Pei on the Prairie

Urban Renewal in Oklahoma City, 1960-1990

By

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THESIS APPROVAL

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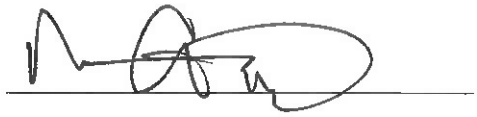

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Abstract – Pei on the Prairie

1. **Statement of the Problem or Issue**
   Downtown Oklahoma City was drastically remade beginning in the 1960s as part of the broader national program of urban renewal. Yet, very little research has explored this transformation, nor has there been a deep exploration of how urban renewal projects were implemented in America's small-and-medium-sized cities.

2. **Brief Summary of the Literature**
   There exists plenty of scholarship on the urban renewal movement in America's largest cities, in particular, New York, Boston, and Chicago. Some examples that this thesis relied upon include Jane Jacobs' *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961), Lizabeth Cohen's *Saving America's Cities* (2019), Robert Fogelson's *Downtown* (2001), Christopher Klemek's *The Transatlantic Collapse of Urban Renewal* (2011), Samuel Zipp's *Manhattan Project* (2010), Thomas H. O'Conner's *Building a New Boston* (1993), and *The Battle of Lincoln Park* (2018). In addition to these broader works on the topic of urban renewal in America (and internationally), this thesis also builds upon historical works focused on Oklahoma City's history, including Steve Lackmeyer's *OKC Second Time Around* (2006), David Holt's *Big League City* (2012), Mick Cornett's *The Next American City: The Big Promise of Our Midsized Metros* (2018), and *Norick: The Mayors of Oklahoma City* (2005).

3. **Thesis Statement**
   Oklahoma City's urban renewal program of the 1960s and 70s was ultimately a failure – due in part because of its top-down nature, and in part due to the project's dependency on federal funds, which dried up when urban renewal fell out of favor nationally in the mid-1970s. This failure would ultimately open up a path for a more successful redevelopment program by the start of the twenty-first century. Additionally, OKC's urban renewal story mirrors similar themes of renewal work done in larger cities with regards to top-down decision making, and a lack of regard for local residents who would be affected, particularly people of color.

4. **Statement of the Research Methodology.** This research was conducted as a textual analysis of primary source documents in narrative form. These documents include articles from the *Daily Oklahoman*, articles from *The Black Dispatch*, yearly reports to the city council from the Oklahoma City Urban Renewal Authority, and archival material from the city government and from the Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce.

5. **Brief Summary of Findings**
   The primary source documents show that Oklahoma City officially established their urban renewal authority in 1961 after several years of advocacy from the city's business community, and that by 1964 specific plans were being presented that would have the city's official approval by 1965. The most talked about plan was for the central business district, with project work being designed by internationally famous architect I.M. Pei, along with plans for a new medical center south of the state capitol, and a housing zone to be redeveloped farther to the east of the capitol and downtown. Work began by 1966, and the Pei Plan itself would see its first projects completed in the early 1970s, though some of the most crucial elements, namely a downtown shopping center and downtown

apartment towers, would never be built, leaving the "Pei Plan" incomplete and the central business district full of empty lots that had been bulldozed in preparation for work that would not occur, and leaving that part of the city largely vacant outside of the nine-to-five week-day working hours. Furthermore, the urban renewal work done in the city's historically African American "Eastside" district would help speed up the area's decline, which had already begun due to the end of segregation.

6. **Confirmation, Modification, or Denial of Thesis**
   The research confirmed the initial thesis that OKC's renewal programs followed similar patterns to what occurred in high-profile cities. Furthermore, it also confirmed that the Pei Plan was at best only half-completed, and that having its core lynchpin project, the downtown shopping center, not built ultimately resulted in the plan being a failure. The poor state of Oklahoma City's downtown by the 1990s would lead the city government to create the MAPS program, which is locally funded and has more citizen input, and has largely been seen as a success.

7. **Statement of the Significance of the Findings**
   The significance of this research is that it provides a greater understanding of how Oklahoma City ended up being able to create a successful redevelopment plan starting in the 1990s and continuing to the present, by establishing just how the city got to such a poor state in the first place. What's more, we see that what led to that condition was an attempt to renew, not to destroy. This research allows us to compare and contrast the 1960s urban renewal program with the modern MAPS program, the creators of which were able to learn from the mistakes of the earlier endeavor.

8. **Suggestions for Future Research**
   There are several areas for future research that this thesis has opened up. First, a more detailed exploration of OKC's Eastside neighborhoods, both related to urban renewal, and in a broader narrative sense. In particular, Chapter 4 of the thesis, which focuses on renewal work in the city's Eastside could be expanded to include interviews with those whose homes were either relocated or renovated through federal funds, and how they and their families, friends, and neighbors felt about the renewal projects both at the time and now. Second, the preparation for this work shows that there is no complete historical narrative of Oklahoma City, only different texts exploring vignettes in the city's larger story. The closest work to this would be Sam Anderson's *Boom Town* (2018), but this was more a work of journalism – incredibly engaging and well written – and not an in-depth work of historical scholarship. Thirdly, most literature on urban renewal in the United States is focused on the nation's largest cities, primarily those in the eastern half of the country. To have a complete picture of how urban renewal affected America, research needs to be conducted on what this movement did in small and mid-sized cities similar to OKC, and compare what happened there with what happened in the nation's larger cities.

Introduction

On a bright October afternoon, a crowd of almost thirty-thousand people assembled in downtown Oklahoma City. An almost carnival-like atmosphere settled over the soon-to-be-spectators, with vendors selling balloons and plastic toys for children. This was not, however, a festival that drew nearly five percent of the entire city's population to the center of town that day. Shortly after 1:30 p.m., Mayor Patience Latting led those gathered in a chanted countdown. Just after thousands of voices shouts "ZERO!" the popping sound of explosives echoed in the air, and the twenty-six stories ziggurat-like structure that was the Biltmore Hotel, located at the southwest corner of Sheridan and Harvey Avenues imploded into a cloud of dust.[1]

It was Saturday, October 16, 1977. The grand structure that had dominated the skyline of OKC since its construction in 1932 was now a pile of rubble, a heap that the demolition company estimated would take four months to clear away. Thousands of the onlookers swarmed forward, pushing past the police barricades, to try and get a small piece of the building as a memento of the event, picking up bricks, stonework, and even bits of venetian blinds.[2] One reporter from the *Daily Oklahoman* compared the whole scene to a Roman gladiatorial arena, with the thousands gathered on the streets and rooftops and anywhere else they could get a good vantage point trying to bear witness to the death of the condemned hotel. The spectators were a varied lot. Some had once worked in the building, while others had been guests. One man had helped build the tower, telling the reporter that he "thought it would last a hundred years when [he] helped build it," reminiscing that he worked twelve-hour shifts installing marble in the winter of 1932. Some of those interviewed that day bemoaned the loss of a city landmark, while others said it marked the forward march of progress. By 1977, there were many empty spaces downtown

[1] "Blast Topples Biltmore Hotel," *The Daily Oklahoman*, October 17, 1977.
[2] Ibid.

where other buildings dating back from before World War II – some all the way back to just after statehood in 1907 – had met a similar, if less dramatic fate, to that of the Biltmore.[3]

What led to the end of the Biltmore, and more than four hundred other buildings in Oklahoma City's downtown core? That question leads back to a different hotel a few blocks away, and a little over a decade earlier in December 1964, when city officials and businessmen packed into a ballroom at the Skirvin Hotel, located on the northeast corner of Park Avenue and Broadway. Also in that room was the famed architect and urban designer I.M. Pei, hired, at least in part, by local business boosters, to design a city of the future. What Mr. Pei was asked to sell that day was a grand vision of urban renewal that would, if successful, completely transform the urban core of Oklahoma City, making it, to paraphrase the architect himself, one of the grandest cities in North America. Following a year of study and more planning, the OKC City Council would approve the "Pei Plan" in 1965, kicking off over two decades of urban renovation endeavors in Oklahoma's largest city.

By the mid-1960s, urban renewal was a well-established movement in American city planning. In the nearly eighty years since this movement began, it has gained various meanings depending on which group you ask. For the purpose of this research, urban renewal encompasses the attempts at American city planners to redevelop the central cores of major cities, often attempting to create grand new civic spaces and also trying to rehouse the urban poor, moving people living in substandard housing into more modern and safer environments. This was a top-down approach that has roots in ideas that were circulated prior to World War II, but who's work did not fully begin until after that conflict. Oklahoma had been gearing up to get in on the concept since the end of the 1950s, having various legal hurdles to overcome. The projects –

[3] "Spectators Jam Downtown," *The Daily Oklahoman*, October 17, 1977.

plural, as the Pei Plan would just be the flashiest of three major urban renewal endeavors that OKC would attempt – would not be merely the brainchild of elected officials and talented architects. The story in Oklahoma City would also be one of significant private involvement, in particular from the leaders of the city's Chamber of Commerce. Men like E. K. Gaylord, Dean A. McGee, and Stanley Draper crop up several times as one explores the records and gets into the details of how Oklahoma's capital city tried to reinvent itself. These names stand side-by-side with the elected officials who would be at the heart of the urban renewal movement in OKC: Mayor James Norick, Mayor George Shirk, and Mayor Patience Latting. Also of importance would be James T. Yielding and Ralph Bolen, both of whom would head the Oklahoma City Urban Renewal Authority (OCURA) during key moments of the city's urban redevelopment.

Although Pei's grand plan has become synonymous for the entirety of urban renewal in OKC, it is important to point out that there were two other key projects that were also undertaken by the planners working for OCURA: the University Medical Center project and the John F. Kennedy Housing Project. The former was focused on a major expansion of the existing medical school operated by the University of Oklahoma on Thirteenth Street, just south of the state capitol building, which would require the removal of homes that surrounded the modest school campus, and the latter would be an effort to remove substandard housing in a large swath of land to the east of the medical center and replace the torn-down structures with modern, safe, affordable accommodations. What is important to note about these two projects is that they were both located in the "Eastside" district, the African-American section of the city. While far from the most egregious example of how urban renewal disrupted communities of color in U.S. history, it did have a deteriorating long-term effect on city's Black neighborhoods, though it did

avoid the towering housing projects that the term urban renewal often conjures up in popular memory.

Work on all of the city's redevelopment projects would begin in earnest in 1966. Pei had told his audience two years previous that his plan for downtown would take at least a decade and a half, if not more. Both OCURA and the press would mention this unofficial deadline of 1980. Other planners, officials, and reporters would move the goalpost to 1989, the date of OKC's centennial, saying that the urban renewal efforts would make a good centerpiece for that momentous occasion. When the 1980s actually arrived, however, Oklahoma Cityan's were not the proud owners of a 'city of tomorrow.' The two Eastside projects were more or less on schedule, with some delays caused by hiccups in federal funding – the lifeblood of urban renewal. The downtown Pei Plan, however, was at best half-finished. The architect behind the plan had sold the city leaders on creating a functioning downtown community where people lived, worked, and played. But by 1980, only the new workplaces had fully materialized, with the "play" part only partially completed (a new convention center and theater, but the downtown park still a red-mud construction site, and much lauded downtown shopping center still waiting on the drawing board for funds and corporate backers), and the "live" part still only something that was talked about, with no tangible action taken. Then came a major economic crisis in 1982 that started in Oklahoma City with the failure of the Penn Square Bank and cascaded through the banking sector nation-wide – a failure that occurred, in part, due to a slump in the oil market, which the city and the state are both heavily tied to.

When looking back on a particular city's urban renewal effort, the question ultimately arises as to whether or not such an undertaking can be considered a success. It is the argument of this paper that, on the surface, OKC's redevelopment program of the 1960s and 70s was

ultimately a failure, but one that opened up a path to a self-described renaissance by the first decades of the twenty-first century. The earlier failure relied heavily on federal funds and private investment, and was a top-down program crafted by city officials and local businessmen with little input from the citizenry. This put Oklahoma City in such a low point by the end of the 1980s that there was a willingness to think outside the box, leading to the MAPS program in 1993 that would be more centered on feedback from the community and be entirely self-funded (with the idea that private investment would be made and encouraged, but not integral to the city's own actions). As of 2021, this program is in its fourth iteration and continues to remain highly popular with local voters.

Over the past half-century, scholars have conducted a solid foundation of research into urban renewal. This exploration of OKC's story builds on that body of work. A key text in this field is Jane Jacobs' *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, originally published in 1961 – the same year that Oklahoma City would lay the groundwork to start its urban redevelopment program. Though a product of the 1960s itself, this book reminds researchers that by the time OKC jumped into this renewal project, it had been around nationally long enough for clear, concise criticism. In general, Jacobs is highly critical of planners, saying that they attempt to bring "order by repression of all plans but the planners," which left cities "unstudied, unrespected…as sacrificial victims."[4] Jacobs also presented the city as a complex, intricate ecosystem, one that could be easily disturbed or damaged if tampered with incorrectly, a position that this paper concurs with.[5]

[4] Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Modern Library, Random House Publishing Group, 1961/1993), 34.
[5] Jacobs, *Death and Life*, xxvi.

Moving into modern scholarship on the topic, and to give balance to Jacobs' open criticism of the urban renewal movement, Lizabeth Cohen's 2019 book *Saving America's Cities*, a biographical look at the career of famed renewal leader Edward J. Logue, who first started out in this field in 1954 when he headed New Haven, Connecticut's efforts at remaking its urban landscape. After serving there successfully for seven years, Logue was recruited to do the same work in Boston, which he would do until 1967, and soon thereafter end up being hired to bring his skills to Manhattan, a post he would hold successfully until 1975, when, due to a financial mismanagement scandal of which Logue was cleared of, New York State's Urban Development Corporation came crashing down. Cohen's book uses Mr. Logue's story as a human face to a larger arc of the rise and the fall of the movement that he was a part of. More importantly, the author challenges the simplicity of which the history of urban renewal has often been presented in this country, as a simple good versus evil dichotomy. She aimed to "present an alternative, more nuanced history of postwar American city building that does not dismiss the federal role in renewing cities and subsidizing housing as pure folly," claiming instead "that there is a usable past of successful government involvement in urban redevelopment from which we can benefit today as we grapple with the current challenges of persistent economic and racial inequality, unaffordable housing, and crumbling infrastructure," contending that "policies and practices of urban renewal evolved over time," with mistakes being made but important lessons also learned.[6] This research intends to bring a similar approach of nuance to Oklahoma City's own story.

Robert Fogelson's *Downtown*, published in 2001, proclaims itself to be a pioneering work into the study of the American concept of "downtown," and explores its rise at the end of

[6] Lizabeth Cohen, *Saving America's Cities: Ed Logue and the Struggle to Renew Urban America in the Suburban Age* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019), 10.

the nineteenth century to the fall that began after World War II. Fogelson believed that, at the time of his writing, there was a dearth in the historiography of America's cities when it came to the topic of the downtown, and he set out to correct – or at least begin to correct – that absence. He places the rise of the American conception of the "downtown" as the center of commerce, business, and power at the latter part of the 1800s, reaching its zenith in the mid-1920s, and the beginnings of decline showing by the 1950s. This is a concept that tracks well with Oklahoma City's own story, having been founded in 1889, and the clamoring for renewal beginning at the very end of the 1950s, with action coming in the following decade.[7]

Christopher Klemek's *The Transatlantic Collapse of Urban Renewal,* published in 2011, places the story of urban renewal – in both its origins and its implementation – in an international context. It challenges the idea that the renewal concept, along with the experience of America's growing cities at the end of the nineteenth and into the early-to-mid twentieth centuries overall, was unique to the United States. What Klemek posits, however, is that although the movement to remake cities on both sides of the Atlantic grew out of common issues starting at the beginning of the 1900s, with countries in both Europe and North America sharing new ideas and concepts and generally having a common lingua franca with which to discuss urban development issues and a shared vision of where to go in the future, the divergence would come in the decades after World War II. Specifically looking at the United States, Britain, Canada, and Germany, the author shows how the USA and the UK both walked away from urban renewal with a great distaste for the experiment, and with little faith in future big-government programs to try similar

[7] Robert M. Fogelson, *Downtown: It's Rise and Fall, 1880-1950* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 7.

planning in the future, whereas in Germany and Canada, while experiencing some of the same issues, still maintain a high faith in government ability to plan.[8]

Having looked at these broader works that explore the history of urban renewal nationally and internationally, this paper also builds on more targeted scholarship that looked at the history of the reformation of urban landscapes in individual cities, often individual projects. Samuel Zipp's 2010 book *Manhattan Project* explores the rise and fall of renewal in New York City, which began before World War II. Zipp presents the idea that "the lens of urban renewal helps us to see how these two seemingly disparate developments – the rise of a world city and the decline into urban crisis – were coterminous and mutually dependent. Together, they worked to create the distinct profile of modern, late twentieth-century Manhattan, with its bifurcated landscape of shimmering towers and stark ghettos."[9] The author does this by analyzing the planning and response to four key New York urban renewal projects: the building of the UN Headquarters, the construction of the Stuyvesant Town housing by Metropolitan Life, the Lincoln Center performing arts complex, and the New York City Housing Authority's massive public housing created in East Harlem. Zipp looks at how those affected by these projects responded, from "accommodation and negotiation to critique and resistance."[10] When exploring the events in Oklahoma City, we see similar responses when projects were announced, though with more muted resistance when compared to larger cities like New York.

In the same vein, Thomas H. O'Connor's *Building a New Boston*, published in 1993, looked at the efforts to bring urban renewal in one of America's oldest cities. In his introduction

[8] Christopher Klemek, *The Transatlantic Collapse of Urban Renewal: Postwar Urbanism from New York to Berlin* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), 13-15.
[9] Samuel Zipp, *Manhattan Projects: The Rise and Fall of Urban Renewal in Cold War New York* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 29.
[10] Zipp, *Manhattan Projects,* 17.

to the book, O'Connor sums up not only Boston's story of metropolitan reformation, but the story of OKC and countless other American metros, saying "urban renewal in Boston, then, provides an absorbing example of how an essentially well-meaning reform movement can produce consequences that were never intended, frequently contradictory, and sometimes tragic."[11] It is no surprise that the story follows a similar arc to New York City, Oklahoma City, and others: a city with a downtown that its leaders feared would soon turn into a ghost town if drastic measures weren't taken, and once those measures were put in place, the consequences were often unexpected and unwanted.

Finally, Daniel Kay Hertz's *The Battle of Lincoln Park* looks at renewal efforts in one neighborhood in Chicago. Published in 2018, this book differs from the other two examples examined in that it isn't focused on the master plans of entire cities, or even just specific projects in a city, but the work in a single neighborhood, the eponymous Lincoln Park, just north of downtown Chicago. Hertz begins with the mostly well-intended rehabilitators who wanted to preserve the district in the 1940s, and rings us into the 1970s and beyond, where Lincoln Park was transformed into one of the wealthiest areas of Chicago. This book also delved into the topic of gentrification, which, while not a topic that directly centers in this work, is important to keep in mind when considering urban renewal in a twenty-first Century context. Hertz argues that gentrification is not just a modern phenomenon, but one that dates back to "nearly the beginning of the twentieth century." He also points out the connections between neighborhood "rehabilitation," race, and wealth, saying that "growing wealth in parts of central Chicago cannot be separated from growing disinvestment in other neighborhoods…Lincoln Park's evolution into

[11] Thomas H. O'Connor, *Building a New Boston: Politics and Urban Renewal 1950-1970* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1993), xii.

an affluent community does not make sense except in the context of the growing poverty – and growing black and Latino population – in much of the rest of Chicago. White middle-class residents responded to the threat of economic decline and loss of racial majority status by concentrating their investments in a tightly drawn, slowly expanding circle centered on already-established strongholds of the upper middle class." Although the renewal story in Lincoln Park is more community driven, as opposed to the top-down drive that appears in the stories of New York and Boston, as well as Oklahoma City, this discussion of race and urban renewal is important, one that cannot be ignored.[12]

In addition to these pieces of scholarship that document the rise and fall of the urban renewal movement in the United States that help give us a broader picture of where the particular story of Oklahoma City's experiment in this process sits in the larger national story, this work also builds on various pieces of local history that have been written over the past several decades. At the forefront is the book *OKC Second Time around – A Renaissance Story* by Steve Lackmeyer and Jack Money, published in 2006 which explores the connection between the initial urban renewal program of the 1960s and 1970s and the new, more successful program that began in the 1990s. Lackmeyer, a local reporter for *The Oklahoman*, has written several books on Oklahoma City's downtown and specifically the modern efforts at rejuvenation since the 1990s.[13] This paper and *Second Time Around* overlap in several areas, especially with regards to the Pei Plan, but do diverge and focus on different places. This research fully endorses the assertion in Lackmeyer's work that the 1960s urban renewal work in Oklahoma City laid the

[12] Daniel Kay Hertz, *The Battle of Lincoln Park: Urban Renewal and Gentrification in Chicago* (Cleveland: Belt Publishing, 2018), 11-12.
[13] "Steve Lackmeyer," Staff, The Oklahoman, accessed November 7, 2021, https://www.oklahoman.com/staff/3731365001/steve-lackmeyer/.

groundwork directly for the future program introduced by Ron Norick (son of James Norick) in the early 1990s.

Two other key works in preparing for this research are the 2012 book *Big League City* by David Holt, and *The Next American City: The Big Promise of our Midsize Metros* by Mick Cornett, published in 2018. Mr. Holt is, as of 2021, the current mayor of Oklahoma City – he was elected in 2018 – and Mr. Cornett is his predecessor, having served as mayor from 2004 to 2018.[14] Neither author's books are directly addressing urban renewal in Oklahoma City, however both use the economic bust and destitute state of OKC's downtown that existed in the late 1980s as spring boards to discuss their topics – Holt examined the saga of bringing an NBA franchise to the city while he worked for then-Mayor Cornett, and Cornett used Oklahoma's capital as a case-study for how other "midsized metros" could transform themselves in the same way that OKC did. Both of these city leaders oversaw the continuation of the MAPS program started in 1993 by Mayor Ron Norick, and their view of how the city got to the point of needing such a program – which is, in part at least, the failures of the urban renewal program embarked upon in 1965.

Also of use in establishing some background on two of the key leaders in this saga, Mayors James and Ron Norick, is the book *Norick: The Mayors of Oklahoma City*, published in 2005 by Bill Moore and Rick Moore. This is a biography of Oklahoma City's first native-born mayor and his son, who would follow in his footsteps nearly three decades later, and in many ways these two men bookend the urban renewal story. Norick, as Chapters 1 and 2 of this research will detail, oversaw the birth of the urban renewal movement in Oklahoma City as well

[14] "Previous Mayors," City Clerk – Archives & Records, The City of Oklahoma City, accessed November 7, 2021, https://www.okc.gov/government/archives-records/oklahoma-city-history/previous-mayors.

as some of its implementation. His son, on the other hand, inherited a city struggling after the economic downturn of the 1980s and a downtown that was scarred by the program his father had initiated. This book is far from ideal, as the authors did their best to paint the Noricks in the best possible light – in particular it glosses over James Norick's views on race, which is problematic since he was in office during several key moments in the city's civil rights movement – but it does provide a baseline for understanding at lease some parts of who these two men were and how their actions affected OKC.

These books have all been invaluable in setting the stage for understanding Oklahoma City, often through the eyes of those who now or have recently been at the helm of local government, or otherwise have a close-up view to how things function at city hall and at the planning office. As a local, this author also recognizes that these texts do, at least at times, take part in boosterism – the art of trying to present your special cause in the best possible light. Author Sam Anderson, who wrote *Boom Town: The Fantastical Saga of Oklahoma City,* identifies this phenomenon in the city's history that stems from a collective self-image issue that Oklahoma Cityans have about the place they live.[15] Local leaders and writers want to put the city's best foot forward, to get a positive story out there to challenge this image issue. This is understandable considering that, as a metropolitan area in "fly over country," most Americans know little about the city outside the few times OKC ends up on national news due to tragedies, such as the 1995 terror attack at the federal building, or the perennial threat of severe weather. This is not to say that these books aren't useful in an academic context. Far from it, as they act in many ways as first-hand accounts to help deepen further research. Furthermore, with the lack of

[15] Sam Anderson, *Boom Town: The Fantastical Saga of Oklahoma City, Its Chaotic Founding, Its Apocalyptic Weather, Its Purloined Basketball Team, and the Dream of Becoming a World-Class Metropolis* (New York: Broadway Books, 2018), xvii, 4.

any work that clearly and comprehensively gives the entire history of the city since its 1889 founding, these books provide good narrative for several key moments in the city's story. This research is intended to build on this material and add to it, and as best as possible avoid attempts at boosterism and provide an honest analysis of the events that occurred from this period between 1960-1990.

In the opening chapter, "OKC in 1960," the scene is set for what Oklahoma City was like prior to the start of the urban renewal program that would be underway by mid-decade. Some of the key local players, such as Stanley Draper, Dean A. McGee, Mayor Jim Norick, and others are introduced, and a cursory exploration of their background and motivations are given. This chapter also establishes some of the key issues that these leaders saw facing their community at the start of a new decade. In addition, some of the legal framework at the state and national level that would ultimately support urban renewal is explained.

In the second chapter, "Calls for Renewal," we look at the steps Oklahoma City would have to take in order to make such a program of city rebuilding possible from a legal standpoint, first overcoming state legislative and legal hurdles before passing a resolution to establish their own renewal board. This will ultimately lead to the creation of the Oklahoma City Urban Renewal Authority (OCURA), which will remain at the center of this story from its inception in 1961 onwards. The debate and delays in creating the authority give glimpses into racial issues that will also be explored later on. Also introduced is James T. Yielding, who would be the first director of OCURA, and a key figure in the early implementation of the city's renewal projects. The early forms of these projects are also discussed in this chapter, to set the reader up for further exploration on their specifics in subsequent chapter. Chapter 2 ends with the start of tangible work on renewal in February 1966.

The third chapter, “The Pei Plan,” explores the proposed master plan for Oklahoma City’s downtown urban renewal project, that ultimately became the flashy public face of renewal for many OKC residents after its reveal at the end of 1964 and subsequent approval the following year. This plan built off of some key ideas already being discussed by city business and government leaders, such as the need for a new convention center, and presented a grand vision of what Oklahoma’s capital could look like in fifteen to twenty years if local authorities would make the effort and investment to take that vision and make it into a reality. This city of the future that Pei proposed not only included the convention center, but also a large downtown park, soaring office towers and matching apartment high rises, and at the center, a massive shopping center. It was a bold plan that excited members of the Chamber of Commerce and local government leaders.

Before diving into the implementation of the Pei Plan, Chapter 4, “Renewal and the Eastside,” delves into how city officials implemented urban renewal on Oklahoma City’s Eastside District, which was the historic home of OKC’s African-American community. The flashy plan for downtown was only one part of OCURA’s vision of remaking the city. The proposed expansion of the university medical center south of the capitol, and a large swath of land to the east of this site that became known as the John F. Kennedy Project. These two programs would be largely focused on ‘slum clearance,’ with promised replacement housing to follow, or with money to rehabilitate homes that the authority deemed worth saving. This project would drag out, and due to a collapse in federal funding for urban renewal, would not be completed as originally intended, left instead to private investment. On the whole, part of the program can be considered as a mixed bag of positives and negatives, as on the one hand it did

try to improve the living conditions of those in the area, but on the other it helped hasten the decline of the Eastside.

In the fifth chapter, "Dream Deferred," the successes and failure of the Pei Plan is explored. As the title of the chapter implies, this implementation did not come about as intended. Although the convention center and the office towers would ultimately rise more or less on time, the rest of the "city of tomorrow" that had wowed the city's movers and shakers in 1964 was either much delayed and truncated before it became a reality, or never left the drawing board at all. There are multiple reasons for this lack of success, many of which were economic in nature and outside the direct control of those working at the city planning office. Nevertheless, by the end of the 1980s, the city's downtown was considered by many as a shadow of its former self, both a site of embarrassment for locals, but also fertile ground for a new renovation plan that continues to this day.

