangible and intangible values of the neighborhood, tangible being the physical condition, intangible being defined by such things as resident “pride” or “fear” and the role that the neighborhood takes in the city as a whole.<sup>93</sup> Accordingly, the original plan for conservation was formed on the basis of white neighborhood “pride” and transitional “fear.” The original application for the planning grant, which was submitted between May and December of 1964, called for the rehabilitation of the neighborhood, with only 10-15% of structures being demolished, mostly those in the northeastern section of Midtown, areas with increasingly African American residency.<sup>94</sup> Thus it appears that the

---

<sup>93</sup> Milwaukee Department of City Development, *Milwaukee's Community Renewal Program: Urban Renewal Techniques*, May 1964, Legislative Reference Bureau, City Hall, Milwaukee, WI. 7.

<sup>94</sup> Mandelker, 655; Franks, 42.

original goals of the Midtown project were to raze areas of African American residency and rehabilitate areas of white residency. The clearance of K-3 and the northeast section of Midtown re-established North 20<sup>th</sup> St, the border between K-3 and Midtown, as a buffer zone against the movement of African Americans into Midtown, the original intention of longtime white Midtown residents and the City of Milwaukee.

The Midtown Conservation Project was part of Milwaukee's Community Renewal Program, representing the first major conservation project in the city. Yet, before the Community Renewal Program was written and published, the city of Milwaukee had already designated the Midtown neighborhood as a conservation project due to the influence of Midtown's alderman, the newly formed Midtown Neighborhood Association, and local Midtown businessmen. In his analysis of Milwaukee's CRP, Daniel Mandelker states that "Neighborhood pressures thus dictated the size and limits of the Midtown project."<sup>95</sup> At this time the neighborhood was in the early stages of racial change. The late 1950's and early 1960's presented the Midtown area with population changes as younger white residents moved to the suburbs and were replaced with younger African American families, which were generally larger in size. Although this population change was an emerging trend, there still existed an entrenched older white community in the area.<sup>96</sup> These people, who feared the impending racial transition of their neighborhood, provided the political constituency for the conservation project.

Further evidence that the conservation of Midtown was a racially motivated product of longtime white residents' fears rather than serious city planning was the

---

<sup>95</sup> Mandelker, 655.

<sup>96</sup> Franks, 41.

discrepancy between Midtown Conservation Project and the neighborhood conservation considerations stated in Milwaukee's CRP. A study entitled *Urban Renewal Techniques*, part of Milwaukee's CRP submitted to HUD, highlighted the goals of conservation and served as a guide to determine which neighborhoods to be considered for conservation. Published in 1964, the same year that the Redevelopment Authority of the City of Milwaukee authorized the application for federal planning funds, it stated, "Preference for conservation should be given to neighborhoods in the earlier stages of blight and which have some inherent vitality in terms of identity, character, or stability. In other words, there should be a high degree of owner-occupancy, the owners and tenants should have pride in the neighborhood, the area should be a desirable residential one, and the area should be conveniently located within the city." It was also stated that neighborhoods should be a manageable size.<sup>97</sup> In some respects, Midtown could be given preference for conservation, as it was conveniently located in the central city and longtime residents provided the vitality of identity, character, and stability, but the shift was on. The flight of whites and the movement of African-Americans into the northeast sections of the neighborhood challenged the longtime white ethnic identity in Midtown. High levels of outmigration and absentee-owned properties challenged the stability of the neighborhood.<sup>98</sup> Landlords deferred maintenance on aging buildings and the resulting neighborhood decay was seen as a product of the newer residents. Many of the older white residents who remained in the neighborhood did so due to their economic

---

<sup>97</sup> Milwaukee Department of City Development, *Milwaukee's Community Renewal Program: Urban Renewal Techniques*, May 1964, Legislative Reference Bureau, City Hall, Milwaukee, WI. 9.

<sup>98</sup> Franks, 43.



restrictions. The neighborhood did remain desirable only in that it provided much needed housing for those displaced by K-3.

The size of the Midtown Project was also ill conceived, and reflected the goals of longtime residents rather than actual conservation goals. The Midtown Conservation Project covered 286 acres, twice as large as Kilbourntown-3. It encompassed three distinct residential neighborhoods, the East Lisbon – Vliet neighborhood in the Northeast section of Midtown, the Vliet-State Neighborhood in the Southeast section of Midtown, and the West Lisbon-Vliet neighborhood in the Northwest of Midtown. Each neighborhood had differing degrees of community identity and physical deterioration. The East Lisbon Vliet neighborhood had a higher degree of deterioration, the Vliet-State neighborhood had larger homes with generally better conditions, and the West Lisbon-Vliet neighborhood was the smallest and contained a strong community identity with a combination of residential and commercial areas, varying in condition.<sup>99</sup> According to Mandelker, officials in Milwaukee and HUD said privately that Midtown was too big, but political pressures forced the acceptance of large boundaries. The project was eventually split up by HUD in a final effort to more effectively manage the project. While the goals of conservation in Midtown reflected longtime residents' fears of racially mixed neighborhoods, the borders of the Midtown Conservation Project indicated the intentions of the City of Milwaukee.

Extended urban renewal boundaries was an approach cities used to procure additional federal funds, yet the racial history of Milwaukee offers further explanations for the size of Midtown. As Daniel Mandelker pointed out in his 1971 account of

---

<sup>99</sup> Franks, 42.

Milwaukee's urban renewal program, it was argued that the conservation of Midtown, and the overall strategy of Milwaukee's CRP in action was to constrict the spread of the African-American ghetto into white residential neighborhoods and protect the white ethnic, blue collar electorate of the current city administration.<sup>100</sup> The conservation of Midtown as part of the CRP played an important role in this strategy. The construction of the East-West Freeway through the midsection of Milwaukee, Marquette University, and the Menomonee River industrial valley provided a southern boundary for African American neighborhoods. Downtown Milwaukee, the North-South Freeway, and the Milwaukee River provided a barrier to African-American neighborhoods on the east, and northern suburbs were expected to continue exclusionary measures. Mandelker states, "The only "soft" border was on the west, where Negro movement was beginning to threaten the older, more settled communities of central European ethnics."<sup>101</sup> By upgrading the predominately white neighborhoods of Midtown, the city expected neighborhoods to maintain their racial homogeneity and the white electorate of the common council and mayor.<sup>102</sup> By undertaking such a large project area the city was able to create a hard border to the west of the African-American ghetto and encourage confidence in the older white neighborhoods that were experiencing increasing deterioration, not just those on the border of the African American ghetto, but those to the west of border neighborhoods as well.

---

<sup>100</sup> Mandelker, 647.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 650.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 651.

The Midtown neighborhood was not the only deteriorating neighborhood in Milwaukee. Conditions in other areas surrounding Milwaukee's inner city made them likely candidates for renewal. To the south of Midtown, the large Polish neighborhoods of Milwaukee had similar conditions to that of Midtown. Yet, the south side Polish communities had adamantly opposed renewal in their neighborhoods, making them a poor political choice for the mayor and aldermen.<sup>103</sup> This indicates that general housing conditions mattered little in comparison to racial compositions of neighborhoods and political considerations.

### *Conservation Abandoned*

The goals and intentions of city officials to conserve Midtown quickly changed. The original plan to conserve roughly 84% of the existing structures changed in the proposed plan submitted to HUD in May 1965. The new plan called for the demolition of roughly 46% of structures throughout the Midtown neighborhood. The Redevelopment Authority of the City of Milwaukee argued that upon closer inspection many of the buildings were in poor repair, and unfeasible to rehabilitate.<sup>104</sup>

The new plan cost was to be \$25 million, with the federal government covering two-thirds and the city covering the remaining one-third. Public improvements such as utilities and street widening were to be credited towards the city share of project costs.<sup>105</sup>

---

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 649.

<sup>104</sup> Franks, 44.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

In December 1966, a federal decision was made to award only \$7.6 million towards the Midtown Project. The official reason given for the reduction in funds was that there was a shortage of federal funds. The regional HUD office in Chicago suggested that Milwaukee undertake a reduced version of the project, possibly reducing the size, lowering rehabilitation standards, or staging the project to take place over a longer period of time. Richard Perrin opposed the options of smaller scale and lower standards, believing that such actions, "would not improve the neighborhood sufficiently to attract private capital."<sup>106</sup> This comment is one of the first indications that Richard Perrin and the Department of City Development were looking towards redevelopment as the end goal in Midtown.

