

CHAPTER 5

A COMPREHENSIVE STRATEGY (1963-1976)

In January, 1963 the City Council redefined, by ordinance, the planning functions and procedures of the city. This ordinance emphasized that the primary responsibility of the Plan Commission was to develop and maintain a comprehensive plan. The first product of this undertaking was the report, Your City and Its Planning Objectives, adopted by the City Council in September, 1963. Among its many objectives and policies were the following:

- Cooperative programs with Fountain Square merchants should be continued to insure the maintenance of this area as the North Shore's major regional shopping center;
- Plans should be implemented to provide a "built in" market for office, hotel and apartment uses;
- The location of cultural and civic facilities should be encouraged in order to maintain the downtown as the real heart of the city;
- Also needed is better traffic movement, convenient parking, and shopping areas made more inviting through landscaping, lighting, pleasant parks, sheltered walks, and other devices;
- A new consolidated, multi-modal transportation center should be constructed.

From this point forward a more comprehensive strategy and stronger public-private "partnership" guided downtown revitalization efforts, though not without obstacles, disagreements, and political stress common to progress in most communities.

In the glow of this fresh initiative, developer and local resident Arthur Bohnen proposed to the City Council the construction of four apartment buildings on air rights over the Chicago Avenue/Church Street municipal parking lot, including 570 enclosed parking spaces versus the 264 existing spaces. The proposal never became reality, the first of many such downtown proposals that evaporated in the years ahead.

Nevertheless, the early 1960s was a period during which the city continued to make meaningful investments in downtown, including the installation of 50 large scale street trees, expanded parking lots, a parking ticket validation program, landscaping by members of the Garden Council, a new sign ordinance, and a precedent setting system of public accent lighting in sidewalks to enhance the upper story facades of attractive buildings. Highly regarded at the outset, this lighting system was maintained only for a few years.

During the same years, the city and Northwestern University were engaged in land-swapping to make possible the Emerson Street-Elgin Road-Clark Street connector. In addition to the new road itself, the project made possible the creation of a triangular Oldberg Park between Elgin Road and Clark Street, and a site at the Orrington Avenue intersection for a new Rebecca Crown Administrative Center, designed by Walter Netsch, Jr. of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill and constructed during 1965-1968. This handsome new building with clock tower and plaza provides a key focal point at the end of Orrington Avenue and a physical/psychological link between "town and gown." At the time, this was an important statement, because many universities and colleges prefer the administrative complex to be in the center of the campus, an option Northwestern seriously considered.



Rebecca Crown Administrative Center

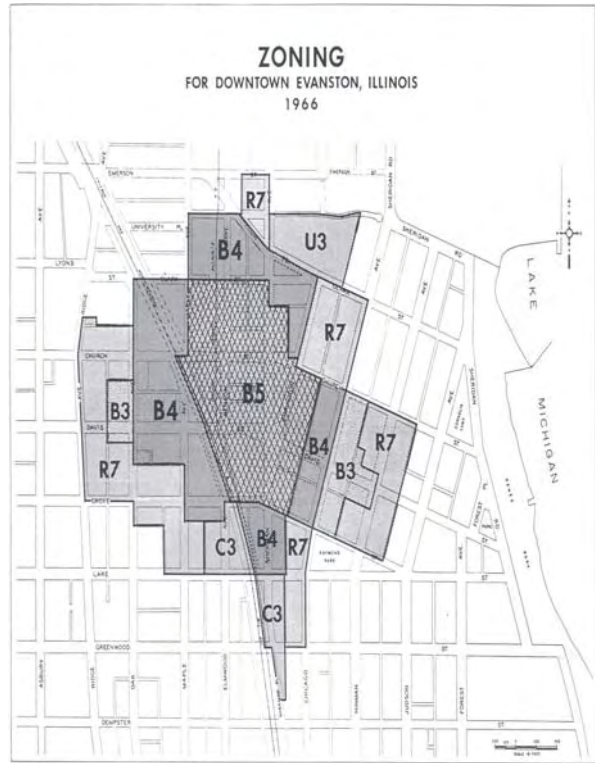
Also in 1965 the State National Bank, whose President was Robert Humphrey, submitted a proposal to the City Council to redevelop its existing site and adjacent properties as a “planned unit development,” including a 20-story office building with a plaza opposite Fountain Square, an underground parking garage, a courtyard, a second commercial building on Orrington Avenue, and a drive-thru bank on Davis Street. The project would eliminate Lord’s department store and Cooley’s Cupboard, and relocate Walgreen’s. It would also require significant amendments to the Zoning Ordinance.