Oklahoma City's urban renewal journey began in an era of change, and is a product of its time. The same year that the Pei Plan is unveiled, Lyndon B. Johnson launched the country on a quest for his Great Society. OKC's leaders' fascination with trying to be what they perceived of as modern or cutting edge is no surprise either, as the country embraced the space race. The community would break ground on one of their signature downtown renewal projects – the convention center – less than two weeks before Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin would be the first humans to walk on the surface of the Moon. As the city began to dream of it's space-age future, the country also entered into the Civil Rights movement, some of it starting in OKC itself with the start of the sit-ins like the one at Katz Diner in 1958. As the city government set up the legal framework to start renewal, Martin Luther King, Jr., would give his famous "I have a dream" speech. His death would occur while much of the downtown and the Eastside saw

bulldozers tear down so-called “slums.” The 1960s and 1970s were a period of change in the United States, and OKC’s renewal movement is just one facet of that larger moment.

As a native of Oklahoma City, this endeavor began as a way to understand the space I had seen since childhood, with my father working for my entire life in downtown OKC. As most people do, I took for granted the permanence of the streets and buildings I had seen countless times. The concrete, stone, metal, and asphalt seem immovable, and many of the buildings seemed to my young eyes as ancient. Yet, in the span of time that I transitioned from child to youth and then young adult, the city transformed before my eyes. Born in 1989, the urban space that I first saw was one that – unbeknownst to me at the time – had been greatly altered by the actions that this research explores. The downtown space of my childhood was a nine to five office space, one where the sidewalks rolled up when the offices emptied, or so my family joked. Today, while not being a twenty-four-hour city, OKC’s downtown has life and community outside the office towers. People want to be there, whether it is to have coffee or a beer in one of the many venues now located inside restored buildings, to have dinner in chic new restaurants, or party in clubs in the new “Midtown” or “Bricktown” districts. Apartments and townhomes continue to pop up, either in new developments or in restoration projects. Here in the early decades of the twenty-first century, the generation coming of age now is less enamored with suburban sprawl, and the urban cores that our parents and grandparents eschewed are once again gaining prominence. When I began to explore Oklahoma City’s story, I wanted to know why past generations had allowed the downtown core to fall into such a sorry shape in the first place. What had they envisioned for OKC when they began to demolish some fantastic examples of early twentieth-century architecture that I can only see in black-and-white photographs, taking concrete parts of our community's history and bulldozing them into oblivion?

When investigating urban history, what is often being explored is the concept of "space." The way that we organize our built spaces can tell us a lot about the priorities of a community at a certain time. Buildings placed in the center, given prominence, tell us what mattered to the people who built them. Buildings preserved say something about later generations and what they want to keep from their past (and conversely, buildings demolished tell us what does not matter, what is considered expendable). In and of themselves, man-made structures simply serve as large-scale artifacts of a people at a certain time and place. They matter not so much because of their design and beauty (or lack thereof), but because they tell us about the people who built them. This is true for individual structures as well as cities as a whole. The way communities are laid out, the reasoning behind why certain places are built where they are, can tell a rich and complicated story about the people living there.

The ultimate story that this research tells is one that mirrors other urban renewal experiences throughout the US, where leaders in a community created a grand plan without a lot of community input. Financial support also didn't lie primarily in the community, which meant that Oklahoma City would ultimately be at the whim of national trends, which shifted against federally-funded urban renewal before work in OKC finished, leaving the officials at OCURA and on the city council scrambling to find other funding or ways to wrap up projects quicker and in a more scaled down design than envisioned. Pei's grand plan, and the plans of men like Dean A. McGee and Stanley Draper and the others that made up the Chamber of Commerce, forever altered Oklahoma City's core, though not necessarily as the intended. The city that exists today bears the marks of their grand plans, embracing some while working to heal others.

Chapter 1 – OKC in 1960

There is an old adage that Rome was not built in a day. And indeed, the idea of building any city in a day is preposterous. Except, that is, for Oklahoma City. It is a peculiar part of the history of Oklahoma's capital city, that on April 22, 1889, a city of tents and a few clapboard buildings filling out several blocks of dirt streets materialized within a few hours, during the first of many land runs that opened Indian Territory to white settlement. Where there had only been open prairie in the morning, by nightfall several thousand people had made "Oklahoma Station" their new home.

By 1960, this unorthodox beginning was but a fleeting memory, and a new arrival at Santa Fe or Union Stations or at the bus terminal at Sheridan and Walker Avenues would have been hard-pressed to imagine a dusty town of tents. Instead, the city greeted our newly arrived visitor with bustling streets filled with cars clogging the roadways and pedestrians coming in and out of a myriad of shops, offices, and eateries. Patrons filled Katz Drug on Main and Robinson at their soon-to-be-famous lunch counter.[16] John A. Brown Department Store on Main attracted shoppers from all over the city and its suburban neighbors. Office workers filled the Baum Building with its graceful design that took inspiration from a Venetian. Businessmen and bankers entered and exited the First National Bank Building at First and Robinson – the city's tallest structure, standing at 446 feet and a dominant feature of the OKC skyline since 1931, with its spire and other Art Deco features reminding a first-time viewer of the Empire State Building.[17] And although this city on the plains was no Manhattan, it had a downtown core that had grown

[16] Terry L. Griffith, *Oklahoma City: 1930 to the Millennium* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2000), 55.
[17] Larry Johnson, *Historic Photos of Oklahoma City* (Nashville, TN: Turner Publishing Company, 2007), 154.

from those dusty first days on the prairie into a hub of commerce, with many unique structures that locals took pride in.

Our new arrival in this prairie polis would have found any number of places to lay their head down for an overnight stay as well, most within walking distance of wherever they arrived from. Plenty of simple, modest options lined both Broadway and Sheridan Avenues, but the two that would stand out were the Skirvin Hotel and the Biltmore Hotel. Built on Broadway and Park Avenues in 1911, the Skirvin had been the project of local businessman William Basler "Bill" Skirvin and offered an elegant stay for guests.[18] So too was the experience for patrons of the Biltmore, one of the other staples of Oklahoma City's skyline located at the corner of Sheridan and Harvey Avenues. At 33 stories tall, it was the third-tallest building in the city and shared the Art Deco style of the First National Building. The Biltmore was one of the premier places to stay in OKC and played host to several celebrities over the years.[19] Guests would have been able to catch performances a few blocks over at the Civic Center Music Hall, another Art Deco treasure, or at the Criterion Theater on Main with its beautiful glass and stone entrance in the "French DeLux" style. No, Oklahoma City's downtown core was no Manhattan or Chicago, but the area had "place:" reasons for both locals and out-of-towners to come and do business or spend leisure time.

For all that this urban core had going for it, however, strong currents of change were already at work, changing how many Americans, from the common shop-goer to the men in elected and economic power, viewed downtown. Such currents would soon find their way to this Great Plains metropolis. Indeed, the early 1960s was an era of change across the country. Many

[18] Jim Edwards and Hal Ottaway, *The Vanished Splendor: Postcard Views of Early Oklahoma, Volume 1* (Oklahoma City: Apache Book Shop Publishing Co., 1982), 79.
[19] Griffith, *Oklahoma City: 1930 to the Millennium*, 69-71.

white families, aided by generous post-war government programs, were making their way into new suburban communities and leaving more built-up urban areas - an opportunity often denied to non-white citizens through various lending practices and property contracts and other tactics that were either overtly or tacitly racist. This pattern held true for Oklahoma City as well. African American citizens of the city's "Eastside" remained locked in a neighborhood they had pushed and scraped for years to expand, while white suburbs excluded them, and the nearby businesses in downtown that refused service to them began to consider relocation to be closer to the sprawl of suburbia.[20]

The generation that fought World War II were now coming into their own, becoming the respected businessmen and politicians that were now starting to take the helm. They gave up part of their youth to ensure peace and prosperity at home, and were now entering their prime, intent on reaping the rewards of their sacrifice. This was also true for Oklahoma's capital city, at the very highest levels of city leadership. If our newly arrived guest had felt so inclined and visited city hall - yet another Art Deco jewel among the downtown architecture, a Public Works Administration project opened in 1937 with a Bedford limestone exterior and Art Deco-style aluminum exterior fixtures[21] - they likely would have found the city's new mayor, Jim Norick (1920-2015).[22] Narrowly elected in 1959, Norick was the embodiment of this new generation of leaders. He served in the Navy during the war, enlisting in 1942 and working at a naval aviation training center in Norman, OK, before being assigned to the USS *Chowanoc* in 1944. His ship

[20] Anderson, *Boom Town*, 188-93.
[21] "City Hall," City of Oklahoma City, accessed March 15, 2021, https://www.okc.gov/government/archives-records/oklahoma-city-history/city-hall.
[22] Erica R. Johnson, "Norick, James Henry (1920-2015)," *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, Oklahoma Historical Society, accessed March 15, 2021, https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=NO008.

was sent to the Pacific, where the future mayor and his crewmates saw action in both the Leyte and Lingayan Gulfs. Norick left service in December of 1945, coming back home to his wife, Madalynne, and young son Ron (a future mayor of OKC himself). He resumed work at the family business, Norick Brothers Printing, while also becoming involved in civic organizations around town.

He first got involved in politics in 1951, when he was elected to city council, representing Ward 1. He told the press, upon his narrow victory, that "I have not made any commitments to anyone other than to promise to always do what I think is in the best interest of Oklahoma City." Indeed, biographers regularly present Jim Norick as a man of the people, unbeholden to outside political interests. He served one term and said that he was returning to business life, but public service soon called again. Norick entered the '59 race for mayor, and in his announcement, he told supporters that "Oklahoma City is ready for even greater growth and prosperity. You can tell this from the way people talk and from the way industry is moving in our direction. I would relish the chance to serve and lead my hometown in making the most of these opportunities." Norick faced a tough three-way race, where he barely eked out a second-place win, which placed him in the April 7th run-off election, where he defeated his opponent, 58,648 votes to 35,682. His win made OKC history, as he was the first mayor of the city to have been born and raised there.[23]

A few blocks away, another important figure would likely have been in his own office, though our visitor from out-of-town would be unaware of him or his unofficial authority. That man was Stanley Draper (1889-1976), president of the Chamber of Commerce. Draper had been a key figure in the city's politics and decision making for years, regardless of who occupied the

[23] Bill Moore and Rick Moore, *Norick: The Mayors of Oklahoma City* (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Heritage Association, 2005), 66.

Mayor's Office in the Municipal Building. Draper came to Oklahoma City in 1919, freshly discharged from military service in World War I. The new arrival began work with the city's chamber of commerce almost immediately, serving as its assistant manager. He became its managing director in 1930 – a post he would retain until his retirement in 1968. Draper was no stranger to working on major civic projects to improve OKC and keep his adopted hometown on the cutting edge. In the 1930s, the chamber president was involved in the project to relocate rail lines out of downtown (the land that those lines formerly occupied was now home to the Civic Center and City Hall). In the 1940s, he was a key figure in getting the Department of Defense to set up what became Tinker Air Force Base. Any future plans that Oklahoma City would hatch would have his fingerprints on it in some form or another.[24]

While a visitor to Oklahoma City likely would have found an impressive – if modest – downtown in the early 1960s, city leaders and businessmen saw something else. They saw an urban core that, thanks to the automobile, the interstate highway systems, and white flight to the suburbs, could quickly wither and die. The "crown jewels" of the skyline were all from before the war. These men – there were no prominent women leaders holding office or the reigns of economic power in Oklahoma's capital at this time – believed in progress, in keeping Oklahoma City relevant, modern, and belonging in the forefront of mid-twentieth century technology. These are the same men that subjected the city to sonic boom testing during this decade in the hope of making OKC the sonic airflight capital of the United States.[25] When these gentlemen of the future looked at their downtown, they saw shabby tenements and stubby brick buildings

[24] Linda D. Wilson, "Draper, Stanley Carlisle," *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, Oklahoma Historical Society, https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=DR001.
[25] Anderson, *Boom Town*, 27-32.

south of Sheridan, many of them below modern building standards. They saw the Biltmore Hotel as a has-been that was in financial trouble. For men like Stanley Draper and Jim Norick, modernity seemed about ready to pass Oklahoma City by.

In 1960, as Norick was settling into his first year in office, the greater Oklahoma City area was home to just over half a million people (511,833 to be exact). Of those, 463,000 where white, 41,000 were African American, and another 7,000 belonged to "other races," according to the US Census Bureau. The median income of families that year was $5,601 (approximately $50,000 in 2021 dollars).[26] Oklahoma's capital city had nearly 115,000 students enrolled in school, kindergarten through twelfth grade. The median age of men in the city was 27.3, and 29 for women (there were approximately 158,000 adult males living in the city limits as of 1960, and 172,000 women). Census data at the time further breaks down this information into white/non-white. The median age remains nearly the same for whites living in OKC, but drops to 21 years of age for non-white men, and 23.3 years for non-white women. There were approximately 125,000 married couples living in the city (and some 14,000 divorcees). There were approximately 172,000 men who were considered of working age in 1960 (14 years and older). Of those, around 136,000 were employed in the labor force (nearly 80% of working age men). At the same time, there were approximately 187,000 women of working age, but only 70,000 employed (37% of working age women). Of the nearly 200,000 Oklahoma Cityans that were employed in some form or fashion, approximately 153,000 used a private automobile to get to work (88,400 people reported that they had one vehicle at their disposal, 43,000 had two, and

[26] "CPI Inflation Calculator," *U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics,* accessed March 15, 2021, https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm.

5,000 had three or more – only 23,700 had no vehicle of their own), 8,000 relied on public transportation, and 14,000 walked to work or relied on "other means."[27]

The 1960 Census report also gives us a glimpse at the type of residences that existed in Oklahoma City at the time. 106,200 households were owner-occupied (99,700 white, 6,500 non-white). 54,000 households were renter-occupied (47,300 white, 6,800 non-white). An additional 12,000 housing units sat vacant. Of the 170,000 plus used or available units in the city, approximately 141,000 were labeled as "sound," with only about 7,000 of those units lacking some sort of plumbing facilities. 24,000 units were found to be deteriorating, and some 7,000 considered "dilapidated." Nearly 150,000 units were single-family structures. Of the units available, some 60-70,000 had been built since World War II. Approximately 133,000 homes had only one bathroom, with 23,000 having more than one, and 16,000 either having none or having some sort of shared facilities. The median housing unit had 4.7 rooms. The average value of owner-occupied homes in Oklahoma City was $9,800 (nearly $88,000 in 2021 dollars),[28] though some 45,000 homes were reported at a higher value. Renters in OKC paid on average $63 a month for their residences (approximately $550 in 2021 value).[29]

Boiling all this information down, we are given the picture of a relatively young citizenry, nearly three-fourths of whom were in a family. It is highly likely that such a family would have had a single breadwinner, and that person would have been male. Oklahoma City in 1960 was a city that drove, with the majority of its workers commuting via private automobile rather than rely on public transportation or walk, an important factor for planners as they began

[27] U.S. Bureau of the Census, *U.S. Census of Population and Housing: 1960,* Final report PHC(1)-111. U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1961.
[28] "CPI Inflation Calculator," *U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics*
[29] *U.S. Census of Population and Housing: 1960.*

to envision the city's future for the latter half of the twentieth century that lay ahead. Oklahoma's capital was also overwhelmingly white, with just over 9% of its population considered to be people of color. It will come as no surprise later on, knowing such numbers, that decisions are made that affected the city's African American community (the largest minority community in the city, 85% of the non-white citizenry) without much input or representation. The condition of the housing stock in OKC at the start of the 1960s is another key fact to consider. Of the 170,000 residential units in the city, 17% was considered either substandard or dilapidated. This would be a focal point in discussions of how they city needed to change in order to go forward, along with the fact that nearly 60% of the housing available dated from before the war. You can't have a modern city if the majority of your people live in antiquated dwellings.

Oklahoma City leaders had growth on the brain as they looked to the newly dawning decade and beyond. From 1950 to 1960, the city proper had added nearly 80,000 people (double the growth from the previous decade of 1940-1950 (which, in and of itself, was double the growth of the decade from 1930 to 1940).[30] And, as families moved to newly spawning suburbs, city leaders were worried that the tax base those families represented would soon be gone. So, between 1959-1961, the city undertook a massive annexation campaign. When Norick took office, the city he led was 80.51 square miles in size. In December 1959, annexation of neighboring communities and rural land brought the size of the city to 256.51 square miles. Another round of annexations in August 1960 brought the size of the city up to 392.67 square miles. This made OKC the third largest city by land area in the United States, behind only Houston, Texas, and Los Angeles, California. A third major set of annexations in October 1961

[30] U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Number of Inhabitants: Oklahoma,* U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1950.

brought the size up to 475.55 square miles, making it the largest city in the United States, and one of the largest in the world.[31] Growth and the future were what OKC's leaders had in mind at the outset of the 1960s. While this view largely focused outward at first, the gaze of these men would regularly come back to the city center, which they felt did not reflect the modernism they wanted the city to project. Discussions began at city hall and among the members of the chamber of commerce as to what should be done to bring downtown into the post-war world.

Unbeknownst to anyone at the time, part of that answer would be the budding architect Ieoh Ming Pei (1917-2019).[32] Born in Guangzhou, China, I.M. Pei came to the United States in 1935 to study architecture.[33] He graduated from MIT in 1940, and then went on to Harvard to get his master's degree, which he would earn in 1946. While there, Pei's introduction to modernist architecture ideas from the Bauhaus school greatly influenced his views on design, which own professional work reflected in the years to come. In 1948, Pei began work at the prestigious New York firm Webb & Knapp, Inc., as their director of architecture. Then, in 1955, he stepped out on his own, establishing I.M. Pei & Associates.[34] This new firm would remain associated with Webb & Knapp until 1960, when it would become fully independent. By the end of the decade, Pei's work would be garnering international attention, a trend which would continue to increase in the 1970s, as he was selected to design the Kennedy Presidential Library, the expansion to the National Gallery in Washington, and many other eye-catching projects in the US and abroad.[35]

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[31] Moore & Moore, *Norick*, 72.
[32] "I.M. Pei FAIA, RIBA," Pei Cobb Freed & Partners, accessed March 16, 20201, https://www.pcf-p.com/about/i-m-pei/.
[33] Paul Goldberg, "I.M. Pei, Master Architect Whose Buildings Dazzled the World, Dies at 102", *The New York Times*, May 16, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/16/obituaries/im-pei-dead.html.
[34] Biography.com Editors, "I.M. Pei Biography," Biography.com, last updated June 3, 2020, https://www.biography.com/artist/im-pei.
[35] Goldberg, "I.M. Pei."

One of his first big projects on his own was the Mile High Center in Denver, Colorado – a twenty-three story tower considered now to be that city's first modern high-rise, with an all-metal-and-glass exterior dominated by the square tower and an atrium of mismatched semi-cylinders, completed in 1955[36]. In 1960, as Norick was still settling into office and his fellow city leaders were contemplating their community's future, Pei received an impressive commission to design the multi-airline terminal at JFK International Airport in New York.[37] In addition to these early individual building designs, Pei had also garnered attention with work on urban renewal projects in cities like New York, Philadelphia, Boston, and Washington.[38] As mentioned before, the concept of urban renewal was not something brand new by the 1960s. Indeed, it had been a going concern in many parts of the United States soon after World War II and was in full swing in some of the largest metropolitan areas by the 1950s. It would ultimately be Pei's work in this field that would catch the eye of the Oklahoma Cityans looking to keep their hometown at the cutting edge. Today, it can be hard to imagine that the sharp lines and edges of modern architecture that were the signatures of Pei's work would catch the eye of leaders in such a conservative mid-western city, but that is just what happened.

Norick, Draper, and other city leaders had several competing concerns when they looked downtown. One was the aging stock of downtown real estate, the newest of which mostly dated from before the war. Many of the buildings dated back to the 1910s and 1920s, and had not been built to last, and as such were showing their age. Many would soon need serious overhauling to remain compliant with the ever-increasing standards of mid-twentieth century building codes.

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[36] "Mile High Center," Denver Urban Review, published December 2, 2018, http://denverurbanreview.com/2018/12/mile-high-center/.
[37] "I.M. Pei: American Architect," Britannica Encyclopedia, accessed March 16, 2021, https://www.britannica.com/biography/I-M-Pei
[38] "I.M. Pei Biography," Biography.com.

This was true not only of the small brick shops and tenements south of Sheridan Avenue, but also for the grander buildings that made up the skyline of the city. With the rise of the automobile, streets in the urban core of the city were being strangled. They had mostly been built during the era of the horse and buggy, and modern vehicles strained their capacity – and as more and more people moved to the suburbs, and with the elimination of the streetcar system in the 1950s, the automobile was most citizens only means to get downtown to shop or go to work. Shopping itself was another great concern. For most of the city's history up to that point, the city center had been the primary place for citizens to shop. But with the blooming of the suburbs came the rise of the suburban shopping malls. Shepherds Mall, which was OKC's first enclosed shopping mall, opened at 23rd Street and Villa Avenue in 1964, and the downtown department stores began making plans to emigrate.[39] And with those departures, remaining shops, restaurants, and entertainment venues started to suffer. Another concern among city fathers was the need for a more modern convention venue. Once the crown jewel of the city, the Civic Center, built in 1937 and matching city hall in its Art Deco splendor, was falling behind modern standards by the 1960s, in terms of not only capacity but also state of the art technology to allow the bigger concerts, theater performances, and national conventions to be able to visit the city. The same could also be said for the city's premier hotel stock. Yes, the Skirvin was still a sought-after location, as was the Biltmore, though the latter struggled financially and had changed owners several times by this point.[40] Despite this, capacity had not kept up with demand nationally, and the major business players in the city worried that they would soon start losing coveted convention business to more up-to-date cities.

[39] "History of Mall," *The Oklahoman*, September 12, 2008, https://www.oklahoman.com/article/3296637/history-of-mall.
[40] "Changes Coming to City Hotel," *The Daily Oklahoman*, October 10, 1968.

With these concerns moving to the foreground in the minds of Draper and others involved in the chamber of commerce, more and more focus began to shift to larger cities back East that had successfully implemented urban renewal programs. Thanks to successful lobbying on the part of these businessmen (along with their like-minded fellows in Tulsa), the state legislature approved a bill in 1959 that would allow municipalities of more than 10,000 people to establish urban renewal boards and to seek federal funding for such projects.[41] This law was not welcomed by all, and did face some initial legal challenges, but the Oklahoma Supreme Court cleared these away by 1960.[42] Finally, with the legal backing of the state government, the movers and shakers in Oklahoma City were ready to take their talk of urban renewal, of remaking the heart of their hometown, and turn it into a reality. What would follow would be a combined work of these outside business interests and the city government to formulate a plan to give downtown Oklahoma City. This effort would soon draw in the architect I.M. Pei, resulting in one of the most ambitious urban renewal plans to be developed in the United States, one that city officials would attempt to bring about with a gusto that even the designer had not planned for. Pei would provide them with a vision for a "city of the future," and these men who wanted to keep their city relevant would do all within their power to bring the future into reality in their city on the plains. As with all good plans, though, contact with reality, from political forces, changing tastes, and an unforeseen economic disaster, would mean that the grand vision soon to be created would not bear the fruit originally intended.

[41] "Blighted Area Cash Available for Oklahoma," *The Daily Oklahoman*, June 12, 1960.
[42] "Supreme Court Must Act Next on Urban Law," *The Daily Oklahoman*, May 26, 1960.

Chapter 2 – Calls for Renewal

As discussed previously, the concept of urban renewal was nothing new by the time Jim Norick took office as Oklahoma City's twenty-eighth mayor in 1959. The earliest high-profile projects dates back to the late 1940s, and the concept had become part of federal law with the passage of the Housing Acts of 1949 and 1954, which allowed the U.S. government to help fund city renewal projects by funding up to two-thirds of these endeavors, the remaining third to be covered by local government.[43] Our aforementioned visitor to Oklahoma City in 1960 would very likely be aware of the concept, having either read about it, or even seen it firsthand if they hailed from a larger eastern metropolis.

Despite the federal program having been in existence for five years when Norick took the oath of office, Oklahoma municipalities were not yet able to take advantage of the available funds from Washington. State action would be required to allow cities to launch such renewal programs, and the legislature did not jump to take up the issue until the same year that Norick started his first term. That year, the Oklahoma legislature passed a law allowing for a city to set up an independent council that would be in charge of any desired renewal projects. Such a council would be the organization that would work the Federal Housing and Home Finance Agency on funding. This law was immediately challenged in state court, and did not have the backing of the state's attorney general, Mac Q. Williamson (1889-1964).[44] He stated that he did not believe that the law was constitutional, because the state's constitution forbade municipalities from taking on outside debt. Political pressure from state Republicans, and from officials in both Oklahoma City and Tulsa, continued to build, and in 1960 Williamson dropped his opposition to

[43] "Blighted Area Cash Available for Oklahoma," *The Daily Oklahoman*, June 12, 1960.
[44] "Williamson, Mac Q.," Oklahoma Hall of Fame, Gaylord-Pickens Museum, accessed November 13, 2021, https://oklahomahof.com/member-archives/w/williamson-mac-q-1959.

the bill – citing that the law could be read to see that the independent councils set up by the cities, not the municipal governments themselves, were taking on the debt, keeping the law within the bounds of the Oklahoma constitution – essentially clearing any major legal challenges to the law.[45] The remaining private suits in court were either dropped or were won by proponents of the law, once the state's chief lawyer changed sides.

With the legal challenges conquered, Oklahoma City could finally get the ball rolling on setting up its own urban renewal program. Before any committees could be assembled, any plans made, or major funding for demolition and reconstruction be obtained, the city first applied for a federal grant to study what areas in the city would most benefit from renewal money, along with three other municipalities in Oklahoma. In total, the U.S. Government released $42,750 to study what areas in major Oklahoma urban centers could benefit from such projects.[46]

The next step, and one of the most critical to the early stages of launching a successful urban renewal program, was to create the independent board that would oversee any such project. The legal framework to allow this to happen was approved on June 27, 1961, when the city council unanimously approved the resolution to create said board. The commission would consist of five members that the mayor would appoint, though final approval lay with the city council members. One member of the board would serve a one-year term, two would serve a two-year term, and two would serve a three-year term.[47] The mayor would allow for some time for the community to suggest members for the board, which he planned to appoint in the fall.

Although the city government and the chamber of commerce generally supported the idea of bringing urban renewal to Oklahoma City, not all community members agreed with this plan.

[45] "Supreme Court Must Act Next on Urban Law," *The Daily Oklahoman*, May 26, 1960.
[46] "State Cities Get Grant for Growth," *The Daily Oklahoman*, July 7, 1960.
[47] "Council Takes Step to Start Urban Renewal," *The Daily Oklahoman*, June 28, 1961.

Some in the real estate market worried about the creation of large public housing projects that had been developed back east. Evan Curtis, a member of the Oklahoma City Apartment Owners Association, voiced his concern during the city council meeting where the urban renewal committee resolution was ultimately adopted. He claimed that such a program would allow "an elite group of people to make money at someone else's expense," and further urged the city councilors to not "throw us at the mercy of social reformers who look to urban renewal as a machine to socialize this country."[48] This was one of many instances reported in the press where local businessmen expressed specific concern about the possibility of public housing being introduced in OKC and the potential "socialist" agenda that could represent.

