

Commission, Community Groups Tackle B'ham's Old Plan

'Lack of Progress' Bothers Plan Board

The Central Business District Development Plan was a product of co-ordinated effort by the planning board and business representatives which began in February 1958 and was completed in June 1961.

The plan was to be a blueprint for future development of the central core, while at the same time, it suggested immediate physical improvements.



ELIOT ROBINSON

On Nov. 29, 1962, over a year after its recommendation, the Planning Board wrote the city commission requesting an official expression on the Plan.

LETTER URGES ACTION

The letter was as follows: "The members of the Planning Board have become concerned over the seeming lack of progress on the first stage of the Central Business District Plan.

The extension of the Jacobson's main store and the projected plans of Peabody's Store indicate that some of the merchants assume that the peripheral route stage of the plan will not be completed, or at least that they are not waiting for it.

Our members considered at length the plans which we recommended to you and hope that they will be implemented. We would further appreciate an official expression on this matter. Anything our board or its members can do to assist in the forwarding of these plans, please call upon us."

The planning board is vitally concerned about the future growth and development of our city, of which the CBD is a most significant part, and sincerely hopes the plan shall move forward.

necessary to maintain and strengthen the business, professional and public elements of Birmingham.

Careful analysis of the study by the planning board resulted in a recommendation to the city commission in October of 1961.

The board endorsed the plan as a concept and guide to future development and recommended that the commission initiate action on the peripheral route right-of-way which was noted as the first step in the "Staging of Improvements" in the plan.

The board, also, has utilized the plan to guide decisions involving street closures and rezonings, whenever possible. But the plan, however, is more than merely a guide to day-to-day planning and zoning problems.

It is a working blueprint, recommended as a necessity to maintain the business core. It envisioned improvements requiring prompt acquisition of vacant land.

However, as time passed, several new structures were constructed on parcels of land initially stated for needed right-of-way, and no official action was taken by the city commission.

Like all other groups involved in the Feb. 14th meeting on plans for the development of Birmingham's central business district, the Birmingham Real Estate Board is vitally interested.

It is our feeling that the Birmingham population will increase in the years ahead and that the population immediately surrounding will multiply many times. This means that we have passed beyond the village stage and that our business property, because of its increased potential, will be more valuable and rents higher.

It is therefore our feeling that it will be necessary to prepare for a new stage in development, a new business area in downtown Birmingham. There are two alternatives open to us.

The first is to allow the business district to evolve as it will and to provide additional services and make changes as they become necessary. Due to the increased business potential of the area, this would result in many undesirable, low overhead, low quality stores.

Some of these have already put in an appearance and, if the trend continues, the image of Birmingham as a place for discriminating buyers of quality merchandise might be permanently changed.

NEED TO LOOK AHEAD

The second alternative is to look ahead and attempt to create the type of business district that we would like to have.

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EDWARD LERCHEN

TO KEEP PACE WITH GROWTH

BCH Plans Major Addition

In order to keep pace with the growth of the Birmingham-Bloomfield area, the board of directors has deemed it necessary to plan a major addition to the existing facilities.

Toward this end, property in the Birmingham Community House block has already been acquired and acquisition of additional property is being negotiated.

Recently the city manager of Birmingham was informally advised, by letter, that the proposed expansion of the community house facilities was desirable to close Merrill Street between Chester and Bates streets, as part of the overall central business district plan.

The closing of Merrill Street is necessary to allow adequate parking facilities for the large expansion to service the area. We also have alerted the City of Birmingham that any planning for off-street parking in the vicinity of the Community House should be made with our future expansion plans in mind.

At the present time the long-range planning committee of the Community House is conducting studies to determine the specific needs—both current and future—to maintain the Community House as the "activities center of the Birmingham-Bloomfield area."

Concurrent with our study of immediate and future needs are holding discussions with various architectural firms—both local and from outside the area—regarding dimensions and design of the addition and the preparation of preliminary sketches and drawings. Necessary funds to carry on these initial steps have already been appropriated.

From the recent experience of our cousin community house in the Grosse Pointe area, we know that expansion of the Grosse Pointe War Memorial Building—through the addition of the William Fries Auditorium—amounted to approximately \$1 million.