The following year the City Council created two new downtown zoning districts, B4 and B5, the latter permitting buildings of 255 feet in height at the center of downtown. Other districts permitted graduated heights to carry out the urban design concept of a pyramid with the tallest buildings near Fountain Square and lower buildings near the periphery of downtown. Finally, the amendments accommodated the zoning concept of “planned unit development,” a process by which the project was approved following review by the Plan Commission.

The new State National Bank Complex (designed by George Schipporeit) was completed in 1969.



State National Bank Plaza (dark tower) and the American Hospitals Supply Corporation Headquarters (white tower)



Source: Comprehensive General Plan, 1972

Recognizing that the prominence of downtown Evanston as a regional shopping center was waning, the Plan Commission, chaired by architect Philip Will of Perkins and Will, explored other future development potentials. The City Council adopted the Plan Commission’s recommended motto, “The Headquarters City” in tribute to the many corporate and institutional headquarters that already existed in the community and the possibility that even more might locate in downtown with new zoning to encourage investment in highrise buildings. “By 1976 fifty-four groups had located their headquarters in Evanston,” according to Margery Blair Perkins.

The Plan Commission (led by its new chairman Alan Marin and supported by city staff planner William Nevel) published a Statement of Central Business District Goals and Objectives in 1967 to guide development. Additional policy statements were published during the years 1968-1972 dealing with: The Function of Downtown; Circulation; and Form and Design.

Top priority in the minds of downtown business persons and property owners was more public parking. Hence, in 1969 a new 600-space municipal parking garage (designed by Loeb, Schlossman, Bennett & Dart) was constructed on Sherman Avenue between Davis and Church Streets. The Plan Commission oversaw the design and required a compatible red-brick clad facade, the prohibition of vehicular access across the sidewalk from Sherman Avenue, and a pedestrian friendly (covered and heated in winter) bus waiting area.

For several decades, local businessman Joseph Levy has been a strong supporter of the community and a major financial benefactor. He contributed funding for the Levy Center, a new state-of-the-art youth activity and leisure center constructed in 1966-1967 at the northwest corner of Church Street and Maple Avenue. When its popularity with high schoolers waned, the City converted it into a senior center (1970). Seniors from throughout the city enjoyed its facilities and programs until it was demolished in 2001 to make way for a new commercial development.

In 1970 Edgar Vanneman, Jr. was elected Mayor. His seven years in office would be characterized by strong, persuasive leadership, especially on downtown revitalization, backed by a supportive City Council.

Following months of intensive effort, the Plan Commission published a recommended update of the Comprehensive General Plan in 1972. The plan was thoroughly reviewed in many public venues and adopted by the City Council in 1974. Also in 1972, the Illinois Historic Structures Survey of Evanston was released.



Source: Comprehensive General Plan, 1972

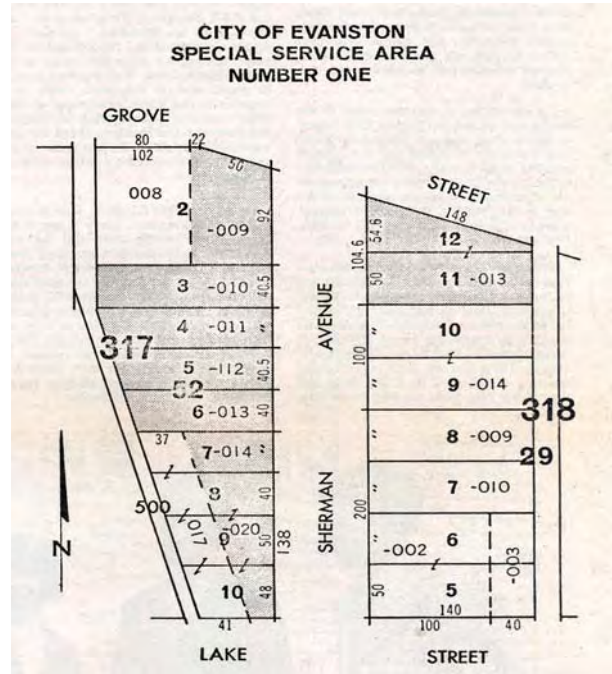
Another historic event occurred in 1972: the City Council adopted an ordinance permitting the sale of liquor by the drink (under certain conditions) for the first time in the history of the city, paving the way for investor interest in hotels and restaurants. For over a century, Evanston had been “dry”. This was due in part to its legacy of being the headquarters of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union. Even today the WCTU is a downtown landmark. Immediately thereafter, Barry Schuman and Associates proposed to develop a \$15 million complex, including a 250-room hotel and multi-level parking garage, on the 100,000 square foot “triangle” parcel (now referred to as 1800 Sherman). The City Council was favorable, but could not assemble the entire site. Hence the project died.