At the same meeting, the Eastside community – the city's African-American community which lies east of the Santa Fe rail line downtown, going at least as far north as Thirteenth Street, stretching west past Eastern Boulevard (today Martin Luther King Boulevard) – expressed their desire to see at least one of their own named as a board member, specifically requesting that F.D. Moon (1896-1975),[49] the retired principal of Douglas High School, be appointed. This was not the first time Moon's name had been mentioned for one of these positions. The *Daily Oklahoman* reported that a petition had been submitted to the council the week before the resolution was approved asking for Moon's appointment.[50] It should not be surprising that the city's African American community wanted representation on this board. By 1961, it was clear that many municipalities that had already undertaken urban renewal projects used these plans to target communities that were primarily occupied by people of color, and that specter of destruction and

[48] "Council Takes Step to Start Urban Renewal," *The Daily Oklahoman*, June 28, 1961.
[49] William D. Welge, "Moon, Frederick Douglass," *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, accessed November 13, 2021, https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=MO011.
[50] "Council Takes Step to Start Urban Renewal," *The Daily Oklahoman*, June 28, 1961.

upheaval in the name of "progress" would have likely been on the minds of many leaders in the Eastside neighborhoods. The city's African American newspaper, the *Black Dispatch*, was cautious about the topic, not coming out directly against the proposal, but not endorsing it either. The concern of the Eastside community centered on the concept of "blight," a term used many times in the city's resolution creating the urban renewal authority.[51] The 1959 state law defined blight as any area where:

> …there are properties, buildings, or improvements, whether occupied or vacant, whether residential or non-residential, which by reason of dilapidation, deterioration, age or obsolescence, inadequate provision for ventilation, light , air, sanitation or open spaces; population overcrowding' improper subdivision or obsolete platting of land, inadequate parcel size' arrested economic development' improper street layout in terms of existing or projected traffic needs, traffic congestion or lack of parking or terminal facilities needed for existing or proposed land uses in the area, predominance of defective or inadequate street layouts; faulty lot layout in relation to size, adequacy, accessibility or usefulness; insanitary or unsafe conditions, deterioration of site or other improvements; diversity of ownership, tax or special assessment delinquency exceeding the fair value of the land' defective or unusual conditions of title' any one or combination of such conditions which substantially impair or arrest the sound growth of incorporated cities, or constitutes an economic or social liability, or which endangers life or property by fire or other causes, or is conducive to ill health, transmission of disease, mortality, juvenile delinquency, or crime and by reason thereof, is detrimental to the public healthy, safety, morals or welfare.[52]

This broad definition gave city officials ample room to declare areas as "blighted," and such locations were often parts of the city owned or inhabited by people of color, much more so than their white counterparts. In many other cities that had already been visited by urban renewal, largely African American communities had been uprooted under the guise of "slum clearance." Eastside leaders did not want to see that pattern repeated in Oklahoma City.

Despite objections from some in the community, the city moved forward with urban renewal. The mayor's staff compiled a list of potential board members and sent those to the city

[51] "Minutes from the City Council Meeting, June 27, 1961," City of Oklahoma City Archives, 1109-1110.
[52] Ibid.

councilmen by the end of summer, with the intent of making appointments in a few months. This would first be attempted on October 24, 1961, with Mayor Norick presenting the council with a list of five appointees for the urban renewal authority.[53] To the mayor's frustration, not all the council members were in agreement, and the issue was tabled for a week. Councilman Harry Bell said that he and his fellow councilmen needed more time to consider the appointments, specifically commenting that "I don't appreciate getting this list just as I walked in. Some of these people I don't even know. It is unfair to expect us to vote on it." Norick countered by claiming that the names were all from the list of people he'd submitted for the council's consideration.[54] At the same time, the Eastside community again presented a petition that one of the authority members be African American – Norick's initial list of appointees were all white. In the end, the council voted to postpone the issue by a week, and in the meantime the mayor asked the city's legal department to investigate whether it was necessary for the council to approve the mayor's appointments at all.[55]

When the city government reconvened the following week on October 31 and the topic was revisited, again the mayor's appointments were blocked.[56] The local press provides little in the way of speculation as to why the council pushed back against the initial five names that Norick presented, and the council minutes themselves only provide vague clues. At the start of the discussion, Councilman Ware proposed that the mayor should come back with a new list of potential appointees for the council to consider. After this proposal, and after telling his fellow councilmen and the mayor that he represented the Oklahoma City Board of Realtors, who were

[53] "Norick Selections Criticized," *Daily Oklahoman*, October 25, 1961.
[54] Ibid.
[55] "Minutes from the City Council Meeting, October 24, 1961," City of Oklahoma City Archives, 1900.
[56] "Norick Choices for Authority Blocked Again," *Daily Oklahoman*, November 1, 1961.

disappointed both that the appointments had been held up and also in the names presented by the mayor, Councilman Gene Campbell made this plea to Norick: "Please do not make appointments on political basis. I urge you to appoint businessmen." The mayor retorted back to Campbell, "I assume you think these are political appointments of mine." Campbell replied that he did not think that, just that he did not want any of the appointments to the urban renewal board to be political, but instead business minded. Following this, a few councilmen attempted to propose alternative suggestions at the mayor's prompting – including Councilman Ware's suggestion that F.D. Moon be one of the appointees, but before that effort got off the ground, Councilman William Kessler made a motion to hold off indefinitely on the appointment of the authority members, which was approved by a 5-3 vote.[57] One can speculate from what little conversation was recorded by the city clerk that there was at least some concern that Mayor Norick had selected the five men on his original list based on some sort of political move, not keeping the city's best interest in mind. It is also important to note that this action does not appear to be unanimous, based on the vote to hold off on the appointments.

The drama over this five-member board would only continue in the coming days. On November 2, 1961, the council assembled for another regular meeting, this time with Mayor Norick out of town on business, and at least two other council members not in attendance. That day's edition of the *Daily Oklahoman* discussed speculation that the council would try to appoint an urban renewal board in the mayor's absence, something that several councilmen denied in the article.[58] Despite such denials, when the meeting began at 9 that morning under the direction of Vice Mayor William Kessler, this is exactly what happened. According to the official minutes of

[57] "Minutes from the City Council Meeting, October 31, 1961," City of Oklahoma City Archives, 1961-1962.
[58] "Move to Select Board Denied by Councilmen," *Daily Oklahoman*, November 2, 1961.

this meeting, Kessler submitted an alternative list of five men to be named to the board of the urban renewal authority. Most notably, Kessler's list included F.D. Moon, who had been proposed by local petition to be on the board to represent the African American community. Councilman Harry Bell motioned that the appointments be approved. Before ultimately being seconded by Councilman Ware, a short debate occurred, where Councilman Martin put on the record that he did not like how this business was being conducted, saying "I would like to say this in all fairness to you. I don't think it is proper or right for you as acting mayor to take advantage of the mayor since he is out of town. I think you are using bad judgement in taking advantage of a situation, and I think that it should be left to the mayor." The vice mayor countered by saying that Norick had already tried to get his list approved by the council twice and failed to gain majority support. Councilman Ware then stated that:

> Over 90 days ago I asked the mayor if we couldn't get together and come up with an urban renewal board because of the interest in it. We all recognized the need and at the time the mayor did not want to discuss it. He did not bring it up for discussion again until a week ago Tuesday when he presented five names of his own choosing. We asked him before the meeting not to present them, to give us an opportunity to get together and he refused to do it. We have no assurance that the mayor would initiate this program next Tuesday or any Tuesday after that. He hasn't indicated by his past action that he wants to cooperate with the council and that must be done.

Following debate, the council voted nearly unanimously to approve the vice mayor's list, with the exception that Councilman Martin voted in the affirmative for four of the five appointees.[59] These and a few other comments recorded in the council minutes indicate that some of this struggle was one of the councilmen opposing unilateral action by Mayor Norick, not necessarily the appointees themselves.

[59] "Minutes from the City Council Meeting, November 2, 1961," City of Oklahoma City Archives, 1969-1970.

When this meeting was reported in the *Daily Oklahoman* the following day, the paper seems to indicate that the actions of the council in the mayor's absence had legal standing, and that at this point the city finally had its five-member urban renewal authority board: C. Kenneth Woodard and Granville Tomerlin, both attorneys and both appointed to the three-year positions; Reuben Martin, a retired labor leader, and Joe C. Scott, an insurance executive, for the two-year positions; and finally F.D. Moon, the former principal of Frederick Douglass High School and a recognized leader in the Eastside community, for the one-year position. Now all that was needed for these board members to get to work would be a resolution from the city officially declaring certain areas in need of renewal.[60]

As the *Daily Oklahoman* quickly reported, city officials expected to begin designating areas of blight that would then be eligible for the urban renewal authority's action in early 1962. Experts on the concept from other areas even stated that Oklahoma City might be ahead of other communities who started on such a journey, since it had already initiated the identification process with federal grant money prior to setting up its renewal committee.[61] Indeed, by mid-January 1962, the Oklahoma City Urban Renewal Authority (OCURA) had met several times with the city planning commission to discuss this topic.

Throughout the rest of 1962, OCURA worked with the city planning commission, led by Paul Clowers, to review the city's existing comprehensive plan that had been adopted in 1949. By mid-summer, it appears that some on the renewal board were anxious for the city to already make a selection for renewal in order to free up federal funds for their operation – until such a designation was made, all expenses were coming out of pocket, to the frustration of some

[60] "Urban Board's Status Hinging on Council Act," *Daily Oklahoman,* November 3, 1961.
[61] "First Urban Renewal Projects Predicted for Early 1962," *Daily Oklahoman,* November 11, 1961.

members.[62] Despite this, the city council would not take official action of this nature until November, waiting on the results of a new survey that had started the previous year by the city planning commission. On November 6, the council unanimously adopted a resolution that designated four areas for renewal and instructed OCURA to "exercise its powers in the public interest to proceed with preparing renewal plans as provided under state and federal laws." In addition, the city government provided $2,000 to cover expenses for the renewal board until the federal funds were released.[63]

The four areas identified by the city planners and renewal board members were as follows: the University Medical Center (an area south of 13th street centered on what is now Lincoln Boulevard, south of the state capitol); the southern section of downtown; an area centered on the intersection of Reno and May Avenues; and finally the fourth "area" was actually a collection of seven "pockets" that were scattered across the city.[64] For the purposes of this work, we will be focusing primarily on the first two areas, as they became the primary focus of OCURA and the city's overall urban renewal story.

It is at this point that we transition the focus from the legal groundwork that took place to make these projects possible, to the actual planning of the process itself. The city's renewal board wasted little time in this effort, and by December 1962 had applied for nearly $240,000 in federal funds to begin the work on what they called the University Medical Center, south of the capitol complex on 23rd Street.[65] While this project would not end up as flashy as what would

[62] "Urban Renewal Project Boosted," *Daily Oklahoman*, July 28, 1962.
[63] "Minutes from the City Council Meeting, November 6, 1962," City of Oklahoma City Archives, 2180-4.
[64] "Renewal Planning Gest Green Light from Councilmen," *Daily Oklahoman*, November 7, 1962.
[65] "Wheels Turn on City's First Urban Project," *Daily Oklahoman*, December 8, 1962.

occur downtown, it is an important piece of OKC's urban renewal journey, in part because it would have a greater impact on the city's Eastside African American community in a manner that repeated itself in many cities that attempted renewal. Even as this first announcement about planning funding made its way into the press, there was concern about what would happen to the people living in this area, causing OCURA members to tell the *Daily Oklahoman* that "it is no slum area," and that the "value of the better kept property is being damaged by other property which is blighted." F. D. Moon, who became the renewal board's vice chairman, is quoted as saying that "as proposed…the project would not disturb many of the homes in the area," going on to call it a "conservation project," where "better kept property would be left alone," and that "only the really blighted property would be drastically changed."[66] People living in this newly designated area, which was primarily residential in nature, were understandably concerned that the city's new plans would end up displacing them.

By the start of 1963, officials in the city planning office were hopeful that plans for the medical center project could be ready by the fall, so that work could begin by the end of the year. What's more, they were also laying the groundwork to get started on the downtown renewal project as well.[67] On January 8, it was announced that OCURA and the planning office had applied for additional federal funds in the amount of almost $230,000 for the downtown project. It was confirmed at this time that one of the things that would be included downtown would be a new convention space.[68]

At the same time, the renewal board hired their first executive director, James T. Yielding, who would be one of the public faces of OKC's urban renewal projects in the early years.

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[66] "Wheels Turn on City's First Urban Project," *Daily Oklahoman,* December 8, 1962.
[67] "Urban Renewal Expected to Start by End of Year," *Daily Oklahoman*, January 6, 1963.
[68] "City Prepares Fund Request for Planning," *Daily Oklahoman*, January 8, 1963.

Yielding, a 43-year-old native of Alabama, would come to Oklahoma after nearly ten years of working on the urban renewal program in Cleveland, Ohio. According to OCURA Chairman Granville Tomerlin, OCURA was only able to hire Yielding after the recently established Urban Action Foundation (UAF) – an organization started by city boosters to help build up private support for OKC's renewal program – gave an advance of funds while the authority was still working on securing all of the necessary federal funding.[69] In the coming years, the UAF would play an important part in supporting the city's plans, especially when it came to building up public buy-in of the downtown renewal project. As we explore Oklahoma City's rehabilitation projects, it is important to know just how this group got started.

As early as 1956, key city businessmen such as Dean A. McGee, E.K. Gaylord, and Stanley Draper – among others – had been interested in bringing the urban renewal concept to Oklahoma City, traveling to Washington, D.C., to meet with Oklahoma Senator Robert S. Kerr and other members of the government to discuss just how to do so.[70] These men, all of whom belonged to the Chamber of Commerce, would continue to advocate for the rehabilitation of downtown and the medical center south of the capitol building, and it was largely their advocacy that convinced the city council to set up OCURA. When it became clear that normal government bureaucracy would slow the process, they banded together to form the UAF in 1962. Formally, their organization would not be chartered as a recognized legal entity until October of that year.[71] In reality, this group was a functioning outgrowth of the Chamber. The earliest reference to the group was found in a letter sent from Draper to McGee on April 18, 1962, a short note about

[69] "Urban Agency Head Chosen," *Daily Oklahoman*, January 16, 1963.
[70] Lackmeyer, *OKC Second Time Around*, 2.
[71] Urban Action Foundation Charter, October 3, 1962. RH-MS-537, Box 113, Folder 9, Papers of Dean A. McGee, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS.

some articles that former was sending to the latter to read discussing urban renewal.[72] In the summer of 1962, several members of the Foundation travelled to D.C. to meet again with Senator Kerr, and the meeting expenses – dinner at Sheraton Carlton Hotel in Washington – was paid for by OKC Chamber of Commerce.[73]

As Yielding settled into his new post in Oklahoma City and began to work with Tomerlin and Clowers, there was a change at city hall. As noted before, there was on going tension between Mayor Norick and what the press often referred to as "the majority faction" on the city council. In the 1963 mayoral campaign, this tug-of-war style resistance to those that backed Norick would coalesce into the Association for Responsible Government. This group was less aligned with any established political party than it was focused on having more control of city governance by the council and not by the mayor, and they proposed a "clean slate" of candidates to replace not only the sitting mayor, but also the entire council. When voters went to the polls that spring, they backed Norick's opponent, Jack S. Wilkes (1917-1969), with roughly 35,000 votes to Norick's 15,500. It was not a complete victory for the Association candidates, however, as they were unable to complete their "clean sweep," winning only half of the seats on the council, which would lead to a fair amount of deadlock at city council meetings.[74] This division ultimately drive Wilkes to resign in 1964, close to a year and one month after taking office.[75] To fill the vacancy, the city council appointed local attorney and historian George H. Shirk (1913-

[72] From Stanley Draper to Dean A. McGee, April 18, 1962, RH-MS-537, Box 113, Folder 9, Papers of Dean A. McGee, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS.
[73] Memoradum from Stanley Draper to Helene Longfellow and Glenn Faris and attached Voucher from the OKC Chamber of Commerce, June 18, 1962, RH-MS-537, Box 113, Folder 9, Papers of Dean A. McGee, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS.
[74] Moore and Moore, *Norick*, 93-99.
[75] "Jack S. Wilkes," City Clerk, City of Oklahoma City, accessed July 3, 2021, https://www.okc.gov/government/archives-records/oklahoma-city-history/previous-mayors/jack-s-wilkes.

1977) as acting mayor. Shirk would then go on to win election to a two-year term as mayor in 1965. It would be under his leadership that the most famous of the city's renewal plans would be presented and approved.[76]

Despite the change in leadership at city hall, the planning for urban renewal remained apace. The local press reported on multiple "forums" and "conferences" where outside experts on the topic came in and educated local businessmen and the average citizen alike on what to expect and what to watch out for, and how they could help support their community.[77] In May, the federal government approved a $206,000 grant for the city to start planning for the medical center project. Tomerlin told the *Daily Oklahoman* that OCURA had already found a firm based out of Fort Worth that would do the planning work and expected to have a final plan within six months.[78]

Despite this initial optimism that real work on the first of the city's urban renewal projects could be underway by the end of 1963, the reality of local bureaucracy slowed this pace, and by the Spring of 1964, OCURA still did not have city approval on any renewal plans. No work had been started on relocating families and removing dilapidated structures, let alone the construction of anything new. The primary hang-up at this point centered on OKC's current comprehensive plan – which constituted a binding document for the city government – had been adopted in the 1940s and contained no provision for urban renewal. Some felt that the entire document would need to be overhauled before the new projects could be formally approved (which was required

[76] "George H. Shirk," City Clerk, City of Oklahoma City, accessed July 3, 2021, https://www.okc.gov/government/archives-records/oklahoma-city-history/previous-mayors/george-h-shirk.
[77] Multiple articles, *Daily Oklahoman*, February-May, 1963.
[78] "City Medical Area Urban Renewal Study Grant Approved," *Daily Oklahoman*, May 15, 1963.

before the full federal funds could be released to get actual work on the ground started), while Tomerlin and Yielding proposed that the city just adopt a new chapter that would be added to the comprehensive plan, avoiding a larger rewrite.[79]

Unsurprisingly with the change again in leadership from Mayor Wilkes to Mayor Shirk, it took some time for the city to take the action needed. This did not stop the various planners and private city boosters in their renewal work. In June of 1964 OCURA announced the approval of a plan for the university medical center project, forwarding it on to the city planning commission for final approval. At the same time, the renewal board also approved of a contract with the UAF to fund work being done on the flashier downtown renewal project that was being designed by architect I. M. Pei.[80] With this done, the onus was now fully on the city council to approve the plans.

OCURA announced in July that the they would host a series of public hearings to review and discuss the university medical center plans, in addition to the proposals for downtown, with the first such event to be held on the evening of August 13.[81] Also in July, Granville Tomerlin and C. K. Woodard announced that they would not like to serve another term on the board, and would end their three year tenures on the 31.[82] They would be replaced by attorney C. Harold Thweatt and banker William H. Harrison at one of the first city council meetings in August.[83] Approximately 100 residents filled the city council chambers in the Municipal Building downtown on August 13 to ask questions and speak out both for and against the plans for the medical center project. So many had questions, in fact, that a second meeting would have to be

[79] "City Mater Plan Shortcut Studied," *Daily Oklahoman*, March 25, 1964.
[80] "City's Urban Renewal Plan Moves Ahead," *Daily Oklahoman*, June 21, 1964.
[81] "Urban Renewal Hearing Planned," *Daily Oklahoman*, July 10, 1964.
[82] "Urban Renewal Member Asks No New Term," *Daily Oklahoman*, July 24, 1964.
[83] "Library Board, Urban Renewal Posts Filled," *Daily Oklahoman*, August 5, 1964.

held, initially scheduled for the evening of August 27 (though later moved to September 8). The chief concern among the attendees was the question of what would happen to displaced residents, especially low-income citizens. Yielding told those assembled that there was public housing already in existence in the city that was available, and that middle income families would be eligible for subsidies to help them rent new homes. Some criticized this, saying that the city should include new public housing in the plan. Others were concerned on the impact this new project would have on small business owners in the area that would be displaced and may not be able to reestablish their shops.[84] Towards the end of August, local residents expressed concerns about the legality around the medical center plan, specifically with regards to the city zoning ordinances, which prompted the planning commission to slow their approval timeline to try and address these issues.[85] These zoning issues were ultimately cleared up, and the planning commission gave their approval for the university medical center on September 10, leaving it in the hands of the city council to make their final decision.[86] The second public hearing was moved again due to this issue, and would occur instead on the evening of October 5. Like the previous meeting in August, the crowd of citizens had so many questions that yet another meeting was promised, for October 12. It is very important to note that even at this planning stage, where no property had been purchased and no buildings bulldozed, there were very real concerns from the African American community about this forthcoming process. These concerns over the racial prejudice that often got built-in to urban renewal, issues we have since identified as common in many such programs as discussed in the introduction, were voiced at the meeting

[84] "100 Residents Attend Hearing on Renewal," *Daily Oklahoman*, August 14, 1964.
[85] "Planning Group Puts Off Final Renewal Action," *Daily Oklahoman*, August 28, 1964; See also, "Extension Asked on Renewal Plan," *Daily Oklahoman*, September 1, 1964.
[86] "Revised Renewal Program Clears City Planning Board," *Daily Oklahoman*, September 11, 1964.

that night. Some even pointed to Yielding's previous city of employment, Cleveland, Ohio, and called the program there a "national scandal." Concern and outright opposition also came from those who opposed the inclusion of a new highway, being called the "capitol expressway," which would tear through part of existing neighborhood (for reference, this roadway proposal is what is now the south end of Lincoln Boulevard, which at the time ended at 13th street, not the later-built I-235). Not all the voices heard that night were against the proposal, however. Statements were read from University of Oklahoma President Frank Lyons, along with the head of the state highway department and the Oklahoma City Board of Realtors. The dean of OU's School of Medicine, Dr. James L. Dennis, came to the meeting and spoke in favor of the project, saying that the current facilities "are landlocked and we may have to seek another location if needed expansion room as provided in the program does not come." The doctor also pointed out that, while the initial renewal program would be an inconvenience to some of the residents, it would ultimately be a boon to the area as a whole, providing livelihood and medical facilities.[87]

Mere days after this meeting, OCURA announced that the federal government had finally approved a grant of nearly $350,000 to cover the planning costs for OKC's downtown project. Part of these funds, it was announced by Yielding, would go to repay the UAF's advance that had been given in the summer to allow planning to start early. In addition to this grant, the renewal board also announced that the federal authorities were reviewing the approved plan for the university medical center and were holding $15 million in reserve for that project should it get approved.[88] This was a major hurdle for the renewal authority to get past, and would help keep up the pressure on the other city officials to make final approval on the plans.

[87] "First Urban Renewal Session Orderly," *Daily Oklahoman,* October 6, 1964.
[88] Federal Funds are Advanced for Downtown," *Daily Oklahoman,* October 9, 1964.

At the next public hearing on the medical center project, the most vocal opposition came from those concerned about the proposed expressway. Yielding and members of the city council all expressed that there was some room to negotiate on this planned roadway, hoping to find a solution that would be satisfactory for the city and the local residents, who had obtained legal council and were working to prevent this new highway in their neighborhood. Discussion between the OCURA's executive director and councilmembers on the way that land appraisals were being conducted in the renewal zone dominated the rest of the meeting. Yielding informed those at the meeting that, after initial appraisals completed for the planning and budget purposes of the project, that a second outside appraisal would be done, and federal reviewers would settle on a figure based on these two appraisals, and if a particular property owner was not satisfied with that number, the could have their own appraisal done and challenge the official appraisal before a jury.[89] It is also important to note that this meeting had far fewer attendees than the meeting on October 5, where nearly 250 people packed into the council chambers, indicating that concern over the project as a whole may have been diminishing.

Then, just as it seemed as if the city could soon greenlight the university medical center project, a new snag appeared. Part of the project plan called for a slight expansion of school land in the renewal zone, which would require the Oklahoma City School District to purchase about thirteen acres of land at cost of about $130,000. This would help fill some requirements from the federal urban renewal office and secure national support for OKC's program. Unfortunately for Yielding and the rest of OCURA, the city's school officials initially balked at such an expense and would not agree to the plan, stalling final approval of the medical center project.[90] The

[89] "Residents Protest Expressway Route," *Daily Oklahoman*, October 13, 1964.
[90] "School Board Cold to Renewal Deal," *Daily Oklahoman*, December 2, 1964.

school board took their time to study the proposal – nearly six months, in fact – before they would ultimately give their assent in a 4-1 vote on May 10.[91]

A month later, the city planning commission gave approval of the medical center plan, and preliminary work could finally begin.[92] That same month, the city council would approve the creation of a public housing authority, which would supervise the relocation of low-income residents within the various renewal zones, a step that OCURA had been asking the city to do for some time.[93] By the fall, the renewal board began hiring new staff members to help with the relocation process, and contacting residents about when they would need to move.[94]

The city would have a special ceremony in February 1966 to mark the beginning of the university medical center project. On Saturday, February 12, Mayor Shirk, Senator Fred Harris, Yielding, and other officials from the city and OCURA gathered at a site in the renewal zone to give the first family displaced by urban renewal – Mrs. Emma Fullbright and her four children – the keys to their new home.[95] This ceremony would come under increasing criticism later on and will be discussed further in Chapter 5. At this point, the city's attention, both from the government and the press, shifted to the renewal project for the central business district. Early planning and discussions had been on-going since late 1964 and into 1965, but now had the city's full attention.

[91] "Land Purchased by School board," *Daily Oklahoman,* May 11, 1965.
[92] "Group to View Urban Project," *Daily Oklahoman,* June 4, 1965.
[93] "Officials Ready to Launch City Housing Board," *Daily Oklahoman,* June 19, 1965.
[94] "Urban Renewal Has 38 Job Openings," *Daily Oklahoman,* October 12, 1965.
[95] "Renewal Project Blastoff Saturday," *Daily Oklahoman*, February 9, 1966.

Chapter 3 – The Pei Plan

On Friday, December 11, 1964, many of Oklahoma City's movers and shakers gathered downtown at the Skirvin, one of the community's finest hotels, for the weekly luncheon of the Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce. But this was no ordinary weekly meeting. Those gathered were shown the future. The OKC of 1989 was displayed before them on color slides and even more vividly in a scale model, showing the businessmen, politicians, and reporters present the plan that would make their city "one of the most beautiful cities of the western hemisphere." Those were the words of I. M. Pei as he walked the local leaders through his plans to completely remake the southern half of downtown into a modern city.[96]

As alluded to in the previous chapter, Pei's involvement in Oklahoma City's urban renewal story was not the result of some forward-thinking city official, nor was the famous architect drawn in on his own. Pei took on this project due to the forethought of the Urban Action Foundation, an organization made up of private businessmen who wanted to help steer this new era of building and redesign in their city. With the relatively slow bureaucratic speed that it took to get funds to allow for planning, and with the city government focused on the university medical center as its first renewal project, UAF stepped in and footed the bill to allow for planning to commence on the downtown project simultaneously – to be paid back once federal grant money was secured.[97] This project would become the public face of urban renewal for Oklahoma City. It was the grand, glitzy undertaking that attracted attention, overshadowing the university medical center and the other zones that OCURA had identified for renewal. So, what exactly did the "Pei Plan" call for, and how did it go from a privately sponsored idea into official planning material for OKC? This chapter will explore how the businessmen behind the

[96] "$31 Million For Face-Lift?" *Daily Oklahoman*, December 12, 1964.
[97] "City's Urban Renewal Plan Moves Ahead," *Daily Oklahoman*, June 21, 1964.

UAF were able to get I.M. Pei to design the Oklahoma City of the future, and also explain just what that city of tomorrow was supposed to entail, according to the so-called "Pei Plan" (also referred to in the press and official documents as the General Neighborhood Renewal Plan, or Project 1-A).