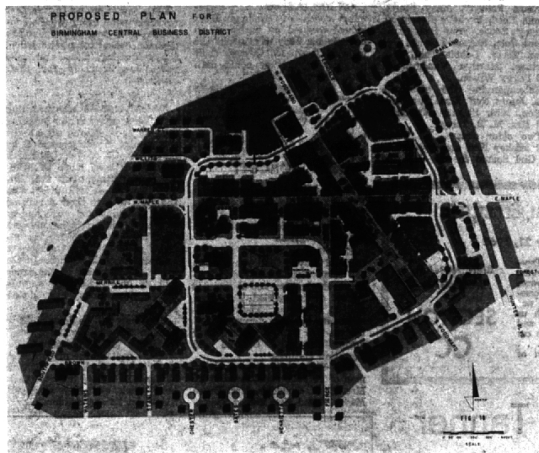
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F. WARD OURADNIK, executive director of the Birmingham Community House, and Judy Butka go over the schedule for coming events at the House. Shirley Hutchison is in the background. The BCH board of directors has announced plans for a major addition to the 33-year-old landmark including an auditorium.



PROPOSED PLAN FOR BIRMINGHAM CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT

This drawing shows the CBDD Plan for downtown Birmingham as proposed by the 1961 planning consultant's report. It outlines the peripheral route to carry traffic around the business area, location of stores, access routes to stores, parking and pedestrian malls. With the proposed widening of Chester and Oakland streets and preliminary steps toward building a parking lot in the southwest quadrant, the first steps of the plan are getting underway.

Birmingham of the Future?

Second, in priority, since the merchants feel it unwise to remove parking from Maple, would be the construction of the proposed peripheral route.

We believe that it also would (See BOARD, 5-CC)

City, School Plans Are Interdependent

The members of the board of education and the administrative staff have discussed the long-range problems of the school district with reference to the possible implementation of the proposed Central Business District Development Plan. In our discussion we were guided by the following basic assumptions:

1. The future of the city of Birmingham and the schools located within it and the future of the total service area are viewed as being mutually interdependent. Efforts to plan for the future and to provide for the future of the city of Birmingham and the schools located within it and the future of the total service area are viewed as being mutually interdependent. Efforts to plan for the future and to provide for the future of the city of Birmingham and the schools located within it and the future of the total service area are viewed as being mutually interdependent.

PRIORITY FOR PARKING

It is our recommendation that the priority in the move to bring the central shopping district to date should be given to parking. The majority of complaints from both shoppers and business people concern the lack of sufficient parking and the fact that it is necessary to return to the meter so often to put money in it.

HEART OF THE TOWN

The central shopping district of any town is its heart. In it, besides business establishments, are buildings which house city management; the managers of such functions as the school system; the police department; the various other leaders in the community, such as in the fields of art and recreation.

UNITED POLICIES

One disadvantage that is ours is the fact that no one individual or corporation controls our business district. Our properties are owned by many different people, many of whom do not live in the area. Their only purpose in the use of their properties is to get the highest possible yield on their investment.

LONG-RANGE PLANS

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MUST EXPAND FACILITIES

In broad terms, the expansion of the Community House entails multiple-purpose facilities. They (See ADDITION, 5-CC)

Proposed Plan Supported by B'ham Jaycees

The Board of Directors of the Jaycees are greatly pleased that the meeting of the leaders of our community has been called for February 14.

In order that you may more fully understand the Jaycees interest in this meeting, we would like to briefly outline our activities with the development of our community. Because our organization is not allied to any specific area of interest within Birmingham, our activities have encompassed a broad area.

In addition to the normal charitable and scholarship works of the Birmingham Jaycees, we have strived to gain greater citizen participation and interest in our city and its government. As a group of young men in Birmingham, we wish to learn more of our community and to participate in its development.

THIS DESIRE

coupled with the program of the National Jaycees organization has led our members to conduct a preliminary survey covering twelve areas of community life. This survey was presented to the Birmingham Action Committee in September, and is the first phase of a long term project.

PROBLEM OF ALL

Our problem is also your problem! The importance of keeping Birmingham strong and growing is a goal of top priority in the minds of Birmingham business and professional men.

It is our hope

that one result of this meeting on the 14th of February will be the formation of a continuing action committee empowered to act in behalf of the community interest. The Jaycees will support and implement such a group with the full effort of our organization.

Parking, Traffic Library Concern

Baldwin Public Library's long range plans present three main problems, and the successful solution to these depends a great deal upon the understanding, cooperation and leadership of other groups.