To further illustrate that Perrin's Department of City Development and Chicago's HUD office had conflicting goals in regards to Midtown, after Mayor Maier successfully pleaded with Chicago to pledge \$9.7 million more to Midtown, HUD and Perrin clashed again. The additional \$9.7 million was to be available to Milwaukee once it satisfied "standard requirements of federal law." These standard requirements were based on forty questions that HUD had in regards to Milwaukee's application for funds. The issue of greatest importance was that of relocation of those displaced by urban renewal.<sup>107</sup> The revised application for Midtown was presented to HUD on June 19<sup>th</sup>, 1967, one day before the deadline.<sup>108</sup> The application was reviewed with the plans for K-3 and the

---

<sup>106</sup> Chris Lecos, "Hope for Extra Aid for Midtown Fades," *The Milwaukee Journal*, December 22, 1966.

<sup>107</sup> "Midtown Funds Pledged by US," *The Milwaukee Journal*, February 2, 1967; "Midtown's Deadline Stirs US-City Clash," *The Milwaukee Journal*, February 21, 1967; "City Plans to Seek Extension of Federal Midtown Deadline," *The Milwaukee Journal*, February 24, 1967.

<sup>108</sup> "US Gets Final Plan for Midtown Project," *The Milwaukee Journal*, June 19, 1967.

annual 1967 Workable Program submission. According to Mandelker, these documents did not square with each other and failed to convince HUD that Milwaukee was serious about the relocation issues. Yet, K-3 and the Workable Program were approved, while HUD reviewed the Midtown plans.<sup>109</sup> The Midtown application failed to impress HUD in addressing the issues of displacement and relocation of Milwaukee's inner-city residents. The civil unrest at the end of July further justified HUD's decision to delay the release of funds for Midtown. To show that they were serious, HUD allowed the Workable Program to expire in September 1967. In correspondence between Henry Reuss and the President of the Midtown Neighborhood Association, Reuss explained that the HUD Chicago office gave three reasons why Milwaukee's Workable Program was deficient. The issues were that Milwaukee needed to address its housing code in regards to requiring fully equipped bath and toilet facilities for certain dwellings, that there was no evidence of an effective minority group housing committee, and that there was no citizen's advisory committee in regards to community development. The letter also states that, "In addition, there may be problems with Milwaukee's program for relocation of dislocated families."<sup>110</sup> The problems with relocating K-3 residents highlighted the relocation problems and convinced HUD that Milwaukee needed to address relocation before undertaking the Midtown project. Milwaukee addressed these concerns by creating a community participation division within the Department of City Development to account for the lack of citizen participation. They also agreed to construct one hundred

---

<sup>109</sup> Mandelker, 663.

<sup>110</sup> Letter to Rudolph Witte from Henry Reuss, October 31, 1967, Mid-Town Neighborhood Association Records, 1961-1980, Box 1, Folder 8, Mss 13, Milwaukee Area Research Center, Milwaukee, WI.

units of public housing.<sup>111</sup> In April of 1968, the contract was signed for a \$16.8 million grant for the Midtown Conservation Project.

HUD took further control of the Midtown project by splitting the project into five phase areas. Work could not begin in an area until Milwaukee proved that adequate housing was available for those displaced by the project. HUD did not allow any further acquisitions until one year after the contract was signed, with the exception of resident hardship acquisitions and vacant or vandalized structures. The Workable Program was denied in the winter of 1968-1969, once again due to the problematic relocation program. In 1970, federal funds were finally released to allow the completion of the first phase of the Midtown project. Developers submitted redevelopment proposals and two were accepted that authorized the construction of 234 units of medium-density subsidized housing. In April 1971, funds were once again cut off due to relocation issues, prompting Milwaukee to agree to construct 193 units of public housing throughout the city. Funds were allowed again in 1972, allowing the city to resume acquisitions and work towards street widening projects and a new supermarket and park.<sup>112</sup>

### *Housing and Street Widening*

Midtown experienced many of the same problems that plagued K-3, due to delays in funding. Landlords milked properties, expecting they were likely to be demolished. Resulting vacant and vandalized structures had deleterious effects on neighboring properties. Once conservation was replaced with a modified renewal plan, housing

---

<sup>111</sup> Mandelker, 665.

<sup>112</sup> Mandelker, 665-666; Franks, 46-47.

developments and street widening became part of the plan to redevelop Midtown. As in K-3, areas of redevelopment were replaced with multi-family homes, usually with higher costs and fewer bedrooms for large families. The widening of streets and the construction of high residential density housing highlighted the abandonment of conservation in Midtown in favor of developer-friendly land uses.

As early as 1967, the city was replacing the Midtown neighborhood with high-density housing accommodations. The city's traditional opposition to public housing was forced to change in response to HUD requirements to build new public housing. In response, the city built housing restricted to older residents, rather than the large families of the growing African-American population. Public housing for the aging white population did not present the same neighborhood threat that African-American housing did and was viewed more favorably by the city residents. In Midtown, the Cherry Court housing project (corner of Cherry and 24<sup>th</sup> St across from St. Michael's Church) was one of the first redevelopments, completed in August 1967. The nine-story building offered 120 single-bedroom apartments for those over the age of 62.<sup>113</sup> Across N. 20<sup>th</sup> St, the Highland Park redevelopment was being completed and would be ready in the fall of 1967. In the April 1967 edition of *Midtown News*, Alderman Robert Ertl announced that the common council had approved a new public housing project on the other side of Midtown at N. 33<sup>rd</sup> St. and W. Highland Ave. That project would have 210 units for elderly and low-income citizens.<sup>114</sup> The first phase of redevelopment in the area

---

<sup>113</sup> "Cherry Court Housing for the Elderly Dedicated," *The Milwaukee Journal*, August 8, 1967.

<sup>114</sup> "From the Desk of Alderman Robert O. Ertl," *Mid-Town News*, April 1967, Mid-Town Neighborhood Association Records, 1961-1980, Box 3, Folder 9.

included the construction of seven apartment buildings and seven townhouse buildings, with 42 one-bedroom, 42 two-bedroom, 16 three-bedroom units and 19 four-bedroom units, in all creating 119 new units.<sup>115</sup> These units created the opportunity to relocate some of the young and larger African American families, but it was clear that preference was given to one-bedroom and two-bedroom units. All of these new housing developments highlight that Midtown was ground zero for private redevelopment. High-density housing with a large amount of one bedroom and two bedroom units replaced larger duplexes and flats that once occupied the area, increasing profits for developers. In addition to new developments, the city began acquiring buildings in order to widen streets. Highland, Lisbon, and 27<sup>th</sup> St were all to be widened in Midtown, in part to accommodate through traffic into downtown and to accommodate the new housing developments being built in the area. Street widening involved the demolition of good homes, an issue not to be overlooked when HUD had continuously cut off funds due to the lack of housing for those displaced. The city still used its share of the renewal funds to move forward their agenda of street widening, the street widening projects had the effect of exacerbating social problems. Areas that once contained large duplexes were leveled for parks, streets were widened destroying single and two family homes, and most redevelopment in the area consisted of one- and two-bedroom apartments; residents recognized that the city was transforming their neighborhood into smaller housing units and greater residential density.

---

<sup>115</sup> "New Construction in Midtown," *Mid-Town News*, February 1970, Mid-Town Neighborhood Association Records, 1961-1980, Box 3, Folder 9.



### *Summary*

The 1954 provisions that called for conservation recognized that slum clearance and redevelopment were not appropriate for many of America's cities. The 1954 amendment was partly an acknowledgement of the failures of slum clearance and partly a conservative backlash against liberal social policies such as public housing. In Milwaukee, the conservation of Midtown was seen as an important part of the CRP; it was meant to conserve the physical nature of Midtown as well as the residential composition. Longtime white residents of Midtown took a strong lead in establishing Midtown as a conservation area.

Yet the era of conservation in Midtown was short lived. Problems of relocation in K-3 caused Midtown to shift racially. The city's response was clearance in order to continue a policy of minority containment and establish a firm boundary between white and minority neighborhoods. Clearance was followed by the development of 1- and 2-bedroom apartment complexes, housing largely unsuitable for the families that the developments were displacing. Further clearance was done to widen roads for the benefit of the suburban through traffic. This clearance was done in similar fashion to K-3, with little citizen involvement or relocation assistance.