While the government of OKC worked to set up the official framework to allow for urban renewal, the businessmen behind UAF (who were, not surprisingly, also members of the Chamber of Commerce) were already at work advocating for a renewal project for the central business district. While the city government put together the OCURA board and slowly put together the other legal pieces they needed, such as the housing code and completing the initial neighborhood survey to find out what areas needed a renewal plan, these men were already trying to come up with a plan for downtown that they could present to the city whole cloth. The first mention of Pei in the local press occurred on January 9, 1964, when the *Daily Oklahoman* mentioned that six men from I.M. Pei Associates were in town from New York to view the city firsthand as part of their contract with Urban Action. Said contract had been approved in August 1963, while the city government had just secured grant money to start work on plans for the university medical center project.[98] Despite not appearing in the state's paper of record until 1964, it appears that this architect had snagged the attention of UAF members as early as December 1962, where a series of memos and letters between Stanley Draper, Dean A. McGee, and other members discuss Pei as "an architect of world renown," and that the staff at I.M. Pei

[98] "Planning Team Visits Theater," *Daily Oklahoman,* January 9, 1964.

and associates were "highly skilled and sufficiently large to handle" the work that the foundation hoped to accomplish in OKC.[99]

Although having visited the city before, Pei's first official visit to OKC in conjunction with the urban renewal project happened on April 2, 1964, when he conducted a walking tour of downtown. In an interview printed the following day, the architect gave the first glimpses of what his ideas were for Oklahoma City's renewal project. He told those with him that the downtown was too big – meaning too spread out, elaborating further that "the city must contract before it can expand. Like a muscle it must strengthen by zones of concentration." Even at this early stage, Pei's vision was pedestrian centered. He wanted to create several livable spaces linked together, not just provide cosmetic upgrades here and there. He also hinted at what would become a major part of the final plan, the creation of several "superblocks" that would be home to some of the plan's key features.[100]

By the time that I.M. Pei and his architecture firm became regular names in the local press, citizens of Oklahoma City were already aware of several key items that those at city hall – and at the chamber of commerce offices – wanted to include in any final downtown renewal plan. Chief among them was a new convention center. In a report prepared by its Committee on Policies and Projects, the Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce pointed out this need at the end of 1961. This document called for a "large, multi-purpose assembly center or arena…which could accommodate 12,000 to 20,000 people." The committee members further pointed out that the city's current convention space – the Civic Center, located at 201 N. Walker Avenue, across

[99] "Memo from Robert Burke Jones to Stanley Draper," December 26, 1962; See also, "Memo from Stanley Draper to Dean A. McGee, December 27, 1962, RH-MS-537, Box 113, Folder 9, Papers of Dean A. McGee, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS.
[100] "City's Too Big, Says Urban Planner," *Daily Oklahoman*, April 3, 1964.

from the Municipal Building – could only hold 6,000 attendees. The report goes on to say that the project would pay for itself not only through the money collected in rent, but also in the tax money paid by visitors who came to the facility and used other businesses in the city on their visit.[101]

After the convention center, the next big project that started to be floated was the creation of a new downtown park. The *Daily Oklahoman* first mentioned this idea in August of 1962 – the same article included the first mention of the Urban Action Foundation, several months before the group was formally incorporated with the state government. The early vision for this park was not of some simple green space in the urban center, but rather a large area that would be both relaxing and an area of entertainment. UAF members envisioned an Oklahoma version of the famous Tivoli Gardens in Copenhagen, Denmark. This European pleasure garden, established in 1843, contained at least twenty-three restaurants and eighty other "eating and amusement places" in 1963, along with a concert hall, dance halls, a lake, bandstands, places for picnics, and "fountains, trees and flowers in abundance everywhere." The park in central Copenhagen attracted an estimated four million people a year in the 1960s.[102] The paper also reported at that time that several key board members of Urban Action were heading to Europe to see this park firsthand, to bring back more ideas for OKC. This included Dean McGee, the UAF chairman, along with Stanley Draper and E. L. Gaylord, all major business players in the city.[103]

[101] Report of the Committee on Policies and Projects for 1962, Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce, November 16, 1961, OKC Chamber of Commerce Archives, Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City, OK.
[102] Program for Oklahoma Tivoli Gardens Competition, Sponsored by Urban Action Foundation of Oklahoma City, Inc., February 5, 1963, OKC Chamber of Commerce Archives, Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City, OK.
[103] "Downtown Park Area Proposed," *Daily Oklahoman,* August 17, 1962.

For the next year, one of the key projects of the UAF and its members was the plan for this proposed park, and the connection to its Danish inspiration was very blatant.

On February 5, 1963, the Urban Action Foundation announced to the chamber of commerce a design competition for an "Oklahoma Tivoli Gardens" to drum up enthusiasm for the concept as a whole – even though the site they designated in the competition, a 29.4 acre plot bounded on the north by California Avenue and the south by the I-40 crosstown expressway, Robinson Avenue on the east, and Walker Avenue on the west, was not part of any official plan from OCURA. The competition would be open to any junior, senior, or graduate student in landscape architecture, and offered a trip to Copenhagen as a first place prize (with $300 for second place, and $100 for third, fourth, and fifth place). The competition had the following requirements:

1. A suitable wall, fence or other device which will permit entry only at key points, with entry points clearly designated.
2. Where any restaurant, theater or other facility is to be accessible both from within and outside the gardens there will be a method of controlled admission into the gardens.
3. A minimum of 800 parking spaces provided for on the site. Area and method of parking is left to the designer.
4. Service entry to permit access by truck and vehicles for delivery and maintenance is to be provided.
5. Provisions should be made for: restaurants; picnic-type eating areas; a place or places for out-of-doors shows, presentations, displays; facilities for indoor concerts, plays; a place specifically for children; a provision for midway-type concessions; specific garden areas for visual enjoyment, rest, and quiet.

6. The designs may include any other ideas for boating, skating, fountains, lighting, souvenir booths, etc., as the imagination or discretion of the designer may develop.[104]

In April, the competition concluded, and the UAF and Chamber had a big to-do to mark the occasion. Hennig Soager, the managing director of the Tivoli Gardens – who had been named one of four judges for the competition – visited Oklahoma City with his wife, and the local movers and shakers planned several major events in their honor. These included a "Scandinavian Ball," hosted by the Urban Action Foundation and OKC's Scandinavian Club at the city's famous Biltmore Hotel (then known as the Sheraton-Oklahoma Hotel) on Wednesday, April 3rd, and a dinner given at the Beacon Club on Friday, April 5th.[105] On Thursday, April 4th, the Chamber of Commerce hosted Mr. Sanger at their meeting at the Skirvin Hotel, where he and Dean McGee gave a report about the original Tivoli Gardens in Copenhagen and also the status of the competition: 150 different submissions from 17 different schools had been received. It is also worth noting that I.M. Pei was in attendance at this meeting, something that does not appear in the press reports the next day and seems to indicate that the leaders of the Urban Action Foundation – and by extension, the Chamber of Commerce – were at least in informal talks with the man whose name would soon become synonymous with OKC's urban renewal project months before any sort of formal agreement was set up.[106] The judges selected the design of North Carolina University Student Kenneth Sangster for first place, with his design described as having a "very strong central garden surrounded by a promenade and adjacent to a sizeable open

[104] Program for Oklahoma Tivoli Gardens Competition, February 5, 1963, OKC Chamber of Commerce Archives.
[105] "Soagers to be Feted," *Daily Oklahoman*, April 2, 1963.
[106] Minutes of Meeting: Board of Directors, Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce, April 4, 1963, OKC Chamber of Commerce Archives, Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City, OK.

parking area, [along with a] strong entrance from the central business district."[107] Sangster's design would be lost to history, but it and the larger competition as a whole helped to cement the idea of a downtown pleasure garden as one of the key things that Oklahoma Cityans wanted as part of any downtown renewal work.

The last of the big projects being discussed before the Pei Plan would finally be revealed was the building of a new home for Mummers Theater, a local institution first started in 1949 out of an old circus tent that had become a popular venue in need of a permanent home by the 1960s.[108] The theater's management received a grant from the Ford Foundation in October 1962 in the amount of $1.2 million, $700,000 of which was specifically earmarked for construction of a new theater (with the understanding that the theater's board of trustees would be responsible for raising a matching amount from local sources), with the remainder to be set aside for the development of the theater's organization over a 10 year period. This initial grant called for construction bids to be received by August 1963, so that the new theater might be available, if all went well, by the 1964-1965 season.[109] By early spring 1963, community leaders organized to raise the matching funds so that the new theater could be built, with key local businessmen such as Jack Durland, president of Cain's Coffee Co., Vernon Beals, president of Beals Advertsising Agency, Harvey P. Everest, president of Liberty National Bank and Trust Co., Horace G. Rhodes, president of United Founders Life Insurance Co., and John W. Nichols, president of Mid-America Minerals, Inc. announced as part of a committee to lead a fundraising drive that

[107] "Winner Selected for Tivoli Design," *Daily Oklahoman*, April 6, 1963.
[108] Steve Lackmeyer, "Mummers Collection: Background," Retro Metro Oklahoma City, accessed July 22, 2021, https://www.retrometrookc.org/collections/mummers-collection/.
[109] Ford Foundation to E. C. Smith, October 4, 1962, OKC Chamber of Commerce Archives, Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City, OK.

would occur between March 18 and March 22.[110] Just before the start of the fundraising effort, Durland addressed the OKC Chamber of Commerce to drum up support, telling those gathered in the Balinese Room of the Skirvin Hotel for the weekly Chamber meeting on March 14, 1963 that "this was the first time in the history of Oklahoma City that we have had private industry from *outside* the city pledge 62% of the total amount." He also quoted E. K. Gaylord, the owner of the publishing company that owned the *Daily Oklahoman*, who told Durland that "this campaign *must* be a success in Oklahoma City." At the end of his presentation, he held up a check he'd already received from a local couple for $1000 that would buy two seats in the new theater with a plaque with their names on it.[111] This was not the only early donation the organizers received, either. A few days before, the local press reported that "an Oklahoma City civic and business leader who said he wished to remain anonymous" had donated $50,000 to help spur on the campaign.[112] On Monday, March 25, the businessmen leading the fundraising push announced that they had raised $651,954, and that they would be extending the drive to Friday, March 29 to try and reach the final goal.[113] That Friday at noon, Durland reported to the businessmen of the Chamber that the fundraising drive had collected $714,864. "The goal will be reached," he told those assembled, "We have and we know we have enough commitments to put this campaign over the top." Durland indicated that several businesses had made it known to him that they would contribute further to the campaign if the full amount had not been reached during the regular period.[114] By June, the remainder of the funds had been pledged, and the theater board of

[110] "Key Chairmen Chosen for Mummers Fund Drive," *Daily Oklahoman*, March 7, 1963.
[111] Minutes of Meeting: Board of Directors, Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce, March 14, 1963, OKC Chamber of Commerce Archives, Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City, OK.
[112] "Mummers Get Gift of $50,000," *Daily Oklahoman*, March 10, 1963.
[113] "Mummers Drive Extended," *Daily Oklahoman*, March 26, 1963.
[114] "Money Drive for Mummers Comes to End," *Daily Oklahoman*, March 30, 1963.

directors were beginning to consider locations and designs. A downtown location was considered a must, and it was generally agreed upon that the new theater should have a 600-seat main auditorium, and a 200-seat smaller theater for more intimate or experimental productions.[115] The members of the Chamber and the Urban Action Foundation obviously agreed with this concept. In addition to the support they showed for the fundraising drive, the UAF incorporated the possibility of having the Mummers Theater downtown when they put together their design competition for the Trivoli Gardens project, saying, "The Mummers Theater in Oklahoma City has been given a grant by the Ford Foundation to assist in the building of a new professional theater. Consideration has been given to the possibility of locating this new theater either in or in conjunction with the proposed Oklahoma Tivoli Gardens."[116] By 1964, it was clear that, even though there was not one single master plan for the downtown, leading citizens of Oklahoma City had a working idea of what they wanted to see done to their city center.

When I.M. Pei stood before the mayor, city councilmen, the chamber of commerce members, and the press at that Friday afternoon luncheon in December 1964, the plan he presented included all three of these elements that the city had been discussing for years. But it involved so much more than these three wish-list items. Pei's vision called for the reworking of several of the downtown streets and the creation of what he called "super blocks," where smaller city blocks would be combined by the closure of roads to allow for the placement of larger development projects. One of these projects was a large, two million square foot shopping mall (twice as big as anything else in the greater Oklahoma City metro area at the time), which would have built-in parking for at least five thousand cars. Another key to this plan was the creation of

[115] "Scism Explores Theater Designs," *Daily Oklahoman*, June 8, 1963.
[116] Program for Oklahoma Tivoli Gardens Competition, February 5, 1963, OKC Chamber of Commerce Archives.

a substantial residential area for downtown. According to Pei, "any exciting city…must have a downtown living community. It does not mean all of you have to live downtown, but a large group of people – not a large percentage, [but] a large group of people should find it possible and attractive to relocate downtown." If we look at the formal report that I.M. Pei & Associates prepared and submitted to the chamber and the city, we can see in greater detail what the designers back in New York had created.[117]

The official planning documents presented to city leaders broke the Pei Plan down into four "projects" based on timing priority: 1) Project Kicker, 2) Project Boomertown, 3) Project Federal Square, and 4) Project Westside Industrial. According to the report, Project Kicker was "the all-important first action project represent[ing] a giant step forward in the revitalization of downtown Oklahoma City. The changes called for in downtown are almost as dramatic as the events on that single day in April 1889, when Oklahoma City was created. Therefore, it has been subtitled Project "Kicker" in reference to the early political history of Oklahoma City, when the first major political parties were named the Seminoles and the Kickapoos. Members of the latter party were nicknamed the "Kickers" due to their general dissatisfaction with local affairs and conditions." It was also noted that "kicker" made a close connotation with "kick-off," appropriate since this project would do just that for OKC's downtown urban renewal.[118]

Project Kicker was indeed ambitious, covering some 241 acres in the heart of downtown, nearly half of which would be recommended for "acquisition, clearance, and redevelopment."

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[117] Transcript of presentation by I. M. Pei: Redevelopment Plan for the Central Business District, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, December 11, 1964, Oklahoma City Urban Renewal Authority Archives, Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City, OK.

[118] *A Report on the Central Business District – General Neighborhood Renewal Plan, Oklahoma* City, Oklahoma, Prepared for the Oklahoma City Urban Renewal Authority by: I.M. Pei & Associates, Architects and Planners, December 10, 1964. Oklahoma City Urban Renewal Authority Archives, Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City, OK.

The core items for this project included the location of the new convention center, the so-called Oklahoma Tivoli Gardens – which would also incorporate the Mummers Theater, and what would become known as the Galleria: "an entirely new major retail core with built-in parking facilities." In other words, all of the pre-Pei ideas about downtown renewal that local leaders had been discussing over the past few years would be in this first focus of the Pei Plan. In addition, there would be some residential areas included (though the bulk of Pei's vision of a substantial downtown community would come in the second project), additions to existing hotels and the space for a new hotel, new office buildings, parking facilities, public plaza spaces, and small areas set aside for light industry or specialized retail.[119]

It is quite clear from the report's wording that the very heart of the entire Pei Plan (let alone Project Kicker) was the proposed Galleria:

> The single most revolutionary concept proposed in the whole plan is the scheme for the major retail core stretching four blocks along Main Street from Broadway to Walker Streets. The proposal for this area calls for almost total clearance of the six blocks involved. They are to be replaced with a unified, all-weather, modern shopping complex with self-contained parking and servicing facilities. This is a serious, difficult and time-consuming proposal, one that has not been made lightly. However, due to the present obsolete and deteriorated facilities, numerous parcels of land ownership and generally inadequate merchandising conditions, it is firmly believed that anything short of this approach is doomed to failure. These new facilities, taken together with the other attractions proposed, will ensure that the downtown core area will retain its absolute supremacy as Oklahoma City's center for high style goods and specialty items, and as the most varied source of retail merchandising. This should become the one place in the Oklahoma City metropolitan area where shopping can be combined with business, gracious dining, entertainment, family recreation, employment, as well as being a state-wide center and an attraction for out-ot-state visitors due to its central location and easy accessibility through the highway, rail and air transportation network system, both existing and propose.[120]

[119] *A Report on the Central Business District*, December 10, 1964. Oklahoma City Urban Renewal Authority Archives.
[120] Ibid., 5.

It is critical that Pei's view regarding the Galleria proposal is highlighted at the outset. The planner is clear that his vision for the new downtown Oklahoma City was one that had a thriving community of people that lived, worked, and played in that district. To achieve that, the shopping center would be crucial.

This grand new retail palace would be two six-story tall buildings, with the first three floors designated for retail space, with the upper levels to serve as parking. In addition, two department stores would be located on the north side of the complex, two new movie theaters would also be incorporated in the design, and a pedestrian bridge that would cross over Sheridan Avenue and link the entire complex to the Tivoli Gardens.[121] Clearly, Pei and his fellow designers felt that a large part of the ultimate success or failure of OKC's renewal efforts would ride on the creation of this new, modern approach to retail, a fact that will be important as we review the ultimate successes and failures of the implementation of this plan in Chapter 5. The Galleria also highlights a core tenant of Pei's overall planning philosophy for this project, to increase activity and business in the area while also opening it up with more green space and plazas by "regrouping buildings [and] intensifying development in the third dimension" - meaning to build up, not out.[122]

The next major area of focus was the office core, centered on Park Avenue, which would be directly north of and tie into the Galleria development centered on Main Street. A signature part of this "office district" would be the planned construction of a thirty-three-story office tower proposed for the northeast corner of the intersection of Broadway and Main Street and would

[121] *A Report on the Central Business District*, December 10, 1964. Oklahoma City Urban Renewal Authority Archives,14-15.
[122] Transcript of I.M Pei Presentation at the Skirvin, December 11, 1964, Oklahoma City Urban Renewal Authority Archives, Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City, OK.

include 350,000 square feet of "first-class office space for both large and small space users." The report predicted that this proposed tower would "become the prestige office location for the entire metropolitan area." This tower would have an open plaza at its base that would tie into the existing Skirvin Hotel and would serve as a "visual terminus" for the east end of Park Avenue. The plan also called for a large building to be located at Harvey and Park, to serve as the west end of the office row and the northern terminus of the proposed Galleria development. Four other twelve-story office buildings were called for along Park Avenue between Robinson and Harvey, and the street itself was to be narrowed, with wider sidewalks. The effect would be to create a walkable pedestrian zone, where high-end retail shops and fine-dining restaurants could be located on the ground floor of these new buildings. This high-end area could then be tied into the general retail shopping of the Galleria.[123]

The third major focus of the report's Project Kicker was the Tivoli Gardens concept, which Pei's people credit as an existing concept that they were only giving a concrete location and vision to. The Pei Plan version of the Tivoli Gardens would be bounded to the north by Sheridan Avenue, and to the south by Reno Avenue (subsuming California Avenue entirely) and stretching west from Robinson Avenue all the way to Lee Avenue, encompassing thirty acres. Walker and Hudson Avenues would cut through the park north to south, but underpasses would allow park visitors to walk uninterrupted through the entire complex. Earthen berm walls would surround much of the development, along with most of the space sunken about twelve feet below street level, creating the impression of "being contained within a special space." The property would contain "a linking system of lakes and islands [occupying] the central portions [that would

[123] *A Report on the Central Business District,* December 10, 1964. Oklahoma City Urban Renewal Authority Archives, 7-8.

afford] opportunities for boating and canoeing as well as for scenic delights. Suitable shops, restaurants, night clubs, exhibits, amusements, and the like [could] be built into the berms in an interesting manner. Active recreation areas in the form of an indoor-outdoor swimming pavilion, tennis courts with viewing stands and playing fields [were] also provided. Rides, educational exhibits or a "zoolet" [could] be provided in an area of special interest to children in a "Children's World." Bandstands, dance pavilions, sculpture and fountains [would] be available for everyone's enjoyment." The Pei Plan vision for the Tivoli park also coordinated with the Mummers Theater project, situating the proposed new theater on the south side of Sheridan between Walker and Hudson, within the bounds of the park. Planners also suggested that the city art museum – at that time located not in the downtown core but instead at the state fairgrounds a few miles to the west – could be relocated to the west end of the park, along with the proposed softball hall of fame.[124]

This sprawling park, according to this new master plan, would tie in with the proposed location of the new convention center, which would be east of Robinson, bounded between Sheridan and Reno, taking up four city blocks (California Avenue would be subsumed here as well). The report in fact refers to the Tivoli Gardens as a sort of "front yard" for the convention center. The location of this building differed from early iterations that had been circulating around government and business circles prior to Pei's involvement of the plan, but the report lays out that its location would tie in well with the existing and planned interstate highway infrastructure in downtown, along with the locations of existing and proposed "Class A" hotels (of the hotels located downtown, only three were considered to fall into this category: the

[124] *A Report on the Central Business District,* December 10, 1964. Oklahoma City Urban Renewal Authority Archives, 9.

Skirvin, the Hutchins, and the Biltmore/Sheraton-Oklahoma). According to the report, "the Convention Center will be a giant step forward for the vitality of the downtown. Its facilities will be large enough for the largest convention needs, and the secondary services required to complement it are expected to be additional elements in the downtown rebuilding program."[125]

Project Kicker also included plans for new public plazas downtown. The primary new public spaces would be a plaza in front of the Municipal Building, dubbed the Civic Center Plaza, and a plaza in front of the new convention center – which the report refers to as a "front porch" for the new building. The Civic Center Plaza would be on the west side of Hudson Avenue, bounded by Robert S. Kerr Avenue to the north, and Main Street to the south. The convention center plaza would be on the east side of Robinson Avenue, between Sheridan and Reno Avenues. This plaza would be more of a narrow strip to serve as the focal entry point for the convention center and would also have a drop-off lane for convention visitors. The designers also discussed having "a colorful row of 13 historically meaningful flags" on tall flag poles lining the east side of Robinson Avenue. Pei's planners saw these two plazas as gateways into the north and south sides of downtown.[126]

Less glamorous but critical to the new development that Pei and Associates envisioned for OKC would be the creation of nearly 15,000 new parking spaces to serve all the new venues and attractions that Project Kicker would include. None of the new parking would be street parking or in open lots, but rather multi-level structures, nearly half of which would be public, the other half built for private businesses. Specifically, the Pei Plan would call for parking underneath the Crosstown Expressway structure, two-level parking decks from Lee to Robinson

[125] *A Report on the Central Business District*, December 10, 1964. Oklahoma City Urban Renewal Authority Archives, 10.
[126] Ibid., 11-12.

Avenues fronting the Tivoli Gardens project along Reno Avenue, a large structure directly south of the new convention center capable of holding over 3,000 cars, and finally a parking structure underneath the Civic Center Plaza capable of holding up to 1,000 cars. The remainder of the increased parking volume would come from private garages that would be built to accommodate the new office buildings and hotels within the development area.[127]

In general, Project Kicker can be considered the "short-term" focus of OKC's urban renewal efforts. It contained all the key projects that city boosters and officials had been focused on in the years leading up to Pei's involvement. These big-ticket items would all look good from a promotional stand-point – and indeed, the glossy pamphlets produced by the Chamber to drum up support for the plan show many of these new features in striking color and show a city of the future that the public would clamor for. Once the plan was approved by the city government, the items in Project Kicker would be the primary downtown focus of OCURA for years.

The next stage of Pei's vision for Oklahoma City would be "Project Boomertown," a name that played off the historical monikers of the Sooners and Boomers. Whereas Project Kicker focused on the commercial development of downtown, Boomertown's focus was on creating a permanent downtown community. Pei projected that this project could create a sustainable community of Oklahoma Cityans that would live, work, and play downtown. This second phase of the Pei Plan would encompass a smaller area than Project Kicker, some 93.5 acres, most of which would be recommended for clearance and redevelopment in order to make way for the creation of 2,400 new dwelling units.[128] The residential developments proposed in this phase fall into three categories: town houses, low-rise apartments, and tower apartments. The

[127] *A Report on the Central Business District*, December 10, 1964. Oklahoma City Urban Renewal Authority Archives, 12-13.
[128] Ibid., 22.

town houses were conceived of being two-story structures, a scale the designers believed would encourage single-family living. The would be clustered in a way that would form small courtyards for each of the six proposed clusters, in addition to creating a larger open space for all the clusters to enjoy communally. [129] The low-rise apartments would primarily by six-story structures of varying density and lengths depending on their specific locations in the city.[130] The tower apartments would all be thirty-stories tall. Like the town houses, the towers would be built in clusters (two clusters, each with three towers).[131]

The town houses would be built on a new super block bounded to the north by Fifth Street, to the south by Robert S. Kerr Avenue, to the east by Walker Avenue, and to the west by Shartel Avenue. Fourth Street, Lee Avenue, and Dewey Avenue would all be vacated within the bounds of this new block. This development would sit on nearly twenty-six acres. These six clusters would contain 217 proposed dwelling units for families to buy. The clusters would all be situated around the edges of the super block, leaving space in the center for a large commons area that would have space for a swimming pool, tennis courts, a playground, and possibly a nursery school (the report notes that a facility here could be built for a K-2 or K-3 school, and that higher grades could be handled by existing schools nearby outside of the downtown proper). Off street surface parking would be provided within this complex, at the rate of 1.25 cars per dwelling (approximately 270 spaces).[132]

The low-rise apartment buildings would be erected in several different locations within the bounds of Project Boomertown. One building would be built along Robert S. Kerr Avenue,

[129] *A Report on the Central Business District*, December 10, 1964. Oklahoma City Urban Renewal Authority Archives, 25-26.
[130] Ibid., 12, 26.
[131] Ibid., 26.
[132] Ibid., 22-23.

stretching between Shartel Avenue and Walker Avenue. The building would contain 368 dwelling units, and space for stores on an arcaded ground floor would be provided. Off-street, below ground parking would be created at the same ratio as that of the town houses. A similar building would be built on Main Street, being about the same size but off-set farther to the east, so that the eastern end of the building would maek a bridge over Walker Avenue. These two buildings also served an aesthetic purpose, acting as walls to clearly define the Civic Center district that would be sandwiched between them. A third, smaller building would be built facing Shartel Avenue, bounded to the north by Main Street, to the south by Sheridan Avenue, and to the west by the location of Lee Avenue (which would be vacated as part of creating a larger block that would stretch to Dewey Avenue). This building would contain 118 dwelling units and also have underground parking at the same rate as the other downtown low-rise apartment buildings.[133]

Finally, there are the two clusters of thirty-story apartment towers, one to be located at the northwest corner of Robert S. Kerr and Walker Avenues (the same block containing the town houses), and the other to be built on the new block with the smaller of the six-story low-rise apartment building, facing Dewey Avenue and bounded on the north by Main Street and the south by Sheridan Avenue. These two complexes, six towers in total, were designed to act as a visual counterpoint and echo of the tall office towers on the east side of downtown. Each tower was designed to hold 180 dwelling units (for a total of 1,080 between the two complexes), and would have below-ground parking for 675 cars at each site. The ground floor of each tower would have space for retail operations, and it was suggested that the top floors of some or all of

[133] *A Report on the Central Business District,* December 10, 1964. Oklahoma City Urban Renewal Authority Archives, 23.

the towers could be converted to house restaurants or dinner clubs, taking advantage of the views from the thirtieth floor. In addition, both complexes would be surrounded by decently landscaped parkland.[134]

Although the bulk of Project Boomertown focused on building residences, commerce was not left out. Along with the retail space provided for on the ground floors of all the apartment buildings, a dedicated retail facility of approximately 62,000 square feet was to be built just north of the town house developments, between Fifth and Sixth Streets and between Shartel and Walker Avenues. This complex was not designed to compete with the more specialty retail and entertainment shops in the Galleria project, but instead would serve the day-to-day needs of the downtown residents, providing spaces for "supermarkets, bakeries, cleaners, drug stores, butchers, doctors, dentists, cobblers and so forth."[135]

No exact estimate was ever given in the report about how many people Project Boomertown expected to have living downtown once completed. However, it is not hard for us to come up with some conservative estimates. If we assume that all of the town houses and half of the apartment stock would be occupied by the idealized "nuclear family" of two parents, two children, and the other half of the apartment stock occupied by married couples without children, we come up with the following numbers: 868 people in the town houses, 2,562 people in the three low-rise apartment buildings, and 3,240 people in the six tower apartment buildings, for a total of 6,670. By this conservative estimate, Pei's proposal would have created a decent-sized small town within the confines of Oklahoma City's core. In the architect's plan, many of these citizens would have worked in the downtown offices or shops the proposal hoped to create. They

[134] *A Report on the Central Business District*, December 10, 1964. Oklahoma City Urban Renewal Authority Archives, 23-24.
[135] Ibid., 24.

would have dined at the restaurants in the Galleria or the Gardens, and would have gone for leisurely walks in the parks and watched productions at the new Mummer's theater. Pei wanted to create "a 24 hour community" in OKC's downtown in order to truly revitalize the area.