But the idea of a new hotel did not die. In 1973-74 the 159-room, 14-story Holiday Inn with restaurant and cocktail lounge was constructed on air-rights over an existing municipal parking lot on Sherman Avenue at Lake Street. The momentum of these projects caused the City Council to engage Barton-Aschman Associates, Inc. to prepare designs for a comprehensive streetscape program, including a new Fountain Square. The Holiday Inn constructed and paid for these recommended improvements in front of its own property.



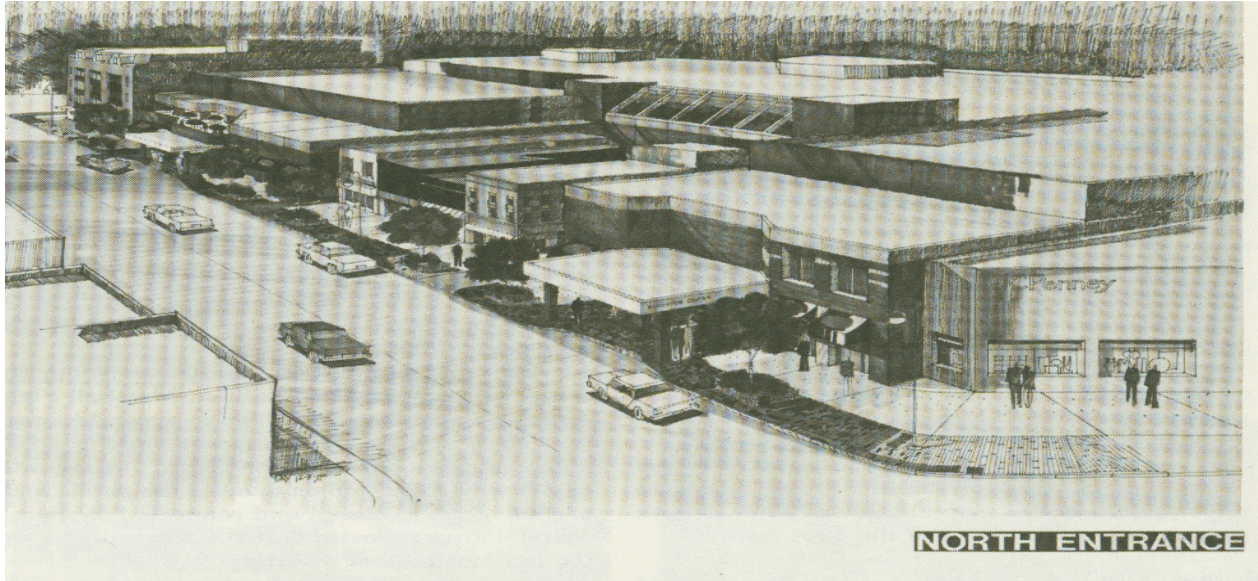
Holiday Inn Hotel & Parking Garage

The City of Evanston determined that the construction of these streetscape improvements elsewhere in the downtown would best be financed by “special service areas” (SSA). The first special service area (SSA#1) was created in 1974 by the City Council to cover all other properties fronting on Sherman Avenue between Grove Street and Lake Street. An additional property tax levy was paid by each property owner to finance construction.