In response, HUD attempted to gain control of the Midtown program, by withholding funds, requiring public housing, and breaking Midtown into smaller projects. Yet as HUD attempted to gain control of the Midtown Project and Milwaukee's Community Renewal Program it was clear that Milwaukee was only willing to go so far with HUD. The city negotiated and made minimal efforts to change their program,

effectually complying without making major changes, such as following orders to complete public housing, but making it senior housing. It was clear that the city was going to undertake renewal to accommodate its own goals: to lure investment and contain the minority populations. The containment of minority populations is a clear goal of Milwaukee's CRP. Once containment failed, clearance and redevelopment was the best option for the city to gain economically from the renewal program. An example of this was the decision to move forward with street widening with the city share of renewal funding, ignoring the need for the existing housing and worsening the problem of relocation.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: ESTABLISHING AUTHORITY IN A TRANSITIONAL NEIGHBORHOOD**

The transition has begun—statistics and observation have proven this. Where it will all end depends on the leadership it receives. Religious and social groups must take an interest. If the new centers and associations of the area succeed in planting the roots of “belongingness” there will be much to gain. If, however, there is no sense of belonging, no pride in living, no self-respect regained, we can chalk the area off as another area for urban renewal projects and total demolition.

— Sister Mary Jane, *Community in Transition*

Sister Mary Jane, Midtown resident from 1960-63, in her study of the population change of St. Michael’s Parish recognized that Midtown had become a different community in the postwar years. Her study on the rates of in and out migration, continuing deterioration, and the anonymity of transitional neighborhoods alluded to the up-hill battle that Midtown faced. She stated, “St. Michael’s Parish is located in an area that housed the cream of Milwaukee society in the latter decades of the nineteenth century. Today, the picture is very different. The parish is located in a transition area — one that is fast becoming a melting pot of races and nationalities.” She described past residents as a cohesive and identifying group, and twice referred to “identity” as something lost among new residents; she stressed the lack of community consciousness in the Midtown community in the mid-1960s. When Sister Mary Jane presented her report to Sister M. Rebecca in 1965, she was uncertain if others would gain insight from

it, but she was clear that it was up to the residents of Midtown to define their community if it was to survive.<sup>116</sup>

Two years after Sister Mary Jane's report, the civil unrest and subsequent clearance of K-3 was an approaching prospect for residents of Midtown. Midtown's population began a rapid change after the clearance of K-3. Young African American, Latino, and Native American families displaced by the K-3 project found residence in the large split-level duplexes that whites were rapidly leaving behind in Midtown. As whites fled, their houses became absentee owned and deterioration set in. HUD-mandated delays caused further deterioration in the neighborhood as residents had no access to grants and loans to fix their homes. The neighborhood, once an ideal candidate for conservation, now was being considered for a clearance program.

While the Midtown conservation project began to look more like the K-3 clearance project, there was a fundamental difference between the two. Midtown was a racially transitional neighborhood rather than the highly segregated racial ghetto of K-3. The familiar white flight that followed the introduction of non-whites into traditionally white neighborhoods stalled in Midtown. Older white Midtown residents failed in their attempts to define the neighborhood by a dominant racial group. The new population increasingly worked towards establishing Midtown as a multi-cultural community. As the traditional segregated neighborhood structure fell apart, greater resistance to the city's urban renewal practices emerged. Urban renewal plans, based upon the racial segregation of the city, no longer represented the goals of Midtown residents who were now more

---

<sup>116</sup> Sister Mary Jane SCSC. "Community in Transition: A Study of the Change in Population Content Within the Boundaries of St. Michael's Parish with Special Reference to Census Tract 41. A Glimpse at Some of the Implications of Transition" Prepared for Sister M. Rebecca, OSF Alverno College, Milwaukee, Wisconsin July 23, 1965, Mid-Town Neighborhood Association Records, 1961-1980, Box 4, Folder 2.

interested in saving what remained of their multi-racial community rather than maintaining a racially homogeneous neighborhood.

The Midtown Conservation Project, initially orchestrated as an effort to protect white property owners and riddled by delays, left behind a deteriorating and vacant landscape in which the new multi-cultural residents were forced to confront city plans that isolated residents in the area. The removal of businesses in Midtown cut off access to goods and services for the residents in Midtown who had no access to private transportation. Renewal plans to widen streets presented issues of pollution, further deterioration, and isolation to the residents in Midtown. The Midtown Neighborhood Association challenged city plans and became active citizen participants to the dismay of the City of Milwaukee. To address the challenges of MTNA and control the required citizen participation, the city attempted to overtake and institutionalize the neighborhood organization. In doing so the city was able to exert control over the urban renewal program.

### *Access to Goods and Services*

Early on in the Midtown Conservation Project, the city of Milwaukee recognized the commercial street as a driving force of deterioration in Midtown. Evident symptoms of deterioration in Midtown were focused on the overcrowded congested streets and obsolete commercial developments. The commercial street brought strangers and through drivers, people uninterested in the neighborhood. Commercial and industrial areas were considered an intrusion on residential land. City plans called for the

consolidation of local businesses into centralized and convenient shopping centers.<sup>117</sup> Business leaders in Midtown were part of the original Midtown Neighborhood Association and the initial call for conservation in the area, but when city plans offered them an out, many were happy to leave the changing area. City clearance plans and premium relocation or compensation fees for business removed most services from the neighborhood, and increased deterioration. In a response to "Vital Questions about the Midtown Project" (a concerned inquisition from MTNA) the Department of City Development concluded that the reasons for the movement of businesses from Midtown varied and were likely personal. It stated, "Concern over reduced business, profit, and lack of faith in the area might have been contributing factors. The problems confronting businessmen were not necessarily due to the urban renewal program. Much of the concern of businessmen and residential owners is due to the general unrest in the City."<sup>118</sup>

In a response to a letter from Congressman Henry Reuss, the Director of Milwaukee's Department of City Development Richard Perrin referred to businesses in the Midtown area as marginal and unlikely to survive the urban renewal process, "the businesses that have been listed include 39 taverns, 27 vacant business establishments, 83 businesses in rented quarters, and 153 business with less than 10 employees. Twenty-six businesses are expected to discontinue their activity upon acquisition of the premises they occupy, and we are certain that many more marginal operations will not be re-

---

<sup>117</sup> Franks, 43.

<sup>118</sup> Letter to MTNA from Frank Polidori, September 10, 1968, Mid-Town Neighborhood Association Records, 1961-1980, Box 1, Folder 8.

established.”<sup>119</sup> The letter from Reuss that Perrin was responding to was in regards to a letter he received from a Midtown businessman named Chester Salomon who wrote to Reuss concerned about his lack of information in regards to relocation, severance compensation, and financial losses.<sup>120</sup> Perrin was sure to state that advice and assistance were available for business relocation, if Mr. Salomon were to seek it out.

The small businesses and shops present in the Midtown neighborhood before the beginning of the conservation project lined W. State St., W. Vliet, and N. 27<sup>th</sup> St. These closed early in the project. The new consolidated shopping center was still not built in 1971, when MTNA president Virginia Slaughter requested it as a priority for the city plans. The renewal plans called for a shopping center to be located in the area bounded by N. 20<sup>th</sup>, N. 22<sup>nd</sup>, W. Walnut, and W. Galena, the first priority clearance area of Midtown. Richard Perrin stated that he had little hope for a higher priority for the shopping center due to the HUD freeze on funds in 1971.<sup>121</sup> Although there was a continuous call for the shopping center, an offer was not made to build a shopping center in the area until 1975 by Jewel Food Stores. Longtime Alderman Robert O. Ert, called it a “shot in the arm” expecting that it would revitalize an area that is now “blighted.” Several reasons explain why it took so long for the shopping center to find its way to Midtown: general disinvestment in the area had likely made it difficult to secure funding, the population reoccupying the area did not have the economic strength to lure

---

<sup>119</sup> Letter to Henry Reuss from Richard Perrin, September 9, 1966, Henry S. Reuss Papers, 1837 – 1998, Box 59, Folder 21.

<sup>120</sup> Letter to Reuss from Chester Salomon, August 8, 1966, Henry S. Reuss Papers, 1837 – 1998, Box 59, Folder 21.