The third phase of the Pei Plan was the "Federal Square" Project, which, as the name suggests, centered on the expansion of downtown facilities of various U.S. government agencies that would be centered on a new public park. This project would encompass nearly sixty acres, less than half of which was earmarked to be cleared and redeveloped. Two residential developments were incorporated into this area's plan, including the already under-construction "Oklahoma Continental" tower, a twenty-two-story building going up on the northeast corner of Fifth Street and Hudson Avenue (today known as the Regency Apartments), and also a 200-unit apartment building proposed by the First Methodist Church for their members that would be built next to their existing church building located at the northeast corner of Fourth Street and Robinson Avenue. Four new private office buildings were proposed in the area, along with a proposed new headquarters for the Roman Catholic Diocese next to St. Joseph's Church, along with an attached parochial school.[136]

The centerpiece of this third phase of the plan, however, would be the 2.7 acre "Federal Square" park to be situated between Fourth and Fifth Streets and between Robinson and Harvey Avenues. This park, with its "pleasant greens, fountains and shade trees," would become, according to the report for Pei and Associates, "a quiet park of immense utility to the immediate vicinity." Beneath this urban oasis would be an underground parking facility with the capacity to hold 1,200 cars. South of this new park is the existing federal office building and courthouse,

[136] *A Report on the Central Business District,* December 10, 1964. Oklahoma City Urban Renewal Authority Archives, 30-31.

which the report notes is not sufficient even for current demand. Therefore, to the North of the park, on the north side of Fifth Street, a new, eleven-story federal building would be built, which would give the government agencies ample space to work in and expand as needed.[137]

The final phase of the Pei Plan was dubbed the "West Side Industrial Project," and would cover 133 acres from Sixth Avenue in the north to Southwest Third Street in the south, and bounded by Shartel Avenue to the east and Western Avenue to the west. The bulk of this phase would not be a "clearance and redevelopment" operation like the other phases had trended towards. Instead, most of the focus here was on identifying substandard industrial and commercial properties and bringing them up to current standards. The only exception is that the plan called for the complete removal of any residential property in the zone. The report states that the few residential properties in this area were all substandard and should not be replaced as new residences would not be compatible with turning the district into a light industrial park. For the most part, existing infrastructure would be left as is with only minor adjustments or improvements to help circulation. However, the plan called for the removal of as many railroad sidings in the area as possible, most of which were rarely used and were merely leftovers of when rail lines ran all the way into downtown.[138]

After presenting the summary of this plan to the citizens gathered at the Skirvin Hotel at Friday afternoon in December, Mr. Pei concluded his remarks by giving eleven promises of what his plan would do for Oklahoma City:

1. Remove slums and existing blight conditions.
2. Facilitate traffic movements in and out of downtown.

[137] *A Report on the Central Business District*, December 10, 1964. Oklahoma City Urban Renewal Authority Archives, 31-32.
[138] Ibid., 36-38.

3. Increase parking capacity downtown by 100%.
4. Consolidate and intensify downtown land use.
5. Strengthen the city's position as an important convention center.
6. Give balance and life to the downtown by the development of residential, cultural, and recreational uses.
7. Increase retail sales 100%.
8. Increase the city's tax base 230%.
9. Strengthen the city's claim as an important regional center and attract federal, state, and other institutional developments.
10. Create a city center as the symbolic focus of public activity
11. Create an attractive and well-ordered environment.[139]

When Pei left the stage, Mayor Shirk asked Ralph Bolen, chairman of the Urban Renewal Authority, to give some closing remarks. First, Bolen gave thanks to the eighty-plus members of the Urban Action Foundation, saying that "these far-sighted individuals who put up the money to get this "kicked off" where we could start and be ready to go at the proper time," deserved the appreciation of the city. After that, OCURA's leader focused the crowd's thoughts on what comes next and laid what would need to happen to take the dazzling dream I. M. Pei had presented to them and turn it into reality. In short, Pei's plans would have to be presented to and approved by OCRUA – a process that Bolen promised would be taken care of quickly, then the plans would be sent to the city council for approval, after which they would be turned over to the planning commission for detailed study. Once those commissioners gave their assent, the plans

[139] Transcript of I.M Pei Presentation at the Skirvin, December 11, 1964, Oklahoma City Urban Renewal Authority Archives, Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City, OK,13-14.

would be sent back to the city council for final approval.[140] In other words, the city now had a bright vision for its renewal program, but normal bureaucratic forms still lay ahead before bulldozers could roll out and start to transform the city.

[140] Transcript of I.M Pei Presentation at the Skirvin, December 11, 1964, Oklahoma City Urban Renewal Authority Archives, Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City, OK, 14-15.

Chapter 4 – Renewal and the Eastside

As was discussed in the introductory chapter, the story of urban renewal in the United States is incomplete if it ignores the role in which race played a part in these massive projects that reshaped much of the urban landscape of twenty-first century America. This is just as true in Oklahoma City as it was in larger centers in the country. In particular, we must consider the following things: the location of the University Medical Center complex in what had been a predominantly African-American residential neighborhood; the creation of public housing projects in the city; and how did the renewal planners at OCURA and City Hall frame much of the conversation about renewal, relocation, and "blight." We will also look at how the Eastside community responded to urban renewal as the projects unfolded.

When considering the topic of urban renewal in Oklahoma's capital city, one is almost immediately drawn to the Pei Plan. The world-famous architect coming in and creating this bold vision for the downtown OKC of the future is hard to miss, and the drawings and models I.M. Pei and associates produced for the Oklahoma City of 1989 shows a sense of optimism and futurism that many associate with the years before the social upheavals of the late 1960s and the 1970s. Despite this, these flashy downtown plans were not the first priority of OCURA. Instead, the planning officials and early boosters of urban renewal in Oklahoma's capital first focused on the project that became known as the University Medical Center. What is now the University of Oklahoma's Health Sciences Center had been a going concern since 1910, and had been anchored south of the state capitol on Lincoln Boulevard since 1928. By the late 1950s, university and city officials dreamed of something far grander, the creation of one of the premier

medical schools in the region, which the facility definitely was not in the 1960s.[141] The problem for this dream was the location of the school, completely hemmed in by housing, much of it home to African-American residents.

If you will recall from Chapter 1, the land east of the Santa Fe rail line, which had been the backbone of the city's early development after its chaotic founding in 1889, had been the home of OKC's African-American community nearly from the start. Drawn in by the warehouse work that sprung up around the rail depot, black citizens began to live on and north of Second Street, which became known as Deep Deuce. By the 1960s, this community had spread northwards and eastwards, becoming known as "the Eastside." This was the local euphemism to refer to the city's African-American quarter. Much of the residential neighborhoods that had sprung up as an outgrowth of the Deep Deuce area now lay just south of the state capitol at Twenty-third Street and Lincoln Boulevard. The University of Oklahoma's Medical School also lay in this area, and was eager to expand but found itself landlocked by homes owned or occupied primarily by people of color.

After the city council got urban renewal officially underway in 1961, the first big step was the creation of a report recommending "blighted" areas that needed to be further examined and likely cleared or rehabilitated with government assistance. Planners from OCURA presented this report to the city planning commission at the end of October 1962, with the board recommending the highlighted areas to the city council for official action. Of those areas, the first on the list was designated as the "University Medical Center Area," from Thirteenth Street in the north to the Rock Island Railroad in the south, and by Lincoln Boulevard on the west and Lottie Avenue in

[141] Dianna Everett, "Medical Education," *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, accessed October 15, 2021, https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=ME004.

the east.[142] The city council green-lit the renewal report a month later, and gave temporary funding to OCURA so that initial steps towards planning could begin until federal funds became available.[143] As was detailed in Chapter 2, it would take several years to secure the proper funding and take care of all the bureaucratic formalities to bring about a solid plan for both this project of the proposed medical center and the city's other urban renewal projects, so that the earliest tangible, visible signs of renewal work didn't begin until February 1966, when senior local officials – including Oklahoma's junior senator Fred Harris, OKC Mayor George Shirk, and OCURA Chairman Ralph Bowlen - held a formal ceremony at the Bethlehem Center on northeast Sixth Street to hand over keys to the first family to be displaced for the medical center project.[144] According to the renewal authority's 1964 annual report to the mayor and city council, project studies indicated that at least 773 families would have to be relocated in the 240-acre renewal zone to new accommodations. Out of that number, the study indicated that only 173 families were financially sufficient enough that they could relocate without OCURA assistance. The remainder would be housed in existing publicly financed housing, new low-rent apartments that were planned for the area, or in houses that would be relocated from existing sites and rehabilitated.[145]

It is worth noting that, in addition to the hospital expansion, the city was very clear in its message that they also wanted to rehabilitate as many houses in the area as possible, as well as build new housing and also commercial zones to serve the district. In an interview with the *Black*

[142] "Urban Renewal Report Adopted, Four Areas Designated," *Daily Oklahoman,* October 31, 1962.
[143] "Renewal Planning Gets Green Light From Councilmen," *Daily Oklahoman*, November 7, 1962.
[144] "Renewal Project Blastoff Saturday," *Daily Oklahoman*, February 9, 1966.
[145] 3rd Annual OCURA Report to the City Council, June 30, 1964, Oklahoma City Urban Renewal Authority Archives, Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City, OK, 23.

Dispatch, the Eastside community's premier newspaper, the day before the first family was officially relocated, James T. Yielding, OCURA's executive director, stated that the primary emphasis of the project would be placed on improving existing housing where possible. The same article went on to detail some of the new development the city hoped to place in the renewal zone: garden-type townhouse apartments between Eleventh and Thirteenth streets west of the medical center; another apartment complex bounded by Sixth and Eighth Streets east of Lindsay Avenue; a shopping center between Sixth and Eighth Streets east of Laird Avenue; expansions of playground areas at two local schools in the area. According to OCURA, 745 parcels of land that contained structures that were considered beyond repair would have to be cleared in this area to make way for all the improvements. In addition, special loans would be made available to homeowners within the zone to help remodel their properties, with assistance from the authority.[146]

That first family that got the spotlight and attention of city officials and the local press was that of Mrs. Emma Fullbright and her four children. The Fullbrights lived at a house on Ninth Street, east of Stonewall Avenue (an address that no longer exists today, as blocks were combined in the decades since as the medical complex continued to expand south). Even in the grainy black-and-white photograph that appeared in the February 10th edition of the *Daily Oklahoman,* it is clear that the house was in poor shape, with sagging features and chipping paint. The paper told readers that this house had buckled floors and cracked plaster.[147] In the *Black Dispatch*, Mrs. Fullbright told the reporter that not only was the plaster cracked, but in many places it had fallen down entirely, and that in a recent cold snap her and her children

[146] "Center to Host Mass Meeting: City's Initial UR Project Gets Underway Saturday," *The Black Dispatch*, February 11, 1966.
[147] "City's 'Renewal Family' Perched on New Threshold," *Daily Oklahoman*, February 10, 1966.

"almost froze to death."[148] The *Oklahoman* article went on to say that the family would be moving into a new home made of brick, and that the mother had reported that the new house had six rooms, which the old house had as well, but that these rooms were larger. Both papers explained that, thanks to recent money made available by a new public housing law passed in 1965 by Congress, that although the rent for the new house was $114 a month, the Fullbright family would only pay $40-45 a month, the rest subsidized by the government. On February 12, 1966, Emma stood with her four children – Charles, 18, Stella, 15, Clarence, 13, and Stephanie, 3 – and received the keys to their new home, marking the "blast off" of urban renewal in Oklahoma City. The following week, the renewal authority was set to get to work on relocating the other seven-hundred-plus families that would need to be relocated to make the project work.

That summer, in OCURA's fifth annual report to the city government, the renewal authority – using a trendy and convenient space launch theme – beamed about the start of real work on their first project. The authority's report went with a space motif, showing a cartoon rocket launching into the atmosphere with "OCURA" on the side, and dropping references to countdowns and liftoffs and NASA itself in the introductory statement. The document stated that by July 1 of that year, the first property in the medical center zone had been rehabilitated, with four more in the process of being remodeled, as property-improvement supervisors worked with thirty-five other owners to prepare for work. Fifty parcels of land had been purchased by the authority, with another 180 in negotiations. Twenty families had been relocated, along with four individuals, and another thirty-two families and four more individuals were working with

[148] "Center to Hold Mass Meeting," *The Black Dispatch,* February 11, 1966.

relocation counselors to prepare for moving. It was expected that clearance of the first of over 640 buildings that the authority expected to clear would begin by the end of August.[149]

Despite the enthusiasm, the report's authors admitted that not everything was quite as "full-steam-ahead" as they renewal officials would like. Many residents in the zone were skeptical of the various rehabilitation proposals, and many, according to what the authority told the city government, refused to believe that they were eligible for grants of up to $1,500 each for property improvements. According to the document, many of the homeowners contacted by OCURA's officers were elderly and hesitated to commit to property improvement loans that were also available, despite assurances from the authority that those receiving welfare would receive increased payments to help cover the loan installments. On top of this, the report admits that initial contact by some of the property negotiators had not been "the most tactful," which likely led to a level of distrust among some of the area's residents. The OCURA report assured city leaders that "orientation and regular briefing sessions have since been held with the negotiators, and it is believed the major portion of this difficulty has been overcome."[150] Later on, the report goes on to assure the reader that the renewal authority's first priority was the individual:

> Urban Renewal, particularly as it is being carried out in Oklahoma City, means far more than the acquiring and clearing of land, the rehabilitation of structures and the physical redevelopment of an area. The Urban Renewal Authority is vitally concerned also with the renewal and rehabilitation of the individual. A comprehensive counseling and educational program has been undertaken by the Authority with the goal of helping those affected by Urban Renewal to become self-reliant, responsible, productive citizens of the community. Many organizations and individuals are assisting with this effort.[151]

[149] 5th Annual OCURA Report to the City Council, June 30, 1966, Oklahoma City Urban Renewal Authority Archives, Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City, OK.
[150] Ibid.
[151] Ibid.

After this statement, the authors went on to list a myriad of programs that the authority had made available to those in the renewal zone, including classes in family finance, home-making, home-buying, and also social work programs to help with deeper issues such as alcoholism. Following this glowing list, the section ends by saying "No longer is Urban Renewal synonymous only with 'slum clearance.' Today, especially in Oklahoma City, it is the people to be affected who are the chief concern of the Urban Renewal Authority."[152]

Why did this report include these statements about how the authority's top priority was the people being affected by renewal? It could be that OCURA officials were wanting to indirectly respond to criticisms they received earlier in spring 1966 as the project got off the ground and those first relocations occurred. In mid-March, the authority had announced that going forward, families would be relocated to their new homes without the fanfare that the Fullbrights had received in February. Furthermore, the renewal officials indicated that future relocations would be into homes that were "more modest, standard, not luxury."[153] The initial report of this decision did not offer much in the way of explanation as to why the authority was making these changes, but a few days later, things were made clearer when the *Daily Oklahoman* reported on complaints that had been made from the leadership of the local branch of the NAACP. At a press conference, the local branch president, Henry Floyd, stood with regional director of his organization, Richard L. Dockery of Dallas, who had just completed a three-day visit to the city at the request of Floyd and other local NAACP members. Dockery told reporters that he believed that more and better planning should take place, with more consultation with those who lived in the renewal project's area. Floyd said that he believed that the OCURA officials hadn't "dealt in

[152] 5th Annual OCURA Report.
[153] "Urban Renewal Drops Fanfares," *Daily Oklahoman,* March 10, 1966.

good with the individuals affected or with the community at large." In particular, both men were critical of the way the Fullbright family had been relocated. They claimed that the new neighborhood, located on northeast Forty-Fifth Street between Lottie and Kelly Avenues was more expensive than the neighborhood the family was coming from, and even though the authority was allowing Mrs. Fullbright to pay her previous rent of $45 and making up the difference of the rest of the rent (which was$114), she would still be facing higher upkeep costs with no income increase, a hardship the leaders found "beyond reason." Floyd reminded the press that the local NAACP had recommended three neighborhoods that had rents closer to what people being relocated were used to where the properties were "safe, sound, and decent."[154]

This was not the only complaint that the two African American leaders leveled at the renewal authority's leaders that day. Floyd – who'd previously spoken on the record in favor of urban renewal – said that the entire program had been "shaded against the Negro," and cited several pressing examples: black businessmen who felt they were not receiving equal treatment with white businessmen in questions of relocation; high-pressure tactics at neighborhood informational meetings where authority officials had not provided sufficient specifics for the projects, nor answered inquiries to the satisfaction of the attendees; irregularities in FHA housing practices regarding African American loan applicants; real estate companies who had unwritten rules that barred loans to applicants of color unless fifty-one percent of homes in a given neighborhood were already owned by non-whites.[155]

These were not the only voices of concern to speak out about the renewal project, nor were the issues that they raised the only ones on people's minds. State Representative John B. White,

[154] "Negro Housing Shifts Set Off Sharp Protest," *Daily Oklahoman*, March 14, 1966.
[155] "Negro Housing Shifts Set Off Sharp Protest," *Daily Oklahoman*, March 14, 1966.

who represented the Eastside at the state capital, spoke out about what he saw as unfair negotiating tactics being conducted by OCURA as they went about appraising the property in the medical center renewal zone as part of the process of buying up the property for clearance. According to authority board member Dr. F.D. Moon, the only African American member of the authority, two appraisals were made of each property in line to be purchased by the renewal board. However, only one appraisal was revealed to the property owners, and that was always the lower figure. Representative White threatened the renewal officials that if they did not stop this practice by Tuesday, August 2, he would organize a march of Eastside residents in protest.[156] Plans got underway for such a march, to occur on Wednesday, August 3, but the board agreed to call a special meeting for that Thursday to discuss the issue, so White postponed the protest action.[157] In the end, no such protest would take place, as the OCURA board voted 4-1 in favor of changing the policy.[158]

Although there was definite concern coming from the Eastside community, there was also clear excitement being expressed by OKC's African American citizens living in the renewal zone. *The Black Dispatch* ran several articles in the latter half of 1966 that highlighted the rehabilitation work being done in the renewal zone that speaks to this. On July 15, an article ran that discussed the first two homes in the renewal zone to be rehabilitated:

> Mrs. Beatrict Lewis, 918 N.E. 6th, has a problem – but it's one she welcomes. So many friends and neighbors are calling or dropping by to see her newly refurbished home that she hasn't had time to get resettled properly. She's been trying to hold them off until she can at least get the furniture arranged, but without much success. Mrs. Lewis is the owner of the first home to be remodeled and repaired with the help of urban renewal in the University Medical Center urban renewal project.

[156] "URA Board Has 'Full Authority,'" *Daily Oklahoman*, July 28, 1966.
[157] "Talks Delay City Renewal Protest Walk," *Daily Oklahoman*, August 3, 1966.
[158] "Urban Renewal Yields Ground in Price Scrap," *Daily Oklahoman*, August 5, 1966.

The article went on to talk about how Mrs. Lewis, seventy-one, had tried to get a loan before to fix up her home, but had had no luck due to her age and due to the run-down state of the neighborhood she lived in. Urban renewal changed that, with a $1,500 no-strings-attached grant along with a three-percent loan to cover the rest of the work. Her kitchen had been completely redone, with new cabinets, fixtures, and linoleum flooring. The floors in the rest of the house had been repaired and refinished, and the outside had been updated as needed and given new window screens and fresh coat of paint. The other home mentioned in the *Dispatch* article that July was that of Mr. Pink "CQ" Payne, a seventy-five-year-old retired railroad worker who'd purchased his home at 511 north Laird Avenue in 1923. Receiving the same financial aid as Mrs. Lewis, his home was having repairs made to the foundation, new windows installed, and the layout of several rooms changed. Payne told the *Dispatch* reporter that the urban renewal program was "a real good deal for people to be able to fix up their houses when they never could have done it otherwise."[159]

In November, another article spoke of the extensive repairs being done to the home of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas at 500 north High Avenue, reported to be the largest improvement project yet undertaken by the renewal program. The Thomas's had completely refurnished their home, leveled out their yard, and installed a new driveway and parking slab. New steps led up to the house, and the exterior had received fresh siding and a new roof. Inside, the remodelers had replaced all the old plaster walls with new plasterboard, lowered the ceilings, installed new kitchen cabinets, repaired and refinished the flooring, and installed a new central heat-and-air

[159] "Rehabilitation Begins on Eastside Homes: 2 Finished," *The Black Dispatch*, July 15, 1966.

system along with other plumbing and electrical repairs. This had all been financed by the three-percent loans that had been made available to area residents.[160]

In December, marking nearly a year of work taking place in the medical center zone, the renewal authority announced the kick-off of "Project Pride," which would be "a dramatic blockwide demonstration of urban renewal." The plan was to bring about the renewal of an entire city block within the renewal zone, all within a maximum of 120 days. The block in question was between Fifth and Sixth Streets to the north and south, and Lindsay and Durland Avenues to the east and west. This block would see the clearance of the most dilapidated buildings, renovations of at least a dozen homes, construction of at least one new home, and public improvements by the city in the form of sidewalks, water and sewer lines, and new trees. Within this project, the McVea family, located at 632 northeast Sixth Street, volunteered to have the spotlight placed on the work to be done on their home, which was expected to cost over $6,000 – considerably higher than the average amount spent on improvements in the area. When asked by the reporter from the *Dispatch*, Ed McVea, the sixty-four-year-old homeowner, said that "I'm so proud and happy that this block was chosen for the demonstration that I don't know what to do. I regard it as an act of Providence. And I'm especially proud that my home is the one that folks get to see." The McVeas agreed to have their home open to the public both during and after the remodeling as a demonstration of what the property improvement program sponsored by OCURA could accomplish.[161] In the end, legal delays prevented Project Pride from being completed within the 120-day goal originally set by the authority, but by summer 1967, when the annual renewal report was presented to the city council at the end of June, officials reported that

[160] "OCURA Roundup," *The Black Dispatch*, November 11, 1966.
[161] "'Project Pride' Launched by Urban Renewal Workers," *The Black Dispatch*, December 2, 1966.

twelve homes had been remodeled on that block, forming "a dramatic example of improvements that can be made through urban renewal."[162]

Not only did *The Black Dispatch* carry several articles showing the excitement in the Eastside community about the possibilities presented by urban renewal, it also gave space for criticism of the critics. In an editorial published on June 10, 1966, an anonymous writer accused "self-appointed spokesmen" of the African American community of "arousing public opinion against a worthwhile program" purely because it did not meet the "personal and selfish ends" of those leaders. The author went on to point out instances in other black communities in the state, such as the towns of Boley or Langston, where, according to the author, local leaders had blocked new highways from coming in for one reason or another, resulting in economic downturns in both communities, with a corresponding boon for nearby white towns. The editorialist also gave an example from OKC, where local African American leaders had resisted the rerouting of a bus line into Deep Deuce for fear of taking away customers, a fear that was unfounded, as the new bus route "dumps more customers [in Deep Deuce] than it takes away." The article ended with this advice to its readers: "It would do citizens well to look closely at some of the criticism lodged against Urban Renewal to determine where it comes form. Some of the arguments being advanced by these leaders that are supposed to be representing some group or other, is so personal and selfish that you can touch it with your hand."[163]

Meanwhile, even as OCURA began the relocation process and started to buy up properties to be cleared, it became clear that the plans approved by the city and the federal urban renewal authorities were too small a dream. In the same 1966 annual report to the city that excitedly

[162] 6th Annual OCURA Report to the City Council, June 30, 1967, Oklahoma City Urban Renewal Authority Archives, Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City, OK.
[163] "An Editorial…Why All the Fuss about Urban Renewal?" *The Black Dispatch*, June 10, 1966.

spoke of the first remodeling and relocations in the medical center project area, renewal authority officials confirmed information that had also been circulating in the press, that the University of Oklahoma hoped to expand the original plans of the new medical center beyond what the current plan called for. Under the original concept, the medical complex located on the south side of Thirteenth Street between Phillips and Kelly Avenues was to expand south to Tenth Street, and east to Stonewall Avenue. However, university medical officials wanted a far larger complex, and so were trying to get approval from OCURA and the city to designate a far larger area for their dream center. Under the new proposal, the expanded health sciences center would go south to Eighth Street, west past Lindsay Avenue, and east all the way to Lottie Avenue, going from a modest fifty acres of expansion, into a much larger 240 acre complex. The university expected that the new project would cost at least $160 million, and would take a decade to complete. The originally planned complex would have included a bigger medical school, university hospital, a building for the Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation, a new Veterans Administration hospital, but the new plans would also include space for other private hospitals, dental clinics, a school of public health, schools for dental teaching, a rehabilitation century, a community health center, state and county health department buildings, a nursing school, specialty centers to study heart disease, cancer, and other ailments, along with research facilities and housing for both students and faculty.[164] As should come as no surprise, the approval of this changed plan took several years to finally get full approval, first from the city, and then ultimately from the federal government, which did not occur until 1970.[165]

[164] 5th Annual OCURA Report.
[165] 10th Annual OCURA Report to the City Council, June 30, 1971, Oklahoma City Urban Renewal Authority Archives, Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City, OK.

Construction came in fits and starts, with some work paid for with private or university funds able to begin within the original site of the expanded medical center, while other projects, such as street improvements, languished due to a lack of funds from Washington while the new plan was debated.[166] Once the new plan had been approved, the flow of funding returned, as did construction. By 1972, work on many of the medical complex's plethora of buildings was underway. The new state health department building opened that year, and the new Basic Sciences Education Building and the expansion of the existing University Hospital had both been finished by the end of 1971. The Colleges of Nursing and Dentistry were expected to have temporary quarters finished that year, and work on the new Presbyterian Hospital was expected to begin in fall 1972, with an expected competition date of 1974.[167] By the end of 1978, the Oklahoma City Urban Renewal Authority officially "closed the books" on the University Medical Center project. Work would continue in the area as planned facilities for the medical complex itself continued to be built, but OCURA's job in that zone was considered finished. Over $32 million – roughly two-thirds of which were federal dollars – had been spent by the authority since work began in 1966, which resulted in eighty-six homes being remodeled and more than 1,400 structures torn down. In addition, the authority built new sidewalks, streetlights, and traffic signals, along with sewer and water lines in the zone at an estimated cost of $4 million.[168]

While the University Medical Center was the city's first urban renewal project to be approved and get underway, it was not the only venture to be undertaken on the city's east side.

[166] 10th Annual OCURA Report.
[167] 11th Annual OCURA Report to the City Council, June 30, 1972, Oklahoma City Urban Renewal Authority Archives, Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City, OK, 10-11.
[168] 17th Annual OCURA Report to the City Council, June 30, 1978, Oklahoma City Urban Renewal Authority Archives, Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City, OK.