Number one on our list is enlarging the area of library service so that in the future the area served may include not only Birmingham and Beverly Hills but also other neighboring communities in the Birmingham-Bloomfield area.

The benefits from such an enlargement of our service area would be two-fold: The surrounding area would benefit by securing the seasonal management and going concern momentum of the Birmingham Library, and Birmingham would benefit by participating in a service of greater scope and competence than it could support by itself at the same cost.

CBDD Reviewed by Civic Groups

On this page are presented the complete texts of reports of the various groups which have an interest in Birmingham's CBDD Plan.

The reports were given at a joint meeting of the Birmingham City Commission and nine community organizations.

More than 100 persons filled the municipal building commission room to try to implement the proposed development for the downtown area.

Citizens Group Outgrowth of BCH Unit

The Citizen's Action Committee started from a meeting of the Birmingham Community House long range planning committee to which several out-of-town advisers had been invited. But the proposed expansion planning with respect to the community's foreseeable needs was its purpose.

It was found that most attempts by other organizations to similarly plot their futures were inhibited by the lack of any clear-cut master plan on the part of the city itself. This indecisiveness, it was felt, had allowed a "drift" in the attitude of the city in general, but most particularly in the downtown business area.

U R G E I M P L E M E N T A T I O N

Our library seems to be well located to take advantage of the peripheral route proposed in the CBDD Plan, but you to consider that the building entrance is so oriented that continued access via Main Street is imperative, and at the present time there is no doubt that we have developed to the stage where more parking is needed.

We also recommend that further steps be taken toward the eventual development of the peripheral route. This route is imperative, and at the present time there is no doubt that we have developed to the stage where more parking is needed.

Report Urges High Quality Stores Here

It has long been my opinion, and I know that it is shared by many others, that the purchasing power of the Birmingham area suggests that a high order of merchandising should be represented in its business district, and I mean that in contrast with what we usually associate with the term shopping center.

At the time that the J. L. Hudson Co. initiated its Northland program there was a great deal of concern felt by the merchants here that its inauguration would be the death knell of merchants. That was disproven in one week of operation at Northland.

C of C Financed '61 Plan

The Birmingham Chamber of Commerce cooperated actively in the formation and work of the Central Business District Development Committee. The committee, at a cost of over \$15,000,000, developed a plan which was completed in mid-1961.

A few months ago the chamber came to the conclusion that work should be started on the plan before it became due to the passage of time. Our board of directors, concerned with the future of the city with this matter, in addition to the work done by the board, a special committee was formed to develop recommendations for implementing the plan.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

For some months we have had a "Keep Birmingham Beautiful Committee" at work under the chairmanship of Virgil E. La Mare. They did a great deal to encourage business people to keep their sidewalks swept and their premises neat and clean. They discovered that this problem is larger and much more complicated than it first appeared.

For example the present ordinance gives the owner or tenant 24 hours to remove snow from his sidewalk. We feel that 24 hours is much too long. We feel that there may be merit in snow being removed from the sidewalks in the business section by the city. We would like to recommend that these two matters be investigated by the city. We shall be glad to furnish any assistance or co-operation which may be required.

Thank you for your constructive interest in the Central Business District Plan.

ent thinking we would hate to lose access via Bates.

When it is considered that as many as 1200 people use Baldwin Public Library in a day, and that in the future, it can be understood by well adequate parking aid easy access to the building area of prime importance.

We believe that if Birmingham is to continue as a prestige community, distinguished for quality and good taste, then every effort should be made to beautify and develop it,—making it strong in cultural as well as in business facilities.

We wish, therefore, to go on record, urging the city commission to implement the CBDD plan and to include provisions for the city's cultural institutions whose patrons are a great asset to the business community.

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The feeling was unanimous that Birmingham was at the crossroads in maintaining its status and that something had to be done immediately to reverse certain trends.

The group met monthly, growing as more and more aspects of community interest came under scrutiny, and soon had representation from a wide cross-section of the city organizations. The aroused civic concern of those attending soon exceeded the original intentions of the community house sponsors.

It was decided to continue the group as a new entity in the hope that the power of its cooperative thought and eventual action would be more effective.

(See GROUP, 5-CC)

(See BOARD, 5-CC)

(See CITY, 6-CC)

(See ADDITION, 5-CC)

(See REPORT, 6-CC)

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