<sup>121</sup> “Shopping Facilities Pushed for Midtown,” *The Milwaukee Journal*, April 9, 1971.

investment back in Midtown, and the city's incomplete plans to widen Walnut St. made development uncertain.<sup>122</sup>

The closing of businesses in a community removed centers of interaction. In response, other areas of social interaction played greater roles, such as churches. St. Michaels Church, often seen as the heart of the Midtown neighborhood, became a meeting place for various social organizations, including Spanish-speaking organizations. Midtown residents focused on the need for social services for the changing community. At 2513 W. Vliet, a youth club opened in July of 1968 that provided classes on African American history, sewing, boxing, and dances. It was the effort of AmeriCorps VISTA workers to provide a place of recreation for the youth of the area, an idea of Michael Cullen, the director of the Casa Maria House at 1131 N. 21<sup>st</sup> St.<sup>123</sup>

Michael Cullen, with the help of some friends, started Casa Maria in 1966. He is better known for his involvement as part of the Milwaukee 14, who stole and burned 10,000 Milwaukee draft board files, accepted arrest, and was eventually deported to his home in Ireland. Casa Maria was originally established as a temporary home for Spanish-speaking newcomers to the city on the south side. It moved in 1967 to the Midtown location and was established as a Catholic worker's house. It housed homeless families that were trying to find new housing and operated a food and clothing bank.<sup>124</sup>

---

<sup>122</sup> "Jewel Seeks Midtown Site," *The Milwaukee Journal*, March 24, 1975.

<sup>123</sup> Larry Tarnoff, "Vista Workers Tackle Big Job to Form Youth Club," *The Milwaukee Journal*, November 23, 1968.

<sup>124</sup> Martin Hintz, "Casa Maria: Home for the Homeless," *The Milwaukee Journal*, November 11, 1976; *The Milwaukee Journal*, June 2, 1967.



The exodus of businesses exacerbated the problems of the Midtown neighborhood and set the stage for clearance and redevelopment. The city removed much of the vitality of the neighborhood when it removed the businesses located within it, regardless of how marginal they might have been. Those that had owned, rented, or worked in businesses in the area no longer had a reason to live in the area, leading to further disinvestment. In response, social organizations responded as best they could to the needs of Midtown residents while advocating to the city that access to goods and services was needed for residents. The fundamental need for goods and services was one of the first issues that the residents of Midtown had to face as city plans moved forward. The formation and reliance on social organizations set the stage for how the citizens of Midtown would fight against city plans.

### *A Community of Their Own*

The HUD funding cut off after the K-3 clearance was in response to the failure of Milwaukee to abide by the relocation requirements and citizen involvement requirements of the Workable Program. In response, the Common Council approved the creation of a Community Organization Division within the Department of City Development (DCD). The division was headed by Peter Pavlovich, “a long time backer of Mayor Maier,” and two assistants with eight community organizers.<sup>125</sup> The plan was meant to appease the directives of HUD in regards to the Midtown Conservation Project, but keep the Mayor’s

---

<sup>125</sup> Chris Lecos, “City Soon Will Unveil Plan for Citizen Role in Renewal,” *The Milwaukee Journal*, August 28, 1968; “City plan termed ‘Secretive,’” *The Milwaukee Journal*, November 5, 1968.

office and DCD in complete control of renewal projects, including the upcoming Model Cities.

After the plan for the Community Organization Division was made public, the Citizen's Conservation Council, a group representing twenty-four neighborhood groups with all but one from the Northside, sent a letter to Mayor Maier, the aldermen, and HUD voicing concern and discontent over the new division. The letter stressed the lack of actual citizen involvement in the new Community Organization Division, "We feel that the community organization specialists who are appointed to two year terms will not provide the interest and continuity needed to establish confidence from the citizens they will work with because of the short duration of their appointment and the relative insecurity of their future." The community organization specialist positions were exempted from civil service positions because, according to Richard Perrin, "We felt that making the positions appointive would facilitate recruitment for the right kind of people."<sup>126</sup> Without being explicit about the actual intent of the Community Organization Division, Richard Perrin's goal of attracting the "right kind of people" indicates that the city had no intention of providing real community involvement in Midtown. The new Community Organization Division fronted as community involvement, but was actually a political contrivance that allowed the city to claim community involvement while ignoring the claims of actual residents. The staffing of the Community Organization Division made the division accountable to the DCD and Mayor Maier not to residents in Midtown.

---

<sup>126</sup> "City plan termed 'Secretive,'" *The Milwaukee Journal*, November 5, 1968.

According to a letter that Rev. John Baumgartner, of St. Michael's Church in Midtown, wrote to former Mayor Frank Zeidler explaining the consistent disagreement between the city and the Midtown Neighborhood Association, Baumgartner explained that shortly before the creation of the Community Organization Division a group of residents were attempting to gain the contract for the community organization component.<sup>127</sup> Shortly after the Community Organization Division was announced, the Midtown Neighborhood Association presented a proposal to seek \$48,000 from the Common Council so that the Midtown Neighborhood Association could set up and run the neighborhood organization as the official citizen involvement organization. Instead of using the new Community Organization Division as the citizen participation aspect of the conservation project, MTNA would function on behalf of the city to work with the DCD on the conservation project of Midtown and work for the residents of Midtown.<sup>128</sup>

The grant was proposed to the Common Council. The Common Council then referred the proposal to the DCD. Perrin, director of DCD, responded to the Common Council, that the Midtown Neighborhood Association already had a contract with the Redevelopment Authority, which provided some level of assistance to the organization. Further, he noted that the recently created Community Organization Division was formed, funded, and staffed to function as the community organization. The staff assigned to Midtown was working out of the MTNA office, sharing space and "working on a cooperative basis to service people in the area." Perrin laid the death blow to MTNA's proposal by underscoring the financial and legal vagueness of MTNA's

---

<sup>127</sup> Letter to Frank Zeidler from John Baumgartner, March 5, 1971, Mid-Town Neighborhood Association Records, 1961-1980, Box 2, Folder 1.

<sup>128</sup> "Midtown Group Asks for Staff," *The Milwaukee Journal*, November 17, 1968.

proposal. He states that the \$48,000 requested, would likely require “additional appropriations required for subsequent years in order to carry out the community organization program envisioned.” The Federal government budget for the Midtown project already provided funds for community involvement and these funds are being used to staff the DCD and thus cannot be used to fund MTNA. He ends his correspondence with the attached opinion of City Attorney Edwin Whitney, Director of Budget and Management, which stated, “it would appear that city appropriations or contributions to private organizations would be illegal.” The Department of City Development recommended that it be placed on file, killing it.<sup>129</sup>

As Mr. Perrin told the Common Council, the Community Organization staff dealing with Midtown shared the MTNA office, yet close quarters failed to provide adequate communication or “cooperative basis to service people in the area.” In April 1969, just months after the proposal to establish MTNA as the official community organization for Midtown, MTNA sent a letter to Perrin expressing the association’s objection to the contract for social services in Midtown being offered to Therapy Services Inc. Corresponding secretary Fran Krueger makes clear MTNA’s objection,

We have seen that again you and your staff have chosen to ignore the expressed interest of the Mid-Town Neighborhood Association, in matters pertaining to the Mid-Town Conservation Project. This is especially true, in regard to direct services to the residents in the form of community organization, social services, relocation services, etc. We had hoped that the day in which government would by-pass citizen participation, in the development of programs, had passed. Your lack of communication on this matter is especially difficult to understand since at this very time we are negotiating a contract with your staff relative to a limited level of social services for the residents.

---

<sup>129</sup> Richard Perrin to The Joint Committee on Buildings-Grounds-Harbors and Finance-Printing of the Common Council of the City of Milwaukee, December 16, 1968, Mid-Town Neighborhood Association Records, 1961-1980, Box 2, Folder 1.

MTNA argued that Therapy Services Inc. was an occupational therapists company, unlikely to have experience or trained personal to offer services other than occupational therapy. Therapy Services Inc. defined their role for the Midtown contract to identify problems and make referrals to existing agencies. Yet, staff from the social service coordination program of K-3 expressed that existing agencies were reluctant to accept referrals because of staffing limitations.<sup>130</sup> Perrin responded to the objections, by stating that Therapy Services Inc. has part-time social workers and professionals on staff, and that “We expect to improve the limited success experienced in K-3.”<sup>131</sup> Perrin completely ignored the actual issue MTNA was raising, that Therapy Services did not have qualified staff and that their role was unattainable due to a lack of resources in the city. Perrin then addressed the K-3 reference, “Recalling the Kilbourntown-3 Project experience, it has been reported to me that social service agencies were reluctant to provide the on-going rehabilitative services needed for certain families and individuals being relocated because of a lack of proper communication, effort, and follow-up on the part of the K-3 social services contractor.”<sup>132</sup> This placed the blame of K-3 on the social service contractors, and not the limitations of resources in the city and city planning.