In 1966, the same year that work first began in the medical center area, OCURA announced a much bigger plan – if less flashy than the University of Oklahoma's Health Sciences Center, much less the Pei Plan for downtown – on land directly east of the medical center renewal zone. This proposal was first mentioned in a small section of the 1965 report OCURA delivered to the city, noting that the area around the newly completed John F. Kennedy Junior High School that the city built near the corner of Thirteenth Street and Eastern Avenue (today Martin Luther King Boulevard) was "a substantially blighted residential area." The report stated that the early stages of a neighborhood survey had begun, and that "the Authority expects to begin detailed planning for an urban renewal project" once renewal officials completed the survey work.[169] The following year, this project had gone from early stages to having a full planning document approved by the city, awaiting federal approval, which the renewal authority fully expected to receive. Borrowing its name from the aforementioned junior high school, the John F. Kennedy Urban Renewal Project would be a completely different animal than OKC's other renewal ventures, focused almost exclusively on getting people out of substandard housing. It would also lack any of the grand centerpiece projects that the other renewal zones would have.[170]

Not only was the JFK project different, it was also bigger. In fact, when it was approved in 1966, it was reportedly the largest urban renewal project west of the Mississippi, and the third-largest nationwide. The proposed renewal zone would be 1,257 acres in size, bounded by Twenty-Third Street to the north, I-35 to the east, Fourth Street to the south, and then on the west by Stonewall Avenue from Fourth Street to Thirteenth Street, and by Lottie Avenue from Thirteenth to Twenty-Third, encompassing 6,028 buildings and at least 4,392 families and 916

[169] 4th Annual OCURA Report to the City Council, June 30, 1965, Oklahoma City Urban Renewal Authority Archives, Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City, OK.
[170] 5th Annual OCURA Report.

single individuals. According to the report prepared by OCURA studying the area, eighty-one percent of the buildings located in this new zone were considered substandard, but it was thought that at least sixty percent of these – 2,898 – could be saved through repair and remodeling. The city estimated that around 2,035 buildings would have to be torn down, which would require the relocation of 1,720 families to standard housing. The OKC housing authority planned to build or lease 1,000 such units, with private and charitable organizations expected to make up the remainder. Renewal officials optimistically hoped that the first properties could be acquired over the winter of 1966. The project was projected to cost over $20 million over the next six years.[171]

The full plan called for more than just housing rehabilitation, however. Authority planners had ambitious ideas for this huge chunk of the city. On the drawing board sat the following: doubling the amount of park land from thirty-eight acres to seventy-seven; redesigned street patters to reduce through traffic – making neighborhoods quieter and safer; a system of lighted pedestrian pathways linking residential areas with parks, schools, and commercial services; screening commercial and industrial properties, along with highways and railroads, from residential areas; increasing parking around commercial districts; and the expansion of industry around the railroad that ran through the area from fifty-four acres to eighty-nine.[172]

Unsurprisingly, a project this large grabbed the attention of Eastside residents and leaders, and not all of them were happy with this massive new renewal plan. This unhappiness was made known at a city council meeting on Thursday, May 26, 1966, as the city was moving towards final approval of the JFK project. Henry Floyd, the local NAACP president, told the council and those present in the audience that his organization was withdrawing their support of the urban

[171] 5th Annual OCURA Report.
[172] "JFK Urban Renewal Project Opens; Series of Seven Meetings Schedules in Area," *The Black Dispatch*, March 11, 1966.

renewal projects in OKC, charging that OCURA was failing to communicate and listen to the concerns of Eastside residents bearing the brunt of the city's plans. He had several specific complaints that day as he addressed the city government. First, the plan for the expanded medical complex would uproot homes that were in good shape, needlessly destroying decent neighborhoods. Second, the JFK plan would place industry too close to Douglas High School. And third, Mr. Floyd claimed that the renewal authority did not conduct their information meetings with the public in a proper manner. He claimed that at those meetings, citizens' questions were not met with actual answers, and said that sometimes public officials failed to appear when they'd promised to do so. The local African American leader promised to file formal objections to the plans unless the city officials addressed Eastsider concerns.[173] This first concern seems to have been the crux of Floyd's protest, where the expanded medical center complex would expand slightly into the JFK zone in order to build housing for students and faculty of the various medical schools. The Eastside leader told the *Daily Oklahoman* that he couldn't understand why the authority would buy high-valued homes that would cost OCURA more when there was plenty of less valuable property available if the center were to expand southwards instead of farther east. He went on to say that "urban renewal is necessary here, but the authority is going in the opposite direction," and that he feared the project could turn into "a negro removal program." In early June, regional director of the NAACP, Richard Dockery, filed formal protest with the regional office of the federal Housing and Urban Development office in Fort Worth, attempting to block the JFK project.[174]

[173] "NAACP Withdraws Support of City Urban Renewal Projects," *Daily Oklahoman*, May 27, 1966.
[174] "NAACP Acts to Block City Urban Project," *Daily Oklahoman*, June 4, 1966.

On Tuesday, June 14, 1966, a joint statement was issued by Ralph Bolen, chairman of the renewal authority, Henry Floyd, and three other parties involved with the dispute, saying that they were entering into mediation in order to solve the crisis over the JFK project, hoping to have a result that would "prevent any individual inequities that may arise in implementing the Kennedy Plan," by the end of the week.[175] On Saturday, June 18, the *Daily Oklahoman* ran an article saying that some sort of agreement may have been reached, and that over one hundred of the city's African-American leaders met with Floyd and the rest of the local NAACP board for over two hours late the previous evening, discussing the results of the mediation with the renewal board, and the paper said that a formal announcement was likely later that same day.[176]

That afternoon, such an announcement was forthcoming. The lead mediator, Wheeler Frisbie, a professor of business at Oklahoma City University, came up with a six-pointed agreement that Floyd and most of the other Eastside leaders could agree with that was also acceptable to the Oklahoma City renewal officials. The first and second points were that the mayor would set up a combined review board to study, make recommendations, and make amendments to the JFK project plan, and that the renewal authority agreed to take such actions into serious consideration. Thirdly, OCURA agreed to provide for preference in property disposition for business and homeowners displaced in the plan. Fourthly, the renewal office would create a business research center that would study business problems in the area, assist in the business relocation program, provide counselling to dislocated business owners, and recommend changes and improvements in the business relocation program. Fifthly, that the renewal board would work as quickly as possible to complete a feasibility study for the area in the project zone south of Fourth Street.

[175] "Plans Laid to Settle JFK UR Fuss," *The Black Dispatch*, June 17, 1966.
[176] "Secret Renewal Accord Reached?" *Daily Oklahoman*, June 18, 1966.

Lastly, the parties involved in the mediation would come up with a way to help designate members for the mayor's advisory board. Overall, Floyd and his fellow NAACP leaders seemed to be satisfied with this agreement, and promised to keep working with the city on the renewal programs, though some individuals did express concern that the issue of the houses to the east of the medical center complex had not yet been addressed.[177]

Protestors more or less placated, planning work on the project moved forward, and tangible work began in February 1967. More than 200 property owners in the JFK zone requested home-improvement assistance even before the project received its funding from the federal government, and by the start of July, authority rehabilitation counselors had inspected more than 100 homes so that work could begin. Three early key projects, the construction of an elementary school between Kate and Prospect Avenues on Twentieth Street, a home for the elderly between Stonewall and Lottie Avenues and between Eleventh and Twelfth Streets, and a 200 general-occupancy complex between Eastern and Jordan Avenues and between Fourth and Sixth Streets, were all given first priority so that the land could be acquired as soon as possible to allow for construction. The 1967 OCURA report to the city council also reported that the mayor's advisory committee that had been a part of the settlement with the NAACP the previous summer – consisting of three locals who lived in the zone and three city officials – had been successful in convincing local traffic planners to not run an expressway through the middle of the JFK residential area, showing that the committee did have some muscle that it could flex when needed.[178] By 1968, the authority reported that "the ring of hammers and whine of power saws" could be heard throughout the John F. Kennedy project area. The renewal officials reported that

[177] "6 Resolutions OK'd to Get City Renewal Project Rolling Again," *Daily Oklahoman*, June 19, 1966.
[178] 6th Annual OCURA Report.

by July of that year, 185 renovation projects had been completed, twenty-nine were under way, and an additional 146 were in the process of getting loans and grants so that work could begin. The purchasing of land for two of the high priority projects – the senior living center and the new elementary school – was nearing completion, with only a few properties still needing to be closed on so clearance and construction could begin. In total, 214 parcels of land had been purchased by July 1968, with thirty-two families, forty-five individuals, and sixty-nine businesses having been relocated.[179]

The first private redevelopment began in June 1969, on an initial twelve lots of land, with somewhere between 150 and 200 more set to be sold privately to interested investors as soon as the authority acquired them over the next two years. These lots could be sold to real estate developers or individuals who agreed to construct homes on them, or in some cases, could have houses moved to them from total clearance areas elsewhere in the project zone as long as the new owners agreed to rehabilitate the structures once moved. Most new homes in the area, however, would be built by the Oklahoma City Housing Authority, which had plans for spending $13 million on low-rent housing there. By the summer of 1969, the new school site had been fully acquired by OCURA, but only the houses in the poorest of conditions had been torn down, the rest earmarked for relocation once other cleared property opened up elsewhere in the district. The authority stated that summer that nearly 350 homes had been improved or were in the process of being improved, and there were pending loans or grants for another 260 residences.[180]

[179] 7th Annual OCURA Report to the City Council, June 30, 1968, Oklahoma City Urban Renewal Authority Archives, Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City, OK, 6-8.
[180] 8th Annual OCURA Report to the City Council, June 30, 1969, Oklahoma City Urban Renewal Authority Archives, Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City, OK, 9-10.

In May 1970, the housing authority broke ground on a high-rise apartment building on the corner of northeast Twelfth Street and Lottie Avenue, to be called the Marie McGuire Plaza. This was designed to be a 200-unit building for low-income senior citizens. Property purchasing and clearance continued apace that year as well. By July 1969, OCURA estimated that over 700 property owners had remodeled or were in the process of remodeling their homes, with 300 more applicants waiting for final approval.[181] The following year, the Marie McGuire Plaza was nearing completion, and the remodeled home count was at 900 – though the authority said they still had close to 2,000 more to go. New parking had been provided for along the sides of Twenty-Third Street for businesses – many of which had been relocated there from other parts of the renewal zone. By the summer of 1970, the authority had fully acquired and cleared the site where a new school was planned, but due to issues around Oklahoma City Public Schools' integration plans – a long, drawn out drama beyond the scope of this paper, but one that did dominate the local press of the late 1960s and early 1970s – the city had temporarily taken over the property and converted it into a simple neighborhood park.[182]

The much-touted senior living center opened in March 1972. At the formal opening ceremony, the buildings namesake, Marie McGuire, who had previously overseen federal housing programs for seniors for the Department of Housing and Urban Development, was on hand to great new residents. That same month, OCURA presented a special certificate to Mr. and Mrs. McCarty, who's home at 2024 northeast Fifteenth Street became the 1000th home in the JFK district to be remodeled with help from the authority. By the end of June, when the renewal office issued their annual report, 1,114 homes had been rehabilitated in this zone. Including the

[181] 9th Annual OCURA Report to the City Council, June 30, 1970, Oklahoma City Urban Renewal Authority Archives, Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City, OK, 8-9.
[182] 10th Annual OCURA Report, 11-13.

new senior center, 300 dwelling units had been completed by the OKC Housing Authority. Renewal officials announced a new branch library, and a new fire station would also be built in the district over the next few years.[183] In 1973, construction was underway on this new fire station, and the land had been cleared for the new community library that was expected to cost half a million dollars. Construction was also under way on various street and public utility improvements. All was not well that year, however. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development announced earlier in 1973 that they were suspending most subsidized housing programs, and terminating the home rehabilitation program, both of which had been so crucial to Oklahoma City's JFK project. Work that was already under contract would not be affected by this policy change, but this meant that no new projects could begin, and OCURA essentially ceased buying more property in the area. Furthermore, the authority stated that all existing structures would remain in place until funding existed to ensure that those buildings could be replaced with up-to-date housing that would be safe and sanitary for future residents.[184] This lack of funds, along with other outside economic factors, would lead to a slump in new construction of homes by the renewal and housing authorities for the next two years.[185] Slowly, some federal funds were released by HUD, so that by 1976 nearly $1 million in new loan money had been made available to the JFK residents. By July of that year, the authority announced that over 1,500 homes (approximately half of the total goal) had been rehabilitated in the district.[186]

[183] 11th Annual OCURA Report, 12-13.
[184] 12th Annual OCURA Report to the City Council, June 30, 1973, Oklahoma City Urban Renewal Authority Archives, Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City, OK, 11.
[185] 14th Annual OCURA Report to the City Council, June 30, 1975, Oklahoma City Urban Renewal Authority Archives, Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City, OK, 5.
[186] 15th Annual OCURA Report to the City Council, June 30, 1976, Oklahoma City Urban Renewal Authority Archives, Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City, OK, 13.

In fall 1977, work began on a second 200-unit senior living center immediately south of the original eleven-story Marie McGuire building, and work continued on improving streets throughout the district. The Oklahoma City Housing Authority also announced they had completed 120 single-family homes in the JFK area by the summer of that year. Nineteen seventy-seven was also the first year that OCURA began administering privately-financed home improvement loans for citizens in the JFK neighborhood and other areas of the city that the authority deemed in need of rehabilitation – even if they were not inside formal renewal districts.[187] The following year, as work continued on the new senior center, the rehabilitated home count topped 1,750, and work began on a new childcare and counseling center at 2001 north Eastern Avenue, the big news for the JFK district was the start of major industrial redevelopment, long a part of the overall renewal plan for the zone. The Economic Development Administration awarded a $600,000 grant to the renewal authority, which secured an additional $170,000 in funding to start work on the industrial sites located on Fourth Street.[188] In summer 1979, the housing authority opened the second senior center, known as the Wyatt F. Jeltz Center, with its 200 units for low-income elderly citizens, immediately south of the existing Marie McGuire tower. The aforementioned family services center on Eastern Avenue also opened that year as well.[189]

As the new decade dawned, urban renewal entered into a sunset phase on the Eastside. That year, the Oklahoma City Urban Renewal Authority received a $5.9 million grant from the federal government to "close out" this project. When this grant was awarded, the Department of Housing

[187] 16th Annual OCURA Report to the City Council, June 30, 1977, Oklahoma City Urban Renewal Authority Archives, Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City, OK, 12.
[188] 17th Annual OCURA Report, 11.
[189] 18th Annual OCURA Report to the City Council, June 30, 1979, Oklahoma City Urban Renewal Authority Archives, Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City, OK, 8.

and Urban Development and the city acknowledged that these funds would not be enough to fully realize all the original plans that had been set down in 1966. The city would therefore focus on utilizing the funds to ensure the most essential projects were completed, and set the district up so that future projects funded by other sources could be successful. OCURA estimated that, by the summer of 1980, more than $1 billion had been spent in all of the city's urban renewal districts, a mix of federal, private, and city funds. As part of this drawdown, OCURA sold nearly half a million dollars worth of land to private developers, hoping to transition to a new phase of urban renewal. Spring 1980 saw the opening of the first major industrial project in the district, the James E. Stewart Industrial Center – named for a commissioner of the renewal authority. This $800,000 complex at northeast Fourth Street and Fonshill Avenue was largely funded by the Economic Development Agency. At the same time, ground was broken on a second facility just to the west by the Crown Paint Company. Near the close of the 1980 annual report, the renewal authority estimated that over 1,900 homes had been rehabilitated in the JFK district with the help of OCURA and federal funding – short of the 3,000 home goal, but still a large number, considering the severe funding restraints present throughout much of the 1970s.[190] Construction in the John F. Kennedy renewal zone would continue past 1980, but this work would transition from "urban renewal" to regular public and private development seen in other parts of the city.

As we conclude this chapter, there remains one thing that should be addressed, and that is how the issue of race was directly – or not directly – addressed by OCURA. In the seventeen consecutive annual reports that the renewal authority delivered to the mayor and the city council that are available at the state archives, between the years 1964 and 1980, there is no direct

[190] 19th Annual OCURA Report to the City Council, June 30, 1980, Oklahoma City Urban Renewal Authority Archives, Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City, OK, 10-12.

mention of "negro," "colored person," "black," "African American," or any other language pertaining to race. Some of these terms do appear in coverage from the *Daily Oklahoman*, but usually only as descriptors when discussing people from the Eastside who were meeting with city officials or protesting – never in the more positive articles that were simply describing the people living in the areas affected by renewal. The printed word, however, only tells part of the story. As the old saying goes, a picture is worth a thousand words, and when one examines the photographs printed in the city's paper of record, or even more tellingly, in the often glossy, highly produced reports delivered to city hall by the renewal officials, a somewhat different narrative emerges.

In print, the authority presents a picture of simply repairing older homes or replacing them with newer ones, and was very eager to share the number of homes rehabilitated or built new, in addition to touting the big-ticket items that were also being built in the renewal districts. In the 1965 annual report, the first to include more than just a handful of photographs, the very first picture inside the cover is that of a young African American boy sitting outside a house on what is presumably a front porch on a couch with a cup in his hand. The child has very little clothing on, lounging and wrapped in a sheet or thin blanket. The upholstered couch he is sitting on looks very ragged, the cloth material looking worn and very tattered around the edges. What is visible of his home is battered-looing white siding, scuffed up and with paint peeling in certain places. The window behind the couch looks to be in poor shape, possibly broken, and the screen door to the right of the couch is in tatters, with half the screen drooping down.[191] A similar sort of display appears in the 1967 report – which itself has a black family outside a nearly completed home, obviously waiting to move in. On the inside cover, opposite the letter from the chairman

[191] 4th Annual OCURA Report.

of OCURA, are two photographs showing groups of African American children outside their homes that are clearly in poor condition, with the caption below that reads: "Because of Oklahoma City's total approach to Urban Renewal, these youngsters won't have to grow up in today's slums." Later on in the same report, the authority presents a before-and-after approach showing a black woman standing in a kitchen. In the first photograph, the unidentified woman is standing in an older, beat-up looking kitchen cleaning dishes in a small sink with almost no counterspace visible. In the second photograph, she appears in a much more spacious, much more modern kitchen, in the same pose and doing the same task. Something subtle in this photograph too is that, although she is in the same pose, she is in nicer, more stylish clothing. Nothing about the second picture looks "poor," whereas the first picture does. The caption, split between the two photographs, stated "Human renewal moved this woman from here….to here." On the following page, the report presents another before-and-after set up, where a young African American boy is sitting near the bottom of a rickety wooden staircase, mostly bereft of paint and looking very unsound, the child dressed and plainly and frowning. In the second picture, the same boy sits on the front porch of a brick home with white decorative columns, smiling and appears to be in better clothes. The caption below these pictures reads: "Human renewal made it possible for this little boy to leave a slum apartment and move to an attractive three-bedroom home."[192] This sort of photographic story about poverty and race also appears in the 1968 OCURA report as well, where we have another before-and-after set up showing an African American woman and her three children in their clearly sub-standard living space. A rough-hewn brick or stone wall is seen on the right side of the picture, and behind the family is a simple wooden shiplap wall with peeling paint around the edges and different shades of paint on

[192] 6th Annual OCURA Report.

the wall itself. The occupants are sitting on a bed together, but the photograph has been taken from a kitchenette-like space, with a small stove clearly visible in the right foreground, seeming to indicate that the home they are living in is very small. In the "after" picture, the mother and two of her children are sitting on a bed with a proper bedframe, windows to either side of the bed with painted window frames, and the wall that sits behind the family is clearly plastered and painted a light color. The photograph implies an open and airy space, which the "before" photograph clearly does not.[193]

This was the last instance in the official materials available in the archives where these sorts of photographs occurred. Throughout the rest of the reports up to 1980, we regularly see before-and-after pictures of homes and businesses that had been remodeled (similar images were in essentially every report) along with progress shots on the various construction projects. It is also worth noting that these photographs aren't the only depiction of OKC's black citizens in these reports. We do see them attending meetings with OCURA, celebrating new homes purchased or remodeled, or just going about normal life, without a clear undertone of poverty. The difference that is worth noting, however, is that at no point in any of the reports do the authors show any depiction of white poverty. When white citizens of Oklahoma City appear in the photographs of these annual documents delivered to the city government, if they aren't just going about their business in the city as "average Joes," they are in suits representing the authority or the government, or as construction workers, or the planners of all the projects. This follows a common pattern that we have seen played out in the broader American media, where African American make up a greater percentage of people depicted to be in poverty in the press when

[193] 7th Annual OCURA Report.

compared to the actual numbers of people in poverty, as pointed out by Dr. Martin Gilens of Princeton University in a 1996 article published in the journal *Public Opinion Quarterly*.

How OCURA applied urban renewal to Oklahoma City's Eastside district was not some sinister plot by the city government or the white business leaders to destroy OKC's black community. Instead, all the evidence points to systemic issues of having an under-represented community being ignored when their wishes and opinions clashed with those of the city planners (for example, when the medical center wanted to build housing for staff and students on land occupied by higher valued homes to the east compared to low-value homes that were farther south). The leaders in the city redrew the map for this section of the city without taking in proper input from those who lived and worked there, and these changes – occurring at the same time as broader social changes such as desegregation – meant that the Eastside community would not be the same once the bulldozers and construction crews were through with their part of the city.

Chapter 5 – A Dream Deferred

The approval process as laid out by Ralph Bolen at the end of that luncheon at the Skirvin Hotel in December 1964 proceeded largely as predicted, though at slow and bureaucratic pace. The city council approved detailed study and planning for the Pei Plan in May 1965.[194] A year and a half later, the councilmen would finally give full approval in December 1966, allowing for tangible work to begin.[195] By this point, the "Pei Plan," known on official documentation as the General Neighborhood Renewal Plan, had been split into two parts: Project 1-A, and Project 1-B. The first section would include the eastern side of downtown from 4th street to the expressway, and from the Santa Fe rail line to Walker Avenue, encompassing the area where Pei envisioned the new convention center, the Tivoli Gardens project, and the business towers.[196]

In the midst of this process, Bolen retired from the OCURA board – rather, asking not to be renominated once his term expired at the end of July 1966, though he ultimately stayed on for a short period after to help transition the new Chairman, W. M. Harrison, vice president of the First National Bank & Trust Company, into his new role.[197] During this same period, James Yielding, the executive director of the authority, resigned in order to return to Ohio to take a position at a private architectural and engineering firm.[198] Despite this change in leadership, by the time the urban renewal authority presented the city government with its seventh annual report at the end of June 1968, concrete plans for specific elements of the Pei Plan were in the works, and physical, visible work in the downtown had begun.[199]

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[194] Minutes of the City Council Meeting, May 4, 1965, City of Oklahoma City Archives, 559-60.
[195] "Leaders Rallied to Renewal Aid," *Daily Oklahoman*, December 16, 1966.
[196] 6th Annual OCURA Report.
[197] "Mayor Briefed on Renewal by Chairman," *Daily Oklahoman*, July 30, 1966.
[198] "Yielding Quits Renewal Post," *Daily Oklahoman*, September 30, 1966.
[199] 7th Annual OCURA Report.

What we will explore in this chapter are the successes and failures in the implementation of the Pei Plan. Since most public officials stated that the core of the plan would take ten to fifteen years to complete, we will focus on the status of the city's urban renewal projects by 1980 and see what had come to pass, and what remained on the drawing boards. We will also step past 1980 and explore some pivotal events in that decade that would have a profound effect on the future of the Pei Plan and Oklahoma City more broadly. What we will see is that by the 1990s, economic events that were unforeseen when I. M. Pei and the city leaders unveiled the plans for downtown in 1964 would overtake this vision of the future metropolis on the prairie, leaving OKC with at best a half-fulfilled dream that would never fully come about, at least not in the way that had been planned.

One of the key pillars of the Pei Plan was the construction of a new convention center, and as has been discussed previously, the desire for such a facility was among the earliest drives for the urban renewal movement in the city. As such, it should come as no surprise that during the mayoral election campaign of 1967, the prioritization of this project became a political tool for none other than James Norick, who was seeking to return to his former post and replace Mayor George Shirk, who'd been in office since 1964. Mr. Norick pledged that completion of the new center would be a top priority if he were elected. He outlined a program of "forward action," promising to prioritize not only the convention center, but also the Mummer's Theater project, the medical center, and a "north-south Oklahoma City expressway." He accused current leaders of "feet-dragging" that he charged had cost the city millions of dollars in lost revenue.[200] This topic would come up several times in the campaign, from advertising by Norick's campaign and

[200] "Norick Demands Forward Action," *Daily Oklahoman*, March 26, 1967.

also in debates with his main opponent, Ray Ackerman.[201] Whether it was the issue of the convention center, or citizen frustration with so-called "slate government" (where the organization "Association for Responsible Government" fielded candidates for every council seat and the mayorship that had removed Norick in 1963), Norick won the election.[202]

Merely a week after Norick returned to office, architects in contract with the city presented the council with updated plans for the convention center that would be built at the site called for in the Pei Plan. This facility would boast a 15,000-seat arena, 100,000 square feet for exhibition space, and parking for 1,250 vehicles, in what one writer for the *Daily Oklahoman* speculated could become "one of the world's most beautiful, useful, and economical structures." The paper went on to report that the estimated cost of the project, if construction were to start by May 1968, would be over $20 million – a far cry from the mere $5 million voters had approved in a bond issue in 1962.[203] This had been at the center of the election back-and-forth between Norick and Ackerman, with the latter accusing the former mayor of having sold the public a false bill of goods with such a low amount for a bond, and Norick countering that the $5 million price tag had been adequate for initial plans for a center at a different location in 1962 dollars, and that the ARG's administration having embraced the Pei Plan and moving the convention center to a new location had actually caused the price shift.[204] Regardless, the city council would ultimately give approval for the preparation of final architectural plans a week later, and instructing the city

[201] "Norick for Mayor" Paid Political Advertising, *Daily Oklahoman,* April 1, 1967; See also, "Norick Airs Center Issue, Ackerman Charges 'Switch,'" *Daily Oklahoman,* March 31, 1967.
[202] Moore and Moore, *Norick*, 111.
[203] "Council Meets Conventional Dream Team Today," *Daily Oklahoman*, April 18, 1967.
[204] "Norick Airs Center Issue, Ackerman Charges 'Switch,'" *Daily Oklahoman,* March 31, 1967.

administrative staff to include consideration for the new convention center in upcoming Capital Improvement Program proposals to help finance the remaining $15 million.[205]

This would ultimately lead to a massive, multi-project bond proposal that would be sent to the voters in summer 1968. Twelve different components were sent to the voters on July 16th of that year totaling over $112 million – including $18 million for the convention center.[206] Norick and other city officials campaigned for the massive bond issue in the weeks leading up to the vote, along with putting out plenty of editorials and advertisements in the papers. One such advertisement showed pictures of four recently completed convention centers in Tulsa, Dallas, Fort Worth, and Wichita – all places that OKC competed against for convention business. The text of the ad told readers that the city was "at the crossroads," telling them to look at the competition and then stated "It's your decision whether Oklahoma City is IN or OUT of the picture!" Below the images of the competing convention centers was a smaller-print section extoling the virtues of the proposed new downtown facility followed by an architectural rendering of what the building would look like. This was part of the city's "Yes'em all! July 16" campaign.[207] In the end, voters approved of eleven of the twelve projects in the bond, including the convention center – but by a margin of just thirty-seven votes for the downtown project.[208]

Despite the narrow win, the project now had the green light to proceed once all of the land in the four-block area that had been designated for the convention center had been acquired, a process that OCURA leadership warned could take some time.[209] It should come as no surprise that local business leaders, worried that officialdom might go too slowly in these final steps

[205] "Approval Goes to Convention Center Plans," *Daily Oklahoman*, April 26, 1967.
[206] "Center for Residents, Too – Versatile Facility Planned," *Daily Oklahoman*, July 13, 1968.
[207] "We're at the Crossroads" paid political advertisement¸ *Daily Oklahoman*, July 14, 1968.
[208] "Center Bonds Win Officially By 37 Votes," *Daily Oklahoman*, July 18, 1968.
[209] "Speed Urged in Acquiring Center Site," *Daily Oklahoman*, July 31, 1968.

before construction could begin, organized a special task force within the OKC Chamber of Commerce at the beginning of August with the duty of working with individuals who owned the land in the designated four-block area to help them through any remaining hang-ups and sell their property.[210] By September 1968, city officials announced that bids for clearing this four-block site would open on October 8, and that OCURA hoped to have all the buildings in the area cleared by late summer or early fall 1969.[211] The first building to be demolished in order to make way for the convention center – believed by the state historical society to be one of the first saloons built in Oklahoma City sometime between 1892-1893 and part of a formerly notorious area of the city known as "Hell's Half Acre" – came down on Sunday, December 8, 1968. By this point, OCURA had purchased 25 of the 68 parcels of land in the area designated for the convention center, with negotiations nearly completed with 14 of those remaining, and various other negotiations on the other properties. The city manager told the press that the city government would likely start taking construction bids for the project in March 1969.[212] This was ultimately pushed back to May of that year, and six different firms vied for the contract, two of which were local, the other four coming from Houston, Wichita, and Boise, Idaho.[213] In the end, H. A. Lott Co., of Houston made the winning bid and would to be the builders of the convention center.[214]

On Tuesday, July 8, 1969, the leaders of the city gathered in the hot summer sun on the cleared four-block area that was now cleared and ready for the future. Ground-breaking festivities were kicked off by an original "89er" settler – identified in the press as Albert Burke

[210] "City Task Force Organized to Push Convention Center," *Daily Oklahoman,* August 2, 1968.
[211] "Bids to Signal Land Clearing," *Daily Oklahoman,* September 5, 1968.
[212] "Demolition Starts Sunday," *Daily Oklahoman,* December 6, 1968.
[213] "Six Firms Eye Building Pact," *Daily Oklahoman*, May 10, 1969.
[214] "At Long Last! Work Begins on City Center," *Daily Oklahoman*, July 9, 1969.