Source: City of Evanston

Concurrently in 1973, the Homart Development Company (a subsidiary of Sears Roebuck) proposed a \$41 million, multi-level, mixed-use project, including 535,000 square feet of retail space anchored by a new Marshall Field’s store and a new J.C. Penney department store, 100,000-150,000 square feet of office space, a possible hotel, and a 2,000 space parking structure in the four blocks bounded by Church Street on the south, Elgin Road on the north, Maple Avenue on the west and Sherman Avenue on the east. This was the largest project ever proposed for downtown and drew considerable public interest. In the spirit of cooperation, the City Council again turned to Barton-Aschman Associates, Inc. to prepare sketch plans for all of downtown. Later, as a result of internal corporate policy and personnel changes, Homart withdrew and transferred “ownership” of the project to Westcor Development out of Phoenix, Arizona. This project failed to materialize in 1976 when Field’s announced that it had never been fully committed and would not anchor the retail mall.



Retail Complex Proposed by Westcore Development

Source: Barton-Aschman Associates, Inc.

Mayor Vanneman appointed the city's first Economic Development Committee at this time to attract and recruit new businesses to Evanston. Among its members was a newly elected alderman, James C. Lytle, who subsequently succeeded Mayor Vanneman in 1977.

Fortunately, not all projects were doomed. In 1974 Hawthorn Realty proposed a \$35 million "superblock" development for properties fronting on Sherman Avenue from Davis Street to Grove Street. The project included two high-rise office buildings with a connecting arcade, providing 700,000 square feet of office space and 75,000 square feet of retail space. Principal occupants were to be American Hospital Supply Corporation in the south tower and the First National Bank in the north tower, replacing its older building at the same site. That portion of the site would become a plaza. Because the project required the sale of an existing municipal parking lot at the corner of Sherman and Grove, the City Council was obligated to advertise for bids. The Hawthorn Realty bid was selected and the first tower with arcade was constructed. The second tower was never built due to high acquisition costs and financing difficulties.

The Mann Building at 820 Davis Street, designed by Stephen A. Jennings and built in 1889, accommodated the Wiebolt's Department Store, from 1929 to 1952. In 1973 it was demolished and replaced in 1975 by a new 5-story, 76,000 square foot office building with retail space on the ground floor. This building became the headquarters of Barton-Aschman Associates, Inc., urban planning and transportation consultants. The architect was Barancik Conte & Associates of Chicago.

Because Evanston was beginning to lose some of its landmark buildings during the 1970s, including the Valencia Theater to make way for the Hawthorn Realty project, the City Council created by ordinance the Preservation Commission in 1975.

Bringing this period of revitalization to a close, Evanston Planning Director Richard Carter delivered a talk to the Plan Commission on October 1, 1975 summarizing the progress of previous decades and yet to be resolved issues related to downtown revitalization. These remarks were published in 1976 as A Background to Planning: Problems and Issues in the Central Business District.



New 820 Davis Street Building

Mr. Carter also identified several questions remaining to be answered in the future:

- How will traffic and parking be accommodated? What buildings should be preserved?
- How can the adversary relationship of the city and developers be changed?
- How can efforts to achieve objectives be sustained?
- How can special amenities be negotiated with developers?
- What is the chemistry (proper combination of elements) of a healthy downtown?

The reconstruction of Fountain Square was completed in this U.S. bi-centennial year with new memorials to veterans and with space for leisure and for public events, such as small concerts.

By this time city government was outgrowing its building on Grove Street and began looking for options which would also permit it to return the Grove Street site to the property tax rolls for multi-family residential development. The City Council selected the vacant Marywood High School building and site at 2100 Ridge Avenue. After extensive restoration, the building was occupied in 1979.

To cap off the year 1976, the City Council enacted ordinances creating Certified Business District No. 1 (the CBD) and the companion Business District Redevelopment Commission (BDRC) provided for by state statutes. These acts provided a transition to yet another period of revitalization.



Fountain Square 1976

CHAPTER 5 LOCATION MAP

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Arthur Bohnen Proposal 2. Emerson-Elgin-Clark Connector 3. Oldberg Park 4. Rebecca Crown Administrative Center 5. State National Bank PUD 6. Municipal Parking Garage 7. Levy Center 8. Women's Christian Temperance Union 9. Barry Schuman Proposal 10. Holiday Inn | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 11. Homart Development Proposal 12. Hawthorn Realty Proposal 13. 820 Davis Street Building |
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