Although MTNA does not specifically mention that it believed it deserved a role in the social services of the Midtown Conservation project, it does allude to the contract

---

<sup>130</sup> Letter to Richard Perrin from MTNA corresponding Secretary Fran Krueger, April 13, 1969, Mid-Town Neighborhood Association Records, 1961-1980, Box 1, Folder 9.

<sup>131</sup> Letter to MTNA from Richard Perrin, April 19, 1969, Mid-Town Neighborhood Association Records, 1961-1980, Box 1, Folder 9.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

negotiations between the DCD and MTNA. Perrin responded, "We are in the process of negotiating with your Association to expand the contractual services to include maintenance of vacant lots and to provide help in community organization, but as to social services, I think you will agree that this must be performed at a professional level requiring adequate training and experience."<sup>133</sup> MTNA conceded the fight to Therapy Services Inc. but worked toward community participation with Therapy Services Inc. In a letter on May 1<sup>st</sup> to Mary Louise Steckel, President of Therapy Services Inc., Fran Krueger of MTNA invited representatives of Therapy Services to an MTNA board meeting. MTNA also sent letters to HUD and US Senator William Proxmire, expressing its concern that Therapy Services lacked the experience and qualifications to effectively provide social services in Midtown. When HUD and Therapy Services had a meeting to discuss the Midtown project, Father John Baumgartner, Fran Krueger, and Virginia Slaughter of MTNA asked if they could observe, as part of community participation. Initially they were told no by Therapy Services, then told they could by Therapy Services, then told that they couldn't by Gerald Anderson, DCD's director of the relocation, then told that they could by HUD. Eventually they were not allowed to attend, because Gerald Anderson said that Frank Polidori, Assistant Director of the DCD objected to the attendance of MTNA.<sup>134</sup>

The contract problems that the Midtown Neighborhood Association had with the DCD continually displayed that the city of Milwaukee was willing to go along with community involvement to the extent that citizens were allowed to express their opinion

---

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Letter to William Proxmire from John Baumgartner, Fran Krueger, and Virginia Slaughter, June 13, 1969, Mid-Town Neighborhood Association Records, 1961-1980, Box 1, Folder 9.

but unable to effectuate any real community action. The terrible consequences of the K-3 project necessitated community involvement action by the city for the Midtown Project. Under HUD direction, the city was required to show greater social services and community involvement, to create the machinery necessary for a “Workable Program.” Yet they were not interested in actual community involvement. In the eyes of Midtown residents, K-3 exemplified the city’s intention of destroying neighborhoods in order to provide cheap land for developers without regard for neighborhood residents. MTNA continuously attempted to force the city to take into account residents. MTNA was unlikely to have received the contract for social services, yet they expressed concerns they had about the company that received the contract. The fight to make MTNA the community organization for the Midtown Conservation Project would have given Midtown residents actual power and participation in the fight against the DCD, leading the city to deny the request.

The attempt by MTNA to contract with the city was part of a larger trend in the city and nation of activists becoming “institutionalized.” Contracting with government entities presented the opportunity to fund full-time community work. Funding for neighborhood organizations and community service groups increased with the Model Cities programs. Patrick Jones points to this institutionalizing trend as a contributing reason for late 1960s decline in direct action in Milwaukee. Dismas Becker, a white Catholic priest activist in Milwaukee called it the government’s “best weapon.”<sup>135</sup> Becker’s comment reflects that the city often tried to contain the voice of an organization by bringing them under contract, and focusing their efforts. By the end of the 1960s many

---

<sup>135</sup> Jones, 241-242.

of Milwaukee's activists had been institutionalized, including John Givens, the former head of Milwaukee's Congress on Racial Equality, and even many of the Commandos that had practiced direct action for open housing in Milwaukee.<sup>136</sup>

MTNA lost its fight for the community organization contract and was rolled over in the social service contract, but by the end of 1969 it was apparent that MTNA was presenting an obstacle to city plans to undertake renewal in Midtown without actual citizen participation. The fact that MTNA was opposed to the plans of the city was the likely reason they were not institutionalized. By 1969 Midtown was a much different place than it was when the conservation project was first approved. MTNA came to reflect the changing population and the changing attitudes of Midtown residents.

### *Containing Voice, Establishing Authority*

The Midtown Neighborhood Association began in 1959/1960 as an organization of property owners, business owners, school and church leaders. White property owners recognized the growing African American population and neighborhoods and sought to protect property values by fixing up, cleaning up, and organizing residents. The Midtown Neighborhood Association recognized that their neighborhood of older working class white residents on a racial barrier was especially vulnerable to racist real estate practices such as blockbusting and redlining.

According to Father John Baumgartner the call for conservation came in the first years of the 1960s, "These programs based on moral persuasion, failed, and with an

---

<sup>136</sup> Ibid. 241,250.



underlying racist motive the MTNA, under the direction of then alderman George Wittow, petitioned the city to have a conservation program in the area.”<sup>137</sup> The city was an early supporter of the conservation project. In a letter from the newly elected Mayor of Milwaukee, Henry Maier, to the President of the Midtown Neighborhood Association, he expressed his commitment to the older working class white residents that had elected him by saying that they were, “to be commended for developing a neighborhood action program to preserve one of Milwaukee’s basically sound residential areas.”<sup>138</sup>

Up to 1964 the outward appearance of the conservation program and the Midtown Neighborhood Association was optimistic. The backing of the City Health and Sanitation departments helped address issues of garbage, rats, and litter. The president of the Midtown Neighborhood Association, Rudolph Witte, who also worked in the City’s Real Estate office, was very optimistic when quoted in the *Milwaukee Journal* at the end of 1962, “It is a conservation program we are doing, the improvement has been commendable, but we are only three-fourths done.”<sup>139</sup> The optimism mirrored the growing membership of MTNA, with 130 members in 1961 and 425 members in 1962.<sup>140</sup> A 1964 report by the city, *Citizen Participation in Community Development and Urban Renewal* placed the organization’s membership at 450 people. Membership was just over

---

<sup>137</sup> Letter to Frank Zeidler from Rev. John Baumgartner, March 5, 1971, Mid-Town Neighborhood Association Records, 1961-1980, Box 2, Folder 1.

<sup>138</sup> Letter to Rudolph Witte from Mayor Henry Maier to Rudolph Witte, November 13, 1961, Mid-Town Neighborhood Association Records, 1961-1980, Box 1, Folder 7.

<sup>139</sup> Ralph D. Olive, “Hard Work Improves Neighborhood in City,” *The Milwaukee Journal*, December 13, 1962.

<sup>140</sup> Chris Lecos, “Neighborhood Battles Blight with Paint and Persuasion” *The Milwaukee Journal*, October 21, 1961; Ralph Olive, “Hard Work Improves Neighborhood in City” *The Milwaukee Journal*, December 13, 1962.

3% of the neighborhood population, making it the most active neighborhood group in the city according to the report.<sup>141</sup>

The conservation goals of the residents in Midtown fit well with the new Community Renewal Plan that the city released in 1964. Midtown was to be the pilot study for the conservation projects that the city intended to undertake. In 1965, The Midtown Neighborhood Association became formally contracted with the City of Milwaukee. The contract gave MTNA minimal funding for their assistance with planning and helping to share information with residents of the Midtown Community. MTNA renewed the contract with the city in 1967, 1969, and 1971, before it was discontinued in 1972.<sup>142</sup> From 1964-1969, discontent grew in Midtown and MTNA. People were leaving, membership was down, and residents had lost faith in the delayed conservation plan.

In 1965, the formal plan was submitted to HUD, and the percentage of structures to be razed went from the initial 15% to roughly 46%. This, combined with the express clearance of K-3 and the relocation of African Americans into Midtown, caused residents to have a general change in attitude. In 1968, the “Vital Questions about the Midtown Project” from MTNA was sent to the DCD. The tone of the questions was accusatory, harsh, and critical.<sup>143</sup> The “Vital Questions” marked a change in MTNA’s response to the city’s planning and implementation of the conservation project. Up until this point,

---

<sup>141</sup> Citizens’ Governmental Research Bureau , *Citizen Participation in Community Development and Urban Renewal*, 1964, Legislative Reference Bureau, City Hall, Milwaukee, WI.