Lytle – to commemorate the site of the new construction existing at the center of the original OKC townsite. Mr. Lytle fired off a pistole signaling the start of the ceremony. Mayor Jim Norick, Chamber of Commerce President Stanton L. Young, and OCURA Chairman William Harrison all spoke. Young called the moment a "reawakening of Oklahoma City to cultural and scientific opportunities." Following the speeches, more than twenty dignitaries hoisted shovels and broke ground, among them being members of the city council, the renewal authority, the executives of both the architectural firm and the construction firm, and also the widow of the former mayor for whom the new building would be named.[215] The Allen M. Street Myriad Convention Center would now begin its three-year journey from construction site to fully functioning facility.[216]

When city officials celebrated the start of construction, it was predicted that work would take at least two and a half years, placing the predicted completion date in December 1971. By May 1970, it was announced that the excavation of the underground parking garage had been complete, and that all 815 of the foundation piers had been completed. In addition, thirteen of thirty-six columns that would support the roof were also up.[217] In August, crews hoisted the first of fifteen massive concrete roof spans into place – each span being 312-feet long and 31-feet wide and weighing 800,000 pounds.[218] By the end of the year, city and construction leaders celebrated the "topping out" of the building's frame, with the last of the roof spans being put in place.[219] In the new year, however, the roof of the center became a source of contention, with

[215] "At Long Last! Work Begins on City Center," *Daily Oklahoman,* July 9, 1969.
[216] "Allen Street," The City of Oklahoma City, accessed September 14, 2021, https://www.okc.gov/government/archives-records/oklahoma-city-history/previous-mayors/allen-street.
[217] "Myriad Site Digging Over," *Daily Oklahoman*, May 7, 1970.
[218] "Roof Raising Makes History," *Daily Oklahoman*, August 11, 1970.
[219] "Myriad Topping Cold But Cheerful," *Daily Oklahoman,* December 12, 1970.

local architects raising concerns that the building's roof might not be able to hold up if the city experienced heavy snowfall.[220] A structural engineer from Tacoma Washington, Dr. Arthur Anderson, stated publicly that he thought the roof's design unsound in the aforementioned conditions. Although the local architects who designed the building denied this, the city hired an outside firm from New York to study the issue, which in August reported that, although the local designers did stay within one possible interpretation of the building code, it would be in the city's best interest to put in cross-bracing for the roof, something that would ultimately be approved despite worries about extra cost.[221]

In addition to design setbacks, several accidents also occurred during the construction of the convention center. The first occurred on October 8, 1971, when twenty-five-year-old construction worker David Brown fell twenty-seven feet from a concrete support while guiding a pre-cast concrete seats into position after losing his balance when the seats unexpectedly dropped over a foot. Brown died later that day of head and chest injuries.[222] Later that month, a similar incident occurred that claimed the life of forty-four-year-old steel crew foreman Ernest Crossley, who fell thirty-feet as he also guided pre-cast concrete seats into position, though no eyewitnesses saw exactly what caused Crossley to fall.[223] The following Spring, a spark from a welder started a fire that destroyed at least $50,000 in building material and construction equipment and minor structural damage, though thankfully no loss of life.[224]

[220] "Delay Requested on Report of Myriad's Roof Safety," *Daily Oklahoman*, June 26, 1971.
[221] "Additional Bracing of Myriad Roof May Not Cost Citizens, Mayor Says." *Daily Oklahoman*, August 17, 1971.
[222] "Accident at Myriad Site Claims Life," *Daily Oklahoman*, October 10, 1971.
[223] "Worker Falls to His Death at Myriad," *Daily Oklahoman*, October 26, 1971.
[224] "Myriad Blaze Loss $50,000 Officials Say," *Daily Oklahoman*, March 10, 1972.

Between the issues with the roof, the accidents, and the normal delays that come from weather, it is no surprise that it took nearly an extra year before the Myriad Convention Center was ready for business. Throughout 1972, the *Daily Oklahoman* had articles and advertisements about shows and conventions that had already booked for the 1973 season. In September, the city government announced that the Myriad would be formally opened on Sunday, November 5, with two shows that would be open to the public free of charge, in addition to a formal dedication ceremony, and declared that November 1972 would be "Myriad Month," with many events planned around the theme "It's My Myriad."[225] On the afternoon of the official opening, Oklahoma Governor David Hall (1930-2016),[226] the current mayor Patience Latting (1918-2012) – elected in 1971, she was OKC's first and currently only female mayor, who would serve until 1983 for three consecutive terms,[227] and former mayor Jim Norick all spoke to the 8,000 citizens who gathered for the formal dedication before the free concert. In his remarks, Hall reportedly praised the former and current city leadership as well as the citizenry for the creation of a "dream building" that was a "visionary achievement" and "a beacon of a new adventure" for the city and state. After dedicating the center to "the needs of the people and the glory of God," the governor called upon the citizens of Oklahoma City to keep up the good work and support for future projects. At both 1:30 and 7:30 p.m. shows, locals and dignitaries were entertained by performances from jazz and gospel singer Della Reese as well as the New Christy Minstrels. Between the two shows and dedication ceremonies, an estimated 16,000-18,000 people attended

[225] "November Set as Myriad's Month in City," *Daily Oklahoman*, September 24, 1972.
[226] Bob Burke, "Hall, David (1930-2016)," *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, accessed September 18, 2021, https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry?entry=HA007.
[227] "Patience Latting," The City of Oklahoma City, accessed September 18, 2021, https://www.okc.gov/government/archives-records/oklahoma-city-history/previous-mayors/patience-latting.

the festivities celebrating the opening of Oklahoma City's first major urban renewal project.[228] Mere days later, the first commercial use of the space took place, with OKC hosting the International Autoshow, with vehicles on display from Oldsmobile, Buick, Chrysler, and Chevrolet from November 8 through the 12.[229] November 8 also saw the Myriad host its first sporting event, a basketball game between the Dallas Chaparrals and the Memphis Tams of the American Basketball Association. Dallas beat Memphis, 126-118, before 3,175 fans.[230] All in all, it was a busy and successful start for the career of the Myriad, which is arguably one of the most successful parts of OKC's Pei Plan, since it opened relatively close to its originally targeted opening (compared to some later projects) and would be the longest serving in its original capacity, continuing in its role as the city's primary convention center until 2021, with the opening of the new OKC Convention Center down the street.[231]

While the construction of the Myriad was the primary focus of public planning and funds when it came to work on the Pei Plan in the late 1960s and early 1970s, private development was also always part of the plan. At the same time that the new convention center began to rise, so too did several high-rise business towers that Pei had envisioned as the "eastern anchors" of the modern OKC skyline (balanced with the apartment towers on the west side of downtown). The most notable would be the Liberty Bank Tower, located at the intersection of Main Street and Broadway, which would become the tallest building in Oklahoma City upon its completion in 1971 - a title it would hold until the completion of the Devon Tower in 2011.[232] The earliest

[228] "Myriad Called 'Dream Building'," *Daily Oklahoman*, November 6, 1972.
[229] "Autoshow Labeled Success," *Daily Oklahoman*, November 11, 1972.
[230] "Dallas Sneaks by Tams," *Daily Oklahoman*, November 9, 1972.
[231] "Cox Center Transformation into Prairie Surf Studios Requires More than New Signage," *The Oklahoman*, December 14, 2020.
[232] "Evergreen Tree, Old Glory Mark Top of Devon Building," *The Oklahoman*, September 22, 2011.

planning for what would become this icon of the skyline for a quarter century began in summer 1966, when local developer H.T. Griffin purchased property on the north side of Main, east of Broadway, with the hope that more concrete plans would be underway by the end of the year. Griffin's acquisition company, Park Avenue Plaza Corp., intended to ultimately purchase the whole square block, a plan that had been in the works prior to the Pei Plan's approval. Initially, Griffin and OCURA were at odds, as he had originally intended to build two high-rises at this location, something that the renewal officials felt did not comply with the Pei Plan, but by this point he told the press that he and the renewal authority were in agreement about the site becoming a plaza with a single building at its center. Under the plan, the properties would be cleared by OCURA before being officially turned over to Griffin's firm for the start of development.[233] By February 1968, the renewal authority began taking bids for the demolition of buildings at the site.[234] In June of that year, the *Daily Oklahoman* carried the news that Liberty Bank, the occupier of skyline jewel from the 1930s, would be moving into the new tower being built by Griffin, and lending the building its name, with groundbreaking set to take place in September.[235] The ceremony did occur on schedule, September 3rd, 1969 – the fiftieth Anniversary of Liberty Bank - with demolition to begin afterwards.[236] However, like many things related to construction in general, and a massive public-private undertaking like the Pei Plan, this optimistic assessment on when work would start hit a snag.

When the bids for structural clearance of these properties had been put in, OCURA did not go with the lowest bidder, as was required, as the authority did not believe the lowest bidder had

[233] "Main Street Tower Cleared," *Daily Oklahoman,* August 26, 1966.
[234] "Renewal Bids Due Opening," *Daily Oklahoman,* February 14, 1968.
[235] "Syndicate Backs Move by Liberty," *Daily Oklahoman*, June 26, 1968.
[236] "How to Build a Skyscraper," *Daily Oklahoman,* October 19, 1969.

the experience needed for such a large undertaking (the clearance project was not only for Liberty tower, but the two other planned skyscrapers soon to be built on the east side of downtown). Said lowest bidder filed a formal complaint with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, which ruled against OCURA in February 1969, forcing the renewal officials to announce that they would have to reopen bids for the work.[237]

By the fall of that year, these issues had ultimately been resolved, and work was underway at the site, with a projected finish sometime in 1971.[238] A photograph published in the *Daily Oklahoman* in April 1970 showing the ongoing construction of the Myriad Convention Center states that the picture had been taken "from the seventeenth floor of the still-rising Liberty Bank Tower."[239] A blurb on July 23rd announced the "topping out" ceremonies that signaled the completion of the building's steel frame that day.[240] An advertisement that same November said that the tower would be ready for occupancy by spring 1971, on schedule, stating that the building would be "Oklahoma's tallest and Oklahoma City's newest total business environment," which had been "engineered to fulfill your every need." The ad went on to mention the Petroleum Club, set to be at the top of the tower, which would be "the Southwest's finest private club," and hinted at the planned connection to the planned Galleria via an all-weather concourse.[241] Construction continued mostly on schedule, and by July 1, tenants began moving into the thirty-five-story tower at Broadway and Main, with plans for Liberty Bank to be fully relocated to their new home by the end of the month, occupying nearly the first third of the structure, and the press reporting that nearly seventy-five percent of the available space had

[237] "City Renewal to Seek New Project Bids," *Daily Oklahoman*, February 4, 1969.
[238] "How to Build a Skyscraper," *Daily Oklahoman*, October 19, 1969.
[239] "Growing Giants," *Daily Oklahoman*, April 29, 1970.
[240] "Today," *Daily Oklahoman*, July 23, 1970.
[241] "One Hundred Broadway, Oklahoma City," *Daily Oklahoman*, November 29, 1970.

already been leased.[242] By that Christmas, the tower was a fixed part of the skyline, and began a yearly tradition of lighting windows on all four flanks of monolithic square form in the shape of a cross for holidays.[243]

As mentioned before, the Liberty Bank Tower was not the only new skyscraper to spring from the prairie as part of OKC's urban renewal efforts. A tower nearly as tall was planned just two blocks north of the new thirty-five-story pinnacle of the city's skyline, the thirty-story Kerr-McGee Building, the planned future home of the Kerr-McGee corporation. This structure would go up in between Broadway Avenue and Robinson Avenue, facing Robert S. Kerr Avenue. One block to the west, a new fifteen-story headquarters for Fidelity Bank had also been announced. These two buildings would be going up essentially simultaneously, at the same time as Liberty, and all part of an effort by the Urban Renewal Authority and the Urban Action Foundation to get private enterprise involved in the reshaping of the downtown.[244] Oil-and-businessman Dean A. McGee, the chairman and CEO of Kerr-McGee Corp. and also a former president and founding member of the UAF told the press that the construction of their new headquarters was "a continuing expression of our confidence in the community and downtown Oklahoma City."[245] The aforementioned hiccup with getting a proper bid for demolition of existing buildings that briefly stalled the construction of Liberty Tower also affected these two other projects, as their properties all had to be cleared under the auspices of OCURA, but construction on both smaller towers would begin by the end 1969. By December 1970, the majority of the steel framework of Fidelity Bank's new building had been finished, and the base of the Kerr-McGee structure was in

[242] "New Tower's First Tenant Sorta' Lonely," *Daily Oklahoman*, July 11, 1971.
[243] "World of Words," *Daily Oklahoman*, December 19, 1971.
[244] "An Editorial: Ready to Go," *Daily Oklahoman*, June 26, 1968.
[245] "Downtown Oklahoma City: There'll Be Changes Made," *Daily Oklahoman*, July 7, 1968.

place as well, ready for the thirty floors of office space to rise atop it.[246] A photograph in the *Daily Oklahoman* from the end of November 1971, showed the completed and recently occupied Fidelity Building on the right, the nearly completed frame of the Kerr-McGee Center on the right, and in the center the Liberty Bank Tower open in all its thirty-five-story glory.[247] The Kerr-McGee building would be ready for occupants by April 1973, as its namesake corporation began to move into its new home.[248] Nearly nine years after I.M. Pei revealed his master plan for Oklahoma City's revitalized downtown, the city's skyline had been greatly altered and shifted slightly to the east, the pinnacle no longer at the First National Building's Art Deco spire on the corner of Robinson and Park, but now at the top of the square, minimalist Liberty Bank Tower one block over on Broadway and Main, followed closely by the almost Brutalist square tower of the Kerr-McGee structure essentially sandwiched in between the two. That skyline would remain unchanged for nearly forty years, with the completion of the Devon Energy Center's fifty-story tower on Sheridan Avenue, between Robinson and Hudson, across from the Myriad Gardens.[249]

The aforementioned gardens were one of the center pieces of Pei's vision for the city, and has already been established, a long-time desire of many of OKC's planners and businessmen even before the big reveal in 1964. The new master plan also wed the proposed park to another pre-Pei idea: a new and permanent home for Mummer's Theater. In the vision laid out that December day at the Skirvin, the new performance center would be located on Sheridan, essentially in the middle of the new urban green space. However, a quick glance at a map of Oklahoma City today will tell you that the story of OKC's downtown park took a different

[246] "Construction," *Daily Oklahoman,* December 6, 1970.
[247] "Nearing Full Height," *Daily Oklahoman*, November 30, 1971.
[248] "First Tenant in New Center," *Daily Oklahoman,* April 15, 1973.
[249] "Evergreen Tree, Old Glory Mark Top of Devon Building," *The Oklahoman,* September 22, 2011.

journey from the one initially envisioned by Pei and his firm. While such a park was built, the final size was much smaller than what appeared on that elaborate model that citizens and leaders first saw in the ballroom at the Skirvin. Unlike the dream, the reality ended up being smaller in scope and containing far fewer attractions than the Danish inspiration for the park. Mummer's Theater would fare better in getting built on time and "according to plan," but would not center the park that eventually bloomed in the heart of downtown Oklahoma City.

All throughout the rest of the 1960s, the local press made regular reference to "Oklahoma's Tivoli Gardens," not as any concrete plan, but as an assumed eventuality that would come about due to urban renewal and the Pei Plan. It was in the model, it was in all the promotional literature and artist renderings, so it was taken for granted that it would, of course, come to pass. The first discussion of any sort of concrete planning doesn't appear until 1969, half a decade after the reveal of the Pei Plan, when OCURA director James B. White announced that a three and a half block area in downtown, opposite the worksite where the Myriad Convention Center was starting to rise, would be available as early as spring 1970 for the city to purchase from the authority, after the latter had acquired the land needed and had it cleared. White's statement to the press also acknowledged that the exact nature of the park was unclear. OCURA was taking ownership of the land, but the city government would have to buy it from the renewal board once the land had been cleared, a cost estimated at the time to be around $900,000, and some speculated that the city would not want to shell out so much money come the spring – and it was also pointed out that a recent capital improvements bond issue had set aside $550,000 for the park, which would fall short of the projected land cost. There was the option of OCURA donating the land to the city, but existing statues would then prevent the city from doing any major improvements of the land, leaving it essentially as a "wilderness park," which would be a far cry from what had

been envisioned not only by Pei, but also by the men of the Urban Action Foundation and the Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce.[250]

This issue of the cost, and of whether or not the city should buy the land or accept it as a donation with the stipulation that such land would have to be essentially undeveloped, would drag out through the rest of 1969, throwing doubt around the whole project. At the end of that summer, some city officials floated the idea of getting part of the land donated, and part of it purchased, meaning that only some of the land wouldn't be able to have proper development, while at the same time the city's finance director said that city could likely pay the full price of $900,000, using funds from the bond, the sale of other park land in other parts of the city, along with some unspecified contingency funds.[251] In October, the city council was presented with a design plan that would fall under the "active development" category, and was for the entirety of area that Pei and his planners had designated for this Tivoli in OKC concept. However, with the council splitting up the downtown development plans into the "Plan 1-A" and "Plan 1-B," the park itself fell in both zones, so the city officials were mostly concerned with the three block area sandwiched between the convention center on Robinson, and the Mummer's Theater project on Hudson. The planners made a strong case for not going the route of having an undeveloped park, and the city manager and finance officer both expressed the opinion that the money could be found for the purchase of the land – though the former also admitted that the actual development of the park may have to end up being taken care of by an independent trust instead of funded directly by the city. It was announced at that meeting on October 28 that the council intended to vote on the park plans on November 12.[252] However, at that meeting councilman John Smith of

[250] "Site for Park Should Exist Next Spring," *Daily Oklahoman*, June 4, 1969.
[251] "Request Made for Tivoli Gardens Development Plan," *Daily Oklahoman*, August 13, 1969.
[252] "Council to Rule Nov. 12 on Tivoli Gardens Project," *Daily Oklahoman*, October 29, 1969.

Ward 5 derailed the vote after he had been told of rumors that part of the Tivoli Gardens project was a plan to build a big "conglomerate" school where students from all over the city would be bussed in – this was during ongoing discussions and plan to implement school desegregation in Oklahoma City – and Councilman Smith "balked at taking action on Tivoli…saying he first wanted to check on [these] rumors." The vote would therefore be delayed nearly a month, to the council meeting scheduled for December 9.[253] In the interim, city business leaders, lead by the Chamber of Commerce, spoke out publicly in support of a developed park, working with those in favor of the plan on the city council to drum up public support, and stating that the Chamber had heard from members indicating that local businesses would likely rally in support of the park's development if the city would purchase the necessary land.[254] At the appointed meeting, the council did approve of the purchase of the land between Hudson and Robinson for the park, allowing for it to have "active" development. In addition, the council also voted to allow OCURA to start planning for the planning on the 1-B area of the downtown renewal zone. The councilmen did not, however, approve the preliminary site plan prepared by city planners, deciding to table indefinitely such an action, indicating that the actual development would likely come later, and be a public-private partnership with city business leaders.[255]

In the new year, at the start of a new decade, the business leaders began to openly discuss the creation of a committee to formally study the use of the land and hire consultants to create a proper design for the park that the city council could approve.[256] Despite the reported urgency from said businessmen, this was not a slow process, and the council would not fully sign off on a

[253] "Tivoli Project Runs Into Snag," *Daily Oklahoman*, November 13, 1969.
[254] "Tivoli's Key to Downtown Franklin Says," *Daily Oklahoman*, November 21, 1969.
[255] "Tivoli Steps Eyed," *Daily Oklahoman*, December 10, 1969.
[256] "Consultants Urged on Tivoli Gardens," *Daily Oklahoman*, February 24, 1970.

task force to study and plan for the site until August of that year.[257] It's also worth noting that sometime between the start of the year and the creation of this committee, that the public name of the project had shifted from "Tivoli Gardens" to "Myriad Gardens," matching the name of the under-construction convention center across the street and to the east of the would-be park.

OCURA finally began demolition work in November 1970, with the *Daily Oklahoman* announcing that sometime that month eighty-two buildings currently occupying the site of the future gardens were to be cleared, a clear sign of progress, albeit months behind when OCURA had originally predicted that they'd have the property ready to hand over to the city.[258] This ultimately would be the tenor for most of this project's development and eventual construction. Regular talks in the press that work would begin "soon," only to hit another bureaucratic snag, delaying, stalling, and altering the local's vision of having a downtown urban oasis that would be as much a tourist draw as the convention center that had lent its name to the development. The business-leader-led task force helped the city to contract with an architectural consortium that would produce plans in 1971 that would finally be approved of in 1972. The site itself, which the city council had voted to purchase 1969, would not actually be in the city's hands until 1973, at which point many people assumed work was soon to begin.

At that point, a deep disagreement developed among the various city and business officials about how the park would be administered – either by the city, or by an independent trust, of which some politicians complained there were already too many. This would not be resolved until September 1975, with the establishment of the Myriad Gardens Authority, which would be chaired by none other than Dean A. McGee, the businessman who had co-founded and originally

[257] Task Force Will Study Area," *Daily Oklahoman,* August 12, 1970.
[258] 82 Buildings in Downtown to be Leveled," *Daily Oklahoman,* November 3, 1970.

led the Urban Action Foundation, which had kick-started the whole downtown urban renewal project in the first place. With the new board for the gardens in place, the original 1972 plans were updated, and then construction again was delayed due to a lack of federal funds, which was not procured until summer 1977. Finally, at long last, after nearly a decade and a half of dreaming, discussion, and planning, OCURA and the gardens authority announced that ground would be broken on Thursday, November 17, 1977.[259] On the appointed day, the governor, David Boren, the mayor, Patience Latting, and nearly a dozen other state and city officials "gathered under the bright blue autumn skies at Harvey and California in the center of the Myriad Gardens Development." The remains of the last building demolished to make way for the site, the famed Biltmore Hotel – which had not been set to be removed under the original plans created by Pei back in 1964 – were still at the corner of the property, waiting to be removed after the building had been toppled back in October. Speeches were made by the governor and the mayor, and by Mr. McGee, and the polite platitudes were adorned with descriptions of what the park would one day be like, and locals were told that the first phase of construction was expected to be done in roughly twenty-five months – December 1979.[260]

By spring 1979, however, it was becoming increasingly clear that this had been too optimistic an assumption, mostly due to costs and funding resources. In March, it was reported that the builders had told the city that the design would have to be altered, or more money – several million dollars more than the $6.3 million that the city wanted to pay for the project. In particular, the construction of an enclosed tropical garden in a metal and glass tube that would be built as a bridge over the artificial lake in the center of the park – the proposed centerpiece of the

[259] "Myriad Gardens Start Symbolizes 2 Decades of Effort," *Daily Oklahoman*, November 13, 1977.
[260] "Ground Broken for City's Myriad Gardens," *Daily Oklahoman*, November 18, 1977.

design – called for specialty tools that local firms mostly did not have.[261] By the end 1980, the lack of funds was becoming evident, and Dean McGee, the Myriad Trust chairman, told the press that he was looking for funds from both public and private sources, after a grant for over $1 million had been turned down by the U.S. Department of Commerce. Work continued, but the centerpiece botanical bridge was beyond their grasp until funds could be procured.[262] It would take until 1982 before enough funds could be secured to hire a firm that could start building the glass tube over the lake, at an estimated price of $8.5 million.[263] Work was expected to start that summer, but the first of the rings that would make up the cylinder did not rise into place until November 1983.[264] Construction of the bridge wrapped up by the end of July, 1984, more or less on schedule from the start of actual construction.[265]

OCURA and the Myriad Authority and the city government were optimistic that the park could open in 1985, but yet again, funding became an issue. At its core, the long-term concern was how to pay for the continued upkeep of the park. The buildings were finished, the sidewalks and exterior landscaping coming along, but who would pay for the continuous maintenance of the tropical plants inside the Crystal Bridge, as the greenhouse structure was to be named, not to mention the structure itself or the rest of the park's unique facilities, with bridges and waterfalls and the outdoor amphitheater? Unlike the convention center across the street that shared the Myriad name, the park could not generate large sums of income to help pay for itself. In the end, the city council voted – narrowly – to start funding the park in 1987. With that achieved, the

[261] "Myriad Gardens Due Surgery or Cost Hike, Builders Say," *Daily Oklahoman*, March 18, 1979.
[262] "Gardens Hit Money Snag," *Daily Oklahoman*, November 20, 1980.
[263] "Myriad Gardens Phase II Construction Approved," *Daily Oklahoman*, March 27, 1982.
[264] "Architect Whoops It UP When Gardens' Hoops Go Down," *Daily Oklahoman*, November 1, 1983.
[265] "Gardens Tube Almost Done," *Daily Oklahoman*, July 19, 1984.

Crystal Bridge could be planted, finishing touches around the park completed, and an actual official opening set (though the grounds had been used since the completion of the bridge structure in 1984 in an unofficial status by various community events). The long-awaited day finally arrived on Friday, March 25, 1988. Mayor Ron Norick – the son of Mayor Jim Norick, who oversaw the start of the city's urban renewal movement – presided over the ceremonies along with Dean McGee and other local officials. After the official opening, the park kicked off an entire weekend of celebration, with events planned each afternoon for all ages.[266] At long last, eleven years after ground was first broken, and twenty-four years after the presentation of the Pei Plan, the city's central park was finally a full-blown reality. It would be the most dragged out of all the completed projects from the original 1964 plan.

When Pei presented his concept for the OKC of the 1980s, the plan rested on the idea of creating a fully functioning community of people who both worked, shopped, and lived downtown, in addition to having places that would draw in citizens from the suburban sprawl. The core of that plan was the construction of the downtown shopping "Galleria" and the creation of affordable, desirable downtown apartment space. For the latter to be possible, the former had to come to happen first, and of all the Pei Plan projects, the downtown Galleria, which is arguably the lynchpin of the city's urban renewal program, would ultimately fail to come to fruition.