<sup>142</sup> Franks, Midtown Timeline.

<sup>143</sup> “Vital Questions about the Midtown Project,” 1968, Mid-Town Neighborhood Association Records, 1961-1980, Box 1, Folder 8.

MTNA was focused less on the city's role and more on helping the residents of Midtown. The following year the 1969 Midtown Neighborhood Association Election became another watershed moment for MTNA, the Midtown Neighborhood, and the Midtown Conservation Project. Twelve of the fifteen leadership positions were won by a group of residents focused on strengthening citizen control and active participation in the renewal program. These were the officers that sought the \$48,000 contract from the Common Council to establish the MTNA as the community organization, instead of the newly created Community Organization Division.<sup>144</sup>

This was the first highly visible change in the composition of the Midtown Neighborhood Association leadership. MTNA transitioned from a property owners' organization into a community organization. The proposal that MTNA be the community organization component of the Midtown Conservation Project made it important that MTNA reflect the entire community and not just the property owners. As the community transitioned from a white ethnic neighborhood of older property owning residents into a community of young African American, American Indian, and Latino tenants, the goals of MTNA shifted. The attempts to gain control of the citizen participation and social services reflected this change. No longer was MTNA interested solely in maintaining property values; rather they were interested in saving their community and residences.

The 1969 election was a movement towards community organization that represented minorities, renters, and younger residents. The 1970 election confirmed the

---

<sup>144</sup> "Residents of Midtown Challenge Leadership," *The Milwaukee Journal*, January 17, 1969; "Mid-Town Rebels Gain in Vote," *The Milwaukee Journal*, January 17, 1969.

1969 results and caused significant resentment from the remaining long-term residents of Midtown and the older white members of MTNA, driving the wedge deeper in the organization. Older residents accused the incumbents of “bussing” in people from UW - Milwaukee and Marquette to rig the election. After the election, a change in by-laws mandated that to be eligible to vote electors had to attend two meetings in the previous year.<sup>145</sup>

Younger residents, who I will refer to as the community activists, faced opposition from the older residents who referred to themselves as the “independent slate.” Ottmar W. Noesk of the independent slate stated that “Many people are disgusted at young people taking over... The true residents of the area now are in a minority in the association because of these young people who have moved here”. August C.E. Backus and Father John Baumgartner of the community activists contended that the neighborhood had changed and the population reflected more renters than homeowners, minorities, not white German heritage residents, and young families, not older residents. Shortly before the election the independent slate sent out a mailer that called on residents to preserve Midtown from, “hippies, yuppies, derelicts and revolutionary youth”<sup>146</sup>

The independent slate won the presidency, and nine of fifteen seats on the executive board to win control. After accusing the community activists of bussing in outsiders in 1970, the activists returned the accusation in 1971. The community activists had the paperwork to back up the charges; the change in by-laws forced people to be present for two meetings within the year. In the months leading up to the election,

---

<sup>145</sup> Chris Lecos, “2 Factions Vie for Control of Mid-Town Group,” *The Milwaukee Journal*, March 28, 1971.

<sup>146</sup> Chris Lecos, “Anti-Youth Faction Wins Control of Midtown,” *The Milwaukee Journal*, April 22, 1971.

attendance at MTNA meetings increased and there was a visible increase in model cities officials and staff who attended, as well as many members who were not from the Midtown neighborhood. Ottmar W. Noeske of the independent slate defended the outsider participation, "The bylaws state that all interested persons who live in neighborhoods adjoining the project can participate." He attempted to explain the increase in attendance through neighboring residents attending because they were aware of the problems in Midtown.<sup>147</sup> As Father John Baumgartner's letter to Frank Zeider explained,

Taking advantage of the provision of the by-laws which was intended to assure not only the property owners and paid members a right to vote, but all residents of Midtown, there were more than a dozen full-time paid staff members of the city, mostly from Model Cities Agency, more than two dozen people who have received considerations from the city for their work in promoting the city-controlled Model Cities program, and at least three dozen people who do not live anywhere near Midtown.

Father John Baumgartner explained that the Midtown Project was failing at such a rate that the city was interested in renegotiating the contract with MTNA, turning stage 1 and 2 into clearance areas in Midtown, and having a "citizens group" on its side.<sup>148</sup>

By the next year's election three members of the board had resigned, once again charging that the organization was taken over by transients and activists who did not represent the neighborhood. Mrs. Virginia Slaughter, the 1971 presidential victor, lost favor with the independent slate after she said that the independent slate was composed of

---

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Letter to Frank Zeidler from John Baumgartner, March 5, 1971, Mid-Town Neighborhood Association Records, 1961-1980, Box 2, Folder 1.

Model Cities representatives trying to control MTNA, justifying the activist claims of the previous year. Father John Baumgartner ran unopposed in the 1972 election.<sup>149</sup>

The fight for control of MTNA was a fight for the citizen participation component of the Workable Program and the new Model Cities program that covered the Midtown Neighborhood. It was clear that city goals in Midtown no longer represented the interests of Midtown residents, who wanted to see the city take steps towards stabilizing the area through conservation and social services. In order to abide by the necessary citizen involvement required by the Workable Program the city established its own citizen participation office with appointed officials. This satisfied the HUD requirement but the citizens of Midtown continued to challenge the city. In an effort to subdue citizen criticism, the city attempted to take over MTNA, or at least institutionalize it to the extent that MTNA board members were willing to go along with city plans for Midtown.

### *Community Activists*

The community activists resisted many of the plans that the city had for the continuation of the Midtown Conservation Project. As the conservation project moved from delay to delay, little was actually being achieved through urban renewal funds. The city went ahead with infrastructure “improvements” such as street widening on the north and south borders of Midtown. The widening of Highland Ave was especially difficult for the residents of Midtown to deal with. Many of the houses that were to be torn down were large and in good condition. In a letter to the Common Council, MTNA voiced its

---

<sup>149</sup> Chris Lecos, “2<sup>nd</sup> Mid-Town Member Quits,” *The Milwaukee Journal*, February 21, 1972.

opposition to the pollution that would be generated, and noted that the current freeway system had already reduced the Highland Avenue traffic by half. “We want to live in a neighborhood,” stated the residents, “not an island surrounded by more concrete and fast moving cars.”<sup>150</sup>

The fight over the widening of Highland came to a climax on August 8, 1973 when Father John Baumgartner, then president of MTNA, and twenty-five Midtown residents staged a direct action protest of the rezoning of the area around Highland Avenue. Baumgartner led residents to the office of Edward J. Hayes, Commissioner of City Development, to protest the zoning changes. Hayes and Baumgartner exchanged insults about the nature of the meeting and the twenty-five residents forced their way into Hayes’ office.<sup>151</sup> This action gained some media attention but failed to stop the zoning changes.

The widening of Highland Avenue was an exceptionally hard blow for Midtown residents. It destroyed a number of large duplexes that were in good condition, ideal for housing large families; the destruction of these houses was the final abandonment of conservation by the city and directly contradicted the conservation goals originally set forth in the CRP. By this time the expressway system in Milwaukee was complete and there was less need for through streets to reach downtown. The city was fully aware of the negative effects of wider streets. In 1964, the City undertook a residential blight analysis as part of the Community Renewal Program. It found that,

---

<sup>150</sup> Letter from MTNA Corresponding Secretary Paul Fieber to Common Council, November 20, 1971, Mid-Town Neighborhood Association Records, 1961-1980, Box 1, Folder 10.

<sup>151</sup> Chris Lecos, “Priest, City Official Trade Insults Over Renewal Meeting,” *The Milwaukee Journal*, August 8, 1973.

Increased traffic volumes and speeds which transform relatively quiet neighborhood streets into noisy and dangerous thoroughfares also precipitate blight. Efforts to relieve congestion and facilitate the movement of traffic through these areas often tend to accelerate rather than stem the spread of blight. The restriction of curb parking may only increase traffic. Costly construction to widen narrow streets usually not only reduces the size of front yards to a minimum, but also requires the removal of trees along the public right-of-way.<sup>152</sup>

When MTNA actively opposed the street widening, the DCD let MTNA know that opposition was inconsistent with the responsibilities of the MTNA's contract with the city. MTNA had endorsed the widening as part of the original conservation plan and it was up to MTNA to advise and consult with the city in identifying specific problems with the conservation program.<sup>153</sup> MTNA lost its fight against the widening of Highland Ave. The widening of Highland was an effort on behalf of the city to isolate Midtown so that deterioration would not spread into adjacent neighborhoods. This, along with the failure to address long time abandoned and deteriorating homes, points to the intentional isolation of Midtown.<sup>154</sup>

MTNA's consistent clashes with the DCD were its most high profile, but it also fought for fair treatment of residents in the area. The establishment of Casa Maria, block clubs, and other groups interested in social services show that MTNA was interested in more than opposing the city. In 1972 MTNA pleaded for a stop light at the corner of 24<sup>th</sup> and Vliet, an especially dangerous intersection where a child was killed in August

---

<sup>152</sup>Milwaukee Department of City Development, "Residential Blight Analysis," Milwaukee's Community Renewal Program, 1964, Legislative Reference Bureau, City Hall, Milwaukee, WI.

<sup>153</sup> Letter from Peter Pavlovich, DCD, to MTNA, November 23, 1970, Mid-Town Neighborhood Association Records, 1961-1980, Box 1, Folder 10.

<sup>154</sup> "Quick Action in Razing Homes Urged," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, November 11, 1972; "3 Midtown Homes set for Demolition," *The Milwaukee Journal*, November 24, 1972.



1972.<sup>155</sup> MTNA also held a mock trial of an absentee landlord. Four city officials were present for the mock trial, where residents complained that absentee landlords did not maintain homes and at the same time benefited from 3% Federal Loans. John Mohen, recently appointed coordinator for the Midtown project conceded, "I think they have a valid point and we may be guilty of laxity in not following up and enforcing the agreements signed with owners to complete the work within 120 days."<sup>156</sup>

MTNA lost nearly every battle with the City of Milwaukee and the Department of City Development but in the struggle it defined itself as a credible player in the Midtown neighborhood. After MTNA allowed its contract with the city to expire, it continued producing community newsletters independently, and working to protect the residents of the neighborhood against outside power forces. In a newsletter postmarked May 9<sup>th</sup>, 1979, a story titled "Who lives in Mid-town" gives a look at the residential structure of Midtown. From 20<sup>th</sup> to 35<sup>th</sup>, State to Brown, Midtown had 20,500 residents, of whom 2000 were retired, half were under the age of twenty-six, 41% of the households had female heads, and 70% of housing units were absentee owned. More than half of neighborhood residents earned less than \$6025, and the population was roughly one-third African American, one-third White, and one third Asian, Chicano, Native American and Puerto Rican."<sup>157</sup> Midtown's emergence as a multi-cultural neighborhood was a direct result of the empowerment that residents sought through block clubs and

---

<sup>155</sup> "Ertl hears pleas for Traffic Light," *The Milwaukee Journal*, August 24, 1972.

<sup>156</sup> "Core Tenants Hold Mock Trail of Landlord," *The Milwaukee Journal*, June 24, 1972.

<sup>157</sup> "Who Lives in Mid-Town," *Mid-Town News*, May 1979, Mid-Town Neighborhood Association Records, 1961-1980, Box 3, Folder 9.

organizations such as the Midtown Neighborhood Association. Sister Mary Jane commented in her *Community in Transition* paper that minorities finding residence in Midtown in the mid-60s were the upwardly mobile members of their race; the fact that they lived in Midtown, itself was a “status-raiser.”<sup>158</sup> As the community transitioned from property owners to tenants the neighborhood attracted diverse populations. Racial animosities gave away to concerns about if their neighborhood would be destroyed.

### *Summary*

The story of the Midtown Neighborhood Association sheds further light on the goals of the City of Milwaukee and its ability to subvert federal guidelines in regards to adequate relocation and active citizen participation. The city was initially able to get around actual citizen involvement by appointing representatives to the newly created citizen involvement department within the office of the Department of City Development. Yet, when actual citizens challenged the city’s plans their response was to attempt to overtake the citizen opposition and institutionalized the organization.

By the end of the 1960s, it was quickly apparent that sections of Midtown had become the new K-3: an area suffering from vacancy, vandalism, deterioration and a lack of social services. The abandonment of conservation in Midtown, the removal of businesses, and the focus on road widening was a continuation of the racist renewal planning that intended to contain Milwaukee’s minority population and appeal to

---

<sup>158</sup> Sister Mary Jane SCSC. “Community in Transition: A Study of the Change in Population Content Within the Boundaries of St. Michael’s Parish with Special Reference to Census Tract 41. A Glimpse at Some of the Implications of Transition” Prepared for Sister M. Rebecca, OSF Alverno College, Milwaukee, Wisconsin July 23, 1965, Mid-Town Neighborhood Association Records, 1961-1980, Box 4, Folder 2.

developers. The widening of roads to allow through traffic for suburban residents working in downtown further isolated Midtown residents.

By far the most striking example of the city's efforts to thwart active citizen participation came with establishment of the community organizing division and the temporary takeover of the Midtown Neighborhood Association. These two efforts allowed the city to use federal funds to continue the racially motivated urban renewal projects in the CRP while appearing to have an active citizen participation component to their renewal plans. The attempted takeover and institutionalization of MTNA actually achieved very little in terms of the city's need for citizen involvement, but it did show to what extent the city was willing to exercise its power over local organizations. The MTNA takeover shows that the city was not only willing to give token concessions to continue its urban renewal policies but was also willing to actively oppose citizen organizations when they presented obstacles to their plans.

## CONCLUSION

“We hope that the voice and concerns of Midtown residents will be heard and accepted as vital to the successful completion of the Midtown project. In short we hope that the rhetoric of citizen participation be changed to a real fact of life for Midtown residents”

-Virginia Slaughter, Letter to Commissioner of DCD, 1971<sup>159</sup>

“I think they are nuts, to tell you the truth. They tear them down and let the lots fill up with junk. They don’t clean them up. They don’t cut the lawn. I don’t think they know what they are doing.”

-Howard Kleinschmidt, Midtown Resident, 1975<sup>160</sup>

The quote from Howard Kleinschmidt, Midtown Resident in 1975, evoked an image of a neighborhood strangely similar to the neighborhood the Mann family described in 1967. In fact, *The Milwaukee Journal* article that it was taken from is titled, “Fear walks the Streets of Midtown,” could have been, “Fear walks the streets of K-3,” just seven years earlier. The article tells a tale of arson and pilfering taking place alongside the planned demolition of houses, and the misery of residents left behind. In the end, Midtown suffered a fate similar to K-3. The City of Milwaukee’s commitment to minority neighborhood containment extended into the Midtown neighborhood and drastically altered the conservation goals for the neighborhood. The commitment to segregated neighborhoods that Milwaukee displayed through its public housing program,

---

<sup>159</sup> Letter to Kenneth Fry from Virginia Slaughter, December 22, 1971. Mid-Town Neighborhood Association Records, 1961-1980, Box 2, Folder 1.

<sup>160</sup> “Fear walks the Streets of Midtown,” *The Milwaukee Journal*, May 12, 1975.

the choice of renewal projects for K-3 and Midtown, and the failure to create meaningful citizen participation in minority neighborhoods all undermined the Workable Program provisions that were intended to prevent the creation of new impoverished and deteriorated neighborhoods in cities completing urban renewal projects.

Milwaukee's late commitment to the federal urban renewal program could have helped it avoid some of the major criticisms that earlier renewal efforts across the nation experienced, as the 1954 revisions and the Workable Program was intended to address those criticisms. Yet, it was obvious that even Milwaukee's late appearance in the urban renewal program can be attributed to its racialized fears of public housing and the conviction of Mayor Frank Zeidler not to proceed with slum clearance unless there was integrated public housing throughout the city. City council and residents of Milwaukee created two bills that worked to halt public housing in Milwaukee, also killing the prospect of slum clearance. At the end of Frank Zeidler's term, it was apparent that the city would have to take some sort of action to alleviate conditions in the "Inner-Core."

Mayor Henry Maier was willing to utilize federal urban renewal funds. He quickly created the Department of City Development and worked to create the Community Renewal Program, to plan a comprehensive strategy for its future large-scale urban renewal projects. The CRP appeared to have only been completed as a requirement, according the Workable Program, to receive federal funds. The CRP, the individual project plans, and the Workable Program failed to work together. Willing to undertake K-3's large scale, rapid clearance of a minority neighborhood and not address issues of restricted housing created problems for the community renewal program and

HUD cut off federal funding until the city amended issues pertaining to adequate relocate and citizen involvement. Re-work this sentence—too much going on here

The problems with the K-3 clearance project directly translated into problems for the Midtown project. Midtown's early commitment to conservation was part of the city's effort to contain the minority neighborhoods, yet as K-3 was being demolished and the city failed to integrate, Midtown became a transition area. As funding was reopened for the city, the city approached parts of Midtown in a similar fashion to K-3, undertaking clearance and high-density redevelopment in minority sections.

The active residents of Midtown fought against the City's new plans. MTNA evolved from a white homeowners group into a neighborhood organization more representative of the young multi-cultural renters living in the area. As the city removed businesses and began widening roads, MTNA saw the prospect of becoming the next K-3. MTNA sought out the contracts to provide the citizen participation aspect of the Midtown project as well as the social services aspect of the project. In each case they were denied and the city continued to ignore resident's objections or provide adequate services to Midtown residents.

HUD cut off funds for Milwaukee's renewal projects several times based on the city's inability to abide by the Workable Program's requirements of adequate citizen participation and relocation. Each time the city was able to get funds reestablished by making minor concessions, such as building senior housing in place of the needed scattered site public housing that would integrate large minority families into white neighborhoods. These minor concessions show that Milwaukee was not interested in the

goals of the Workable Program, but rather viewed it as a necessary hurdle to jump in order to continue their effort to contain and maintain neighborhoods.

In an early (May 1960) exploration of the Workable Program, based on a survey of city attorneys where the Workable Program was in place, Charles Ryne finds the early reaction to the program to be mixed. He does conclude that the Workable Program helped cities adopt modernized building codes but that many cities still saw the program as a formality to secure renewal funding. Some attorneys had concerns regarding the perceived loss of local initiative and the inability of some residents to bring their homes to code, questioning if the program could be made to meet the general needs of a particular city. Further, most municipalities were quick to adopt modern building codes but faltered in the more “intangible” areas such as community plans, analysis, and citizen participation.<sup>161</sup>

While the Workable Program never directly addressed race, the provisions of relocation and citizen involvement had the greatest impact on minority neighborhoods. Serious Workable Programs, especially in cities with highly segregated neighborhoods, would have had to focus on race in order to truly understand relocation and neighborhood planning. It is clear that if taken seriously rather than as a necessary hurdle the Workable Program would have addressed some of the major problems that Milwaukee faced. Milwaukee, largely avoiding the renewal mistakes of the 1950s, with a housing stock suitable to large working class families, the ability to annex more property, and the ability to retain manufacturing jobs was in a good position to successfully undertake renewal

---

<sup>161</sup> Ryne, 694-697

projects without creating further disadvantages for neighborhoods. Yet, the city's commitment to segregating neighborhoods, partially contrived for political motivations and in order to stem white flight and lure investment back to the city, undermined the achievable goals that the Workable Program highlighted: codes and ordinances, comprehensive community plans, neighborhood analysis, administrative organization, financing, housing for displaced families and citizen participation.

The example of Milwaukee shows the failures of the Workable Program in the face of local control. Although HUD had the ability to cut off funding for Milwaukee's urban renewal projects, control of the program still remained in the hands of city officials. The city was less concerned about the elimination of slums but rather the containment of slums. Federal urban renewal funds gave the city this ability and control; the Workable Program oversight was not enough to prevent Milwaukee from turning Midtown into the next K-3.

The stories of K-3 and Midtown extend beyond the ability of cities to subvert federal control but also give insight to the Open Housing marches in Milwaukee. The failures of the K-3 project were a catalyst of the marches. The continuation of the urban renewal process shows how the city worked to control the voice of residents through neighborhood clearance, making citizen involvement officials appointive or even attempting to take over neighborhood groups. Father James Groppi, who led many of the Open Housing Marches was transferred to the St. Michael's parish in Midtown in 1970, partially in order to quiet his activism; he surely provided an inspiration to the young Father John Baumgartner of St. Michaels and the MTNA.



The urban renewal and civil rights era also helps to explain how Milwaukee continues to be one of the most segregated cities in the country, usually ranking within the top 5. The urban renewal areas of K-3 and Midtown remain predominately African American. The stories of K-3 and Midtown show that cities do not segregate naturally, but rather, as Sugrue and Hirsch contended, cities and their neighborhoods are created as a product of individual actions and governmental policies. The continued segregation and containment of Milwaukee's "Inner Core" can be traced back to the urban renewal policy that could have been addressed through the Workable Program but instead was overlooked in favor of minority neighborhood containment.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

### ***Primary Sources***

Citizens' Governmental Research Bureau, *Citizen Participation in Community Development and Urban Renewal*, 1964, Legislative Reference Bureau, City Hall, Milwaukee, WI.

Gernetzke, Alice. "Milwaukee Redevelopment Authority Renewal Projects 1958 – 1976" Milwaukee Redevelopment Authority, June 14, 1977. Legislative Reference Bureau, City Hall, Milwaukee, WI.

Henry S. Reuss Papers 1839-1998. Mss 112, Milwaukee Area Research Center, Milwaukee, WI.

Lloyd A. Barbee Papers, 1933 – 1982. Mss 16, Milwaukee Area Research Center, Milwaukee, WI.

Mayor's Study Committee on Social Problems in the Inner Core area of the City, *Final Report to the Honorable Frank P. Zeidler*. Mayor, City of Milwaukee, Milwaukee, 1960.

Mid-Town Neighborhood Association Records, 1961-1980, Box 1, Folder 8, Mss 13, Milwaukee Area Research Center, Milwaukee, WI.

### ***Milwaukee Courier***

Milwaukee Department of City Development, *Milwaukee's Community Renewal Program: Urban Renewal Techniques*, May 1964, Legislative Reference Bureau, City Hall, Milwaukee, WI.

----- . "Residential Blight Analysis," Milwaukee's Community Renewal Program, 1964, Legislative Reference Bureau, City Hall, Milwaukee, WI.

Citizens' Governmental Research Bureau , *Citizen Participation in Community Development and Urban Renewal*, 1964, Legislative Reference Bureau, City Hall, Milwaukee, WI.

### ***Milwaukee Sentinel***

*Milwaukee Urban League Records*, 1919 – 1979. Milwaukee Area Research Center. Milwaukee, WI.

### ***The Milwaukee Journal***

## *Secondary Sources*

- Flanagan, Richard M. "The Housing Act of 1954: The Sea Change in National Urban Policy." *Urban Affairs Review* 33 (1997):265-286.
- Foard, Ashley A. and Fefferman, Hilbert, Fefferman, "Urban Renewal Legislation," *Law and Contemporary Problems* 25, no. 4 (Autumn 1960):635-684.
- Franks, Roger L. "The History of Urban Renewal in Milwaukee." master's thesis, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, 1976.
- Greer, Scott. *Urban Renewal and American Cities: The Dilemma of Democratic Intervention*. New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company Inc, 1965.
- Gurda, John. *The Making of Milwaukee*. Milwaukee: Milwaukee County Historical Society, 1999.
- Hirsch, Arnold R. *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago 1940-1960*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.
- Hirschman, Albert O. *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970.
- Jackson, Kenneth T. *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.
- Jacobs, Jane. *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. 1961 Reprint, New York: Modern Library, 2011.
- Mandelker, Daniel R. "Urban Conflict in Urban Renewal: The Milwaukee CRP Experience." *Arizona Law Journal (Law and the Social Order)* 4 (1971):635-679.
- Rast, Joel. "Critical Junctures, Long-Term Processes: Urban Redevelopment in Chicago and Milwaukee, 1945-1980." *Social Science History* 33, no. 4 (Winter 2009): 393-426.
- Ryne, Charles S. "The Workable Program – A Challenge for Community Improvement," *Law and Contemporary Problems* (Fall 1960): 685-704.
- Schorr, Philip. *Planned Relocation*. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1975.

Smith, Kevin D. "From Socialism to Racism: The Politics of Class and Identity in Postwar Milwaukee." *Michigan Historical Review* 29, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 71-95.

Sugrue, Thomas J. *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005.

Tamney, Joseph B. *Solidarity in a Slum*.  
New York: A Schenkman Publication/John Wiley and Sons, 1975.

Trotter, Joe William Jr. *Black Milwaukee: The Making of an Industrial Proletariat, 1915-1945*. 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007.