By the early 1970s, the city planners and officials had a pretty solid notion of what they wanted from the Galleria project, even if there wasn't a specific design. The complex would be on one of the Pei-created superblocks, bounded by Robinson, Sheridan, Hudson, and Park Avenues, would be at least 1 million square feet of shopping space, along with 300,000 square

[266] "City's Crystal Bridge Ready for Visitors," *Daily Oklahoman*, March 26, 1988.

feet of office space, and underground parking.[267] By 1973, discussion around the Galleria presented it as the next priority project, as the convention center was now a finished and going concern, and the major skyscrapers had been completed. OCURA had contracted with the Turner Southwest Associates firm based in New York to design the shopping center, and their plans called for a three-story mall that would overlook a courtyard, have space for theaters, restaurants, clubs, all atop an underground parking structure capable of holding 3,500 vehicles. A bridge was planned across Sheridan to connect the complex to the Myriad Gardens, which by that point were just beginning their decade-plus long construction journey. One change from the original Pei concept would be the addition of two twelve-story office towers on the edges of the property. The expected cost of the project would be over 100 million dollars, and city boosters were actively working to secure funds, which, like with other projects, would be an ongoing concern for this development as well. Construction was expected to start sometime in the middle of the decade once all of the properties in the future super-block had been acquired by the renewal authority.[268]

A positive step forward occurred in January 1974, when the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development authorized a loan to OCURA to help cover the costs of acquiring and clearing the land for the Galleria in the amount of $15.9 million, around half of what the authority had asked for – the city council agreed to cover the other half. The renewal director, James B. White, believed that it would take into the summer before all of the property could be in hand, and did not speculate on the start of clearing, let alone construction.[269] By late fall 1974,

[267] "Grandpa and Chris Explore the Myriad Gardens," *Daily Oklahoman / Orbit Magazine*, July 2, 1972.
[268] "Retail Galleria Futuristic Step for Downtown," *Daily Oklahoman*, November 11, 1973.
[269] "Galleria Over HUD Hurdle," *Daily Oklahoman*, January 18, 1974.

bids went out for demolition on the land that the project would be built on, and demolition began in December and continued on into 1975. By that time, an expected finish date of 1978 was mentioned in the press.[270] All throughout this period, the *Daily Oklahoman* ran articles about specific buildings in the four-block zone tumbling down, and businesses that had been located there advertised their plans to move to new locations throughout the city. In May of the following year, OCURA authorized a new contract with Turner Southwest for specific design plans so that construction could begin, and shortly thereafter a Canadian firm by the name of Cadillac Fairview out of Toronto became the majority partner with Turner Southwest on this project, and officials from the city and the firms believed that plans would be ready, and construction could begin in about a year.[271] During this time, more buildings were cleared, all awaiting the final plans and the beginning of construction.

By the end of 1977, however, concern was being aired about the future progress of the project. Councilmen were worried at what they considered the slow place of demolition on the future construction site. Then, in October, Cadillac Fairview announced that they wanted to be released from the construction contract. The company felt that, while the construction of the office towers in the project was a worth-while investment, the development of the retail space – which was critical for the city – was not a good an investment and they wanted out. Director White remained optimistic despite what on the surface seemed to everyone else as bad news, and said that the Canadian company would remain involved with the construction of the office space, and that OCURA would take over as developer of the retail space until a new firm could be

[270] "Demolition Contract Bids Opening scheduled Nov. 18," *Daily Oklahoman*, November 9, 1974.
[271] "Galleria Gets Going," *Daily Oklahoman*, May 28, 1976.

found.[272] Days later, however, White did admit that demolition on the Galleria site would likely take a hiatus for some time as new developers were sought out and the authority looked to better finalize their plans.[273]

The search for a new developer would dominate much of spring 1978, with multiple firms contacted and different proposals submitted, before OCURA named Dallas-based developer Vincent A. Carrozza as the new developer of the downtown Galleria project. In the agreement put out by the authority, Carrozza would be expected to have the entire project either completed or at least fully under construction within five years. The developer also agreed to begin construction within seven months of the signing of a finalized agreement that would be drafted later in the year.[274] That summer, when the renewal officials submitted their annual report to the mayor and city council, they touted this tentative agreement, and said that construction was expected to begin on the shopping and office complex by 1979.[275] The renewal authority finalized this contract with Mr. Carrozza on December 8 of that year, with officials announcing that construction would begin by July 1979. The concept of the project described in the agreements signed that day included two office towers, a hotel, and of course the shopping center as its centerpiece. It is also worth noting that the city officials and the developer had brought in I.M. Pei and Associates to do the architectural planning for the complex, and said officials expected the plans to be unveiled early in the new year.[276] By this point, nearly the entire site had been cleared and was awaiting construction, save three smaller structures plus the Hales

[272] "Official Still Optimistic About Galleria Project," *Daily Oklahoman*, October 15, 1977.
[273] "White Predicts Blasting Hiatus," *Daily Oklahoman*, October 18, 1977.
[274] "Texan Gets Galleria Nod," *Daily Oklahoman*, April 27, 1978.
[275] 17th Annual OCURA Report to the City Council, June 30, 1978, Oklahoma City Urban Renewal Authority Archives, Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City, OK.
[276] "Galleria's July Start Scheduled," *Daily Oklahoman*, December 9, 1978.

Building, which preservationists had been battling OCURA throughout fall 1978 trying to save, an effort that was ultimately doomed to failure – old buildings weren't allowed to stand in the way of future progress.[277]

In a scene that had echoes of the 1964 unveiling of the Pei Plan at the Skirvin Hotel, more than one hundred and fifty leaders from the government and from business gathered with Vincent Carrozza, I.M. Pei, and project architect Henry Cobb on the 36th floor of the Liberty Bank Tower in the Petroleum Club – the highest dining room in the city – for the unveiling of Carrozza's plan for the OKC Galleria Project. The model shown to the movers and shakers of Oklahoma City contained plans for 1.5 million square feet of office space, a four hundred room hotel, and 700,000 square feet of retail space, along with parking for 3,300 vehicles. The two-story shopping center itself would be topped with a ninety-foot-tall glass dome. Carrozza planned for three separate phases of construction, the first of which would begin almost immediately, once the site was fully cleared. This phase would include the construction of a 300,000 square foot office tower located along Robinson Avenue, on the east side of the project. In addition, the first phase of construction was also expected to include the hotel and underground parking. Phase two would include the construction of the mall, and the developer believed that work on that would begin in the early 1980s, just a few years out at that point. The remaining phase, which would include the rest of the office space, would come later that decade. City leaders were thrilled with the proposal. Mr. Pei reminded those present that he still considered the Galleria to be the most important ingredient in the city's redevelopment plan. Mr. Cobb told the *Oklahoman* that "we want the Galleria to be a place that millions of Oklahoma

[277] "Cloud of Dust," *Daily Oklahoman*, December 18, 1978.

City visitors want to see. We want it to be the heart of the city."[278] With the presentation of these plans, the city leaders once again felt enthusiasm building about their downtown centerpiece project.

At the Galleria site, the last major structure still standing, the Hales Building, met its end on Sunday, April 8, 1979. Built in 1909, the twelve-story structure was the oldest to be sacrificed in order to make way for the promised modern grandeur of the shopping-center-to-be. The day before the demolition charges brought the seventy-year-old building down, a group of preservationists held a mock-funeral for the building – and in honor of other buildings that had met the wrecking ball or explosives. They marched through downtown behind a hearse and at the site of the old building held a ceremony and gave "eulogies" for the Hales and other downtown treasures now lost.[279] Progress on the mall, this planned heart of the city, seemed imminent. In May, Carrozza unveiled the plans for the proposed luxury hotel with Roger Manfred of Trusthouse Forte USA, a subsidiary of an English hotel group with more than 800 high-end operations world-wide. The building was to be built next to One Galleria Tower, the first of the office buildings that would soon begin to rise, and just north of the Colcord Building on Robinson Avenue.[280] On July 9, 1979, construction workers broke ground on the northwest corner of Main and Robinson to mark the start of the fourteen-story office tower that would be the first part of the Galleria complex to rise out of the earth in downtown OKC.[281] The renewal authority's annual report to the city council and mayor that was printed just weeks before this ceremony, on June 30, 1979, trumpeted the beginning of this long-awaited project. A glossy

[278] "Developer Unveils Plans for City Galleria Complex," *Daily Oklahoman*, January 26, 1979.
[279] "Hales Hailed in Farewell," *Daily Oklahoman*, April 6, 1979.
[280] "Galleria Hotel Unveiled," *Daily Oklahoman*, May 6, 1979.
[281] "Ceremony Marks Start of City Galleria Project," *Daily Oklahoman*, July 10, 1979.

color photograph of the model of One Galleria Tower adorned the cover, and the report itself spoke of all the news related to Carrazzo's partnership with Trusthouse Forte USA and all the work that was set to begin. Inserted into this official report in the OCURA archives is a specially-prepared multi-page color pamphlet explaining the plans for the Galleria: an overview model of the entire site showing the three separate office towers lining Robinson and Park to the north and east of the shopping center itself, with the Colcord building preserved at the southeast corner at Sheridan and Robinson, and the First Life Assurance building at the northeast corner of Robinson and Park; a site map showing what would be including in the construction of "phase one" – the new office tower, a small plaza where Main Street would soon dead-end at Robinson that would eventually serve as a vehicle drop off for One Galleria Tower as well as the proposed hotel and the shopping center itself, and the underground parking garage that the mall would eventually be built atop of; colorful architectural renderings of what the office tower would look like when complete along with what sort of views an office space on the upper floors would someday enjoy, looking northward towards the Liberty Bank Tower; colorful architectural renderings of the so-called "Flag Court," the glass domed area where the shopping center and office towers would all be connected, adorned with the various flags that had at one time flown over Oklahoma.[282] Everything pointed to 1979 being the beginning of the all the great things that OKC's business and political leaders had been hoping for since the start of urban renewal in the mid-1960s.

By the end of the year, with construction on One Galleria Tower going apace, scheduled to be completed by 1981, Carrozza announced that the next office building on the site, to go up at

[282] 18th Annual OCURA Report to the City Council, June 30, 1979, Oklahoma City Urban Renewal Authority Archives, Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City, OK.

the southeast corner of Park and Harvey, would be twice the size of the first structure, rising at least thirty-stories and having 600,000 square feet of office space. The Dallas developer told the press that this new tower would start construction in the early 1980s, at the same time as the Galleria hotel, which would now have at least 500 rooms.[283] Throughout spring 1980, discussion focused on the start of the second part of Phase 1, the underground parking garage that would one day be the foundation of the shopping center. With funding secured, that project began in mid-July of that year, with work on Two Galleria Tower beginning in the fall.[284]

Ahead of earlier predictions, One Galleria Tower was officially opened on October 2, 1980, with a glitzy party attended by the mayor, Patience Latting, and other officials from the council and OCURA, along with the tower's developer.[285] Nearly a year later, on September 21, 1981, Two Galleria Tower had its "topping out" ceremony, marking a major milestone for the thirty-one story building.[286] In the meantime, the parking garage that would be the base of the shopping center opened in July 1981, with nearly 2,000 parking spaces available for use.[287] All through 1981, optimism about downtown showed up in the press. One such article that appeared in the *Daily Oklahoman* in August 1981 touted the recent construction on top of major achievements of the 1970s such as the Liberty Bank Tower and the Myriad Convention Center, claiming that all of the downtown renewal projects would make for icing on the city's 100th birthday cake in 1989.[288] Everything seemed to be on the uptick and unlike the Myriad Gardens, which would depend so much more on public funding and support, this commercial venture seemed poised to

[283] "Early Start planned for 'Two Galleria," *Daily Oklahoman*, December 4, 1979.
[284] "Mid-July Groundbreaking Eyed for Galleria's Parking Facility," *Daily Oklahoman*, July 6, 1980.
[285] "Civic Pride Glows Bright at Galleria Tower Party," *Daily Oklahoman*, October 3, 1980.
[286] "Finishing Touch," *Daily Oklahoman*, September 22, 1981.
[287] "Opening of Galleria Parking Garage Postponed," *Daily Oklahoman*, June 265, 1981.
[288] "'Downtown' Will Ice City's 100th Birthday Cake," *Daily Oklahoman*, August 1, 1981.

take off and be finished by the centennial of the land run that saw Oklahoma City founded overnight. And yet, in 2021 there is no Galleria shopping center in the heart of downtown OKC, and there never has been. So, what happened?

In part, Vincent Carrozza is to blame. In December 1981, when he was supposed to submit plans for the retail portion of his Galleria project, the Dallas-based developer announced his request for a three-year extension on his deadline, potentially pushing back the time when work would even begin until 1984.[289] Initially the renewal authority and the city council balked, and only agreed to a six-month extension while negotiations would be ongoing as to the future of the project. A month later, in January 1982, Mr. Carrozza also asked for the same extension on the construction of the Galleria hotel as well.[290] Frustrated citizens expressed their concern to the press about what a stall in this project might do for future retail development all over downtown, and a candidate for mayor, former district attorney Andrew Coats, even made it part of a campaign issue, pointing to this as a lack of leadership from city hall. "There have been a number of projects that the Chamber of Commerce has taken the leadership on, which City Hall should have taken on," he said in a statement to the *Daily Oklahoman*, "Take downtown, for instance. We've got to do something about the great hole in the middle of downtown. We tore things down before things were ready to go up. There were some buildings that should have been preserved, perhaps. And yet the Galleria is still just sitting there and Mr. Carrozza has asked for additional time. I'm not sure we have additional time."[291] Negotiations between the city and the developer continued to drag on. They blew past the original six-month extension in June, and at

[289] "Galleria Developer Wants More Time," *Daily Oklahoman,* December 10, 1981.
[290] "Deadline Extension Requested on Construction of Plaza Hotel," *Daily Oklahoman,* January 21, 1982.
[291] "Ex-County District Attorney Announces He's Candidate for Mayor," *Daily Oklahoman,* February 11, 1983.

the end of August negotiations were suspended for six months. In May 1983, OCURA voted unanimously to end Mr. Carrozza's retail contract for development of the shopping center portion of the Galleria complex.[292] It would take the renewal authority three years to find a new developer for the project, a company named Forest City Rental Properties out of Cleveland Ohio, with the firm going under contract in May 1986. Still, by 1989, as the city celebrated its 100th birthday, there was no sign of a soon-to-emerge retail palace in the center of downtown. The core piece that I.M. Pei had said would be critical for making downtown OKC a place to live and work was nowhere to be found, and the community he envisioned remained a dream of planners and officials at the OCURA offices.

Again, we can ask ourselves, why did this project grind to a halt when it had seemed on the cusp of taking off. An article from the September 24th edition of the *Daily Oklahoman* answers the basics of this question for us:

> Suspension of negotiations with the developer of the retail Galleria project in downtown Oklahoma City will disappoint some, but it is simply a recognition of economic realities. There is no mystery about the reason for the delay. Developer Vincent Carrozza, who requested the suspension, has been unable to secure commitments for key anchor tenants in the projected center. This is not hard to understand. The national economy remains in the grips of a persistent recession that is proving deeper and of longer duration than most economists anticipated. Also, there is a natural reluctance to make investment decisions during a time of uncertainty about whether the encouraging recent decline in interest rates is for real, or only a temporary aberration that will see rates take off again in response to projected massive federal deficits. From the outset, the attraction of one or more major retail stores has been regarded as essential to the downtown galleria concept. Without that element, the enterprise becomes questionable. Carrozza's record of development success in Dallas suggest that if he has been unable so far to put that link in place, any other developer would have faced the same difficulties.[293]

[292] "Developer of Galleria Loses Retail Contract," *Daily Oklahoman*, May 19, 1983.
[293] "Bowing to Reality," *Daily Oklahoman*, September 24, 1982.

Like the Myriad Gardens, the main issue that dogged the retail Galleria project was funding. The modern mall concept doesn't work without anchor stores, and neither Carrozza or his successor developer could find any to help get the retail project off the ground, at least not without a substantial government investment to help lure such anchor stores to join the project. The citizens refused to back such funding, and local private investors were having their own issues. Though it is far beyond the scope of this work (and has been well documented in Phillip L. Sweig's book *Belly Up: The Collapse of the Penn Square Bank*), this author would be remiss to not mention that some of the issues with funding this project and others that had not been fully completed by the start of the 1980s, like the Myriad Gardens, ties directly in to the failure of Oklahoma City's Penn Square Bank in July 1982. Founded in 1960, this local bank that operated out of Penn Square Mall, north of the downtown began to finance oil exploration and drilling in 1975 after a change of ownership. The bank would make loans and then sell shares in those loans to other banks, and quickly overextended itself. When oil prices dropped in 1981, the bank quickly became unstable as they no longer were receiving the type of revenue from the oil industry that helped keep this loan "participation" scheme afloat. The bank was closed on July 5, 1982, and more than $160 million in uninsured deposits were lost. In the aftermath, two other banks in other parts of the country that had been heavily involved in the loan participation scheme also went under, creating painful economic ripples across the country, which was felt very acutely in Oklahoma, which already relies so heavily on the price of oil to be high, that this failure of what had been seen as a prosperous, modern banking institution was a severe insult to injury.[294]

[294] Lynne Pierson Doti, "Penn Square Bank," *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, accessed October 12, 2021, https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=PE009.

The 1982 economic downturn was just one in a series of economic booms and busts that fill the history of Oklahoma City (as was pointed out by author Sam Anderson in his 2018 book *Boom Town*). This one, however, happened at just the right – or rather, wrong – time, and abruptly put the brakes on the city's master redevelopment plan. With massive, city-wide redevelopment project, municipalities run the risk of biting off more than they can chew, or having a plan take longer than expected, and the longer something this big goes on, the more you run the risk of unforeseen developments like what occurred at Penn Square Bank and the aftershocks that rocked both the state and national economy completely derailing even the best of plans.

Conclusion

Should our visitor from Chapter 1 choose to return to Oklahoma City in 1990, thirty years after their initial trip in the years just prior to the start of urban renewal in the Sooner State's capital, they would find themselves entering a very different city. For starters, it is more likely that they would have arrived at Will Rogers Airport, which sits southwest of OKC's downtown and is approximately a ten-mile trip by car. Passenger rail service no longer stops in at the old Santa Fe station (though service will resume in 1999 as part of the Amtrack system)[295] and bus travel has become less common for middle class travelers, though would still be an option. When our visitor arrived downtown, they might feel as if the city they journeyed to thirty years prior had been in some alternate universe for all that the city of 1990 had in similarity to it. The traveler would not be able to stay at the same hotel that they used on their previous journey, as most of them, like the Biltmore, had met the wrecking ball and were now just memories. Others, such as the Skirvin, had fallen on hard times and were currently sitting vacant. The downtown Sheraton, which went up during the renewal era to accommodate the guests of the convention center, would likely suffice for our returning visitor – after all, if he's coming to Oklahoma City then chances are he's here for a conference at the Myriad, or to conduct business with companies whose offices mostly filled out the towers and remaining older structures to create Pei's "east end" business district.

The streets would have seemed far less busy than they had in 1960 as well. Very little shopping remains downtown, with all the department stores having moved to the suburban malls as bulldozers, wrecking balls, and explosives cleared away blocks for the Galleria which everyone had hoped they'd returned to – a dream that was never to be. A few modest

[295] "*Heartland Flyer* led by P32-8 No. 200, 2010s.," Archives, Amtrak, accessed November 11, 2021, https://history.amtrak.com/archives/heartland-flyer-at-ft.-worth-2000s-1.

establishments remained downtown, primarily to service the office workers who populated the city's core from nine to five, after which OKC's downtown largely emptied of people unless a convention was going on. As one local author – and now former Mayor, Mick Cornett – put it, "by five-thirty you could fire off a cannon downtown and nobody would have noticed."[296] If our visitor from out of town wanted to do actual shopping or dining, a visit to Penn Square Mall, Crossroads Mall, Quail Springs Mall, or Shepherds Mall would have been their better bet. All in all, our return visitor would likely be glad when their convention or business meetings ended, so they could take a taxi – or more probably, their own rental car – back to Will Rogers Airport and fly back home.

Our out-of-town guest would not have been alone in this assessment, a fact that Mayor Ron Norick, the son of Jim Norick, who oversaw the start of the urban renewal movement in OKC, was about to have his nose rubbed in. Since taking office in 1987, the city's chief executive had been interested in bringing in a national corporation to create jobs. In 1991, Mr. Norick believed he had found it: United Airlines was looking to build an aircraft maintenance facility which had the potential to create as many as 7,000 jobs, and the mayor led an effort to put OKC in the running. In the end, he and other community boosters – and the voters themselves, did more than just put Oklahoma's capital in the running for this facility, they made it a top tier contender. The citizens approved a penny sales tax that would provide $120 million as an incentive for United, shocking the airline's executives back in Chicago, who had not believed Norick could pull off such a feat. In the end, however, the company announced that they would be building their new facility in Indianapolis, not OKC. The mayor and his team that

[296] Mick Cornett, *The Next American City: The Big Promise of Our Midsized Metros* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2018), 49-50.

had championed this effort were disappointed, and also surprised, believing that they had made the better financial offer. United then revealed that they had secretly sent several of their executives and their wives to visit Oklahoma City to see what there was to see, and their report upon their return to Chicago was damning. They told their board that, regardless of whether the airport was a good fit, or how wonderful the financial package was that OKC was willing to offer, they just could not imagine making their employees live there.[297]

Understandably, the failure to bring the United Airlines maintenance facility to Will Rogers Airport and along with it the failure to bring in such a lucrative number of future jobs led Mayor Norick and the city government and business community to conduct a good deal of soul searching, asking themselves what a city like Indianapolis had, that their city on the plains did not. A lot, as it turned out. Indianapolis had a thriving and revitalized downtown and had been able to attract a major-league sports team to their city, neither of which could be said for Oklahoma City. The executives from United had looked at both cities and decided that the quality of life was better in Indianapolis.[298] Norick, who wanted to help the city shake off the economic bust of the 1980s, now had to come up with a new plan to help breathe life back into the city. What he and his administration came up with was MAPS: Metropolitan Area Projects, a combination of civic improvement projects to be paid for over a five-year period with the same one-penny sales tax that had originally been floated as a way to entice United Airlines. These projects were all aimed at improving the aforementioned low quality of life: A new downtown sports arena that would have the capacity to house an NFL or NBA franchise; a new baseball park that would allow the city's AAA-league team to stay; a new downtown library to replace

[297] Cornett, *The Next American City*, 46-49.
[298] Moore and Moore, *Norick*, 197-99.

the one built in the 1950s; improvements on the downtown performing arts center – a WPA-era gem that had not been renovated since the 1960s; improvements to the city's public transit.[299]

The plan was ambitious, and grew from those initial proposals to also include: a tourist canal in the old Bricktown warehouse district as part of a bid to revitalize that area and make it a place for visitors to come and see; renovations to the Myriad Convention Center, which was now twenty years old and showing its age; a series of dams along the North Canadian River just south of downtown as part of an effort to turn that area into parkland. The full cost was estimated at $236 million. The vote for this plan occurred on December 14, 1993, and by a narrow margin of 54% to 46%, Oklahoma Cityans passed the MAPS program and its penny sales tax. Mayor Norick told supporters at the watch party that "I promise you that when it is all over, and the people of OKC are enjoying these projects, you will be hard pressed to find anyone who voted against it."[300] It had been a big gamble that ultimately paid off, likely thanks to the mayor's all-or-nothing strategy. All of the various projects under MAPS had been tied together on a single vote. The citizens couldn't choose piecemeal to support only the parts they liked. As the mayor explained, "Those that loved sports were working with those that loved the arts. Library enthusiasts were joining hands with people that were pushing for the water projects."[301]

Though this research is not about the younger Norick's MAPS program, not mentioning it in a paper discussing Oklahoma City's urban renewal project is just not possible. In the end, it was the incomplete nature of the earlier plan that ultimately laid the groundwork for the latter program to be possible. The so-called renaissance that OKC is said to have experienced in the wake of MAPS was made necessary, at least in part, due to the failure to complete the original

[299] Cornett, *The Next American City*, 54-55.
[300] Moore and Moore, *Norick*, 215-15.
[301] Cornett, *The Next American City*, 55.

Pei Plan. There were other factors that the city navigated that also created a need for a rebirth – any city so closely tied to the rise and fall of a particular industry like oil and gas cannot avoid those cycles of booms and busts. Even had the original plan from the 1960s been completed, and completed earlier, it is still likely that the slump in the economy that hit Oklahoma in the 1980s would have occurred, meaning that the 1990s and 2000s would have been a time of recovery and rebuilding. However, the flavor of the recovery that did happen was directly marked by successes and failures of OCURA's grand plans.

When looking at Oklahoma City's urban renewal endeavors, we can see the risky nature of such massive ventures. Cities are complicated systems, developing organically and chaotically over time – even cities that got started in one day like OKC. Roads, rails, and other networks hold these creations together following dictates of need and geography. Urban planners then step in and attempt to tame the chaos. Usually this is done on the outskirts, trying to control the expansion of cities. The urban renewal movement was an attempt at surgery in city centers, a dangerous proposition, cutting out places and infrastructure in the heart of a community where everything had traditionally been connected. In Oklahoma City's case, it was a high-risk operation that was nearly fatal and would take decades to recover from. City leaders allowed for the clearance of many historic structures and gutted parts of the downtown, all the while hoping to create a "city of tomorrow" in order to make OKC a leading metropolis in the region. It was ambitious and grand and very much in the go-big-or-go-home spirit that has been common in much of the city's history. The initial payout, however, was a downtown that had gaping holes in it and very little life outside the weekday working hours, along with inflicting severe upheaval on the African-American district to the east at a time that was already full change.

It is worth noting that the urban renewal movement did not, in and of itself, destroy or impoverish the Eastside. With the end of segregation – a battle fought and won in Oklahoma City just as hard as many other places in the region, with local heroes leading the way against an unjust system – black citizens of OKC started to move to new areas and shop in new places outside the section of the city they'd once been relegated to. This shift alone would likely have created an economic downturn in Deep Deuce and the neighborhoods to the north and east of the African-American commercial district. Urban renewal just sped up that process by creating more movement out of the area more quickly. Other decisions outside of the original urban renewal plan, such as the creation of I-235 connecting I-44 to the north of downtown to I-40 that ran just to the south of downtown, also contributed to this downturn, as Deep Deuce proper was physically cut off from the rest of the Eastside, spending the district into further decline until the 2000s, when developers bought up much of the land to build higher-end apartments to compliment the Bricktown entertainment district that was developing as planned under MAPS. The only major structure of importance remaining from the old Deep Deuce is Calvary Baptist Church where the sit-ins led by Clara Luper were planned. Today, it serves as a law office. The area around Second Street east of the rail line and Santa Fe Avenue is still called Deep Deuce, but it is not the same Deep Deuce, showing the effects of gentrification.

In the former Medical Center Renewal Zone, the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center and related hospitals have continued to grow and sprawl, occupying essentially all the land between Thirteenth Street to the north, Eighth Street to the south, Lottie Avenue to the east, and Lincoln Boulevard to the west. This part of urban renewal could be called a success, at least from the university's point of view, along with the local medical community. OU Medical center is highly regarded in the region, and has continued to expand up to present day.

Directly south of the complex, however, the story is different. Looking at aerial photos of the blocks south of Eighth Street, one sees a large amount of open land, clearly where houses once stood. The clearing that occurred during urban renewal succeeded, but the rebuilding afterwards faltered, though more on the fault of the federal government than on local leaders. Farther to the east, the John F. Kennedy Renewal Zone mostly filled in, thanks to private developers working with the city.

In 2021, downtown Oklahoma City bustles, and not just during the workday hours Monday through Friday. There are multiple places to live and there is now an elementary school located in the heart of the city at Sheridan and Walker Avenues. One estimate based on U.S. Census Bureau data suggests that over 2,700 people live downtown. Developers and businesspersons have developed several shopping and restaurant districts since MAPs began in 1993, including Midtown, Automobile Alley, and Film Row, in addition to the aforementioned Bricktown and new Deep Deuce. The Skirvin Hotel reopened in 2007, now a Hilton property, and several other upper-end hotels have opened downtown as well. The First National Bank Building at Robinson and Park Avenues, once the tallest building in the city prior to urban renewal, is undergoing major redevelopment, and is expected to reopen as a hotel, apartment, and shopping space in the near future. The Myriad Gardens underwent a major facelift in 2011,[302] and as part of the most recently completed MAPS program (MAPS 3), the city now has a new and much larger park just to the south of the Myriad Gardens, along with a new

[302] "History," Oklahoma City Botanical Gardens, accessed November 2, 2021, https://oklahomacitybotanicalgardens.com/plan-your-visit/history/.

convention center, replacing the original building that went up during renewal, which now finds itself home to a movie studio.[303]

The Metropolitan Area Projects program continues to be very popular in Oklahoma City, with MAPS 4 receiving voter approval On December 10, 2019. The newest iteration of the concept launched by Ron Norick – having been shepherded along by Mayor Humphrey, Mayor Liebmann, Mayor Cornett, and currently Mayor Holt – establishes several major projects. One of the flashier items is the building of a minor league soccer stadium to house the local club and also serve as a concert venue. Renovations of the Freedom Center (home of OKC's civil rights movement) along with construction of the Clara Luper Civil Rights Center as a museum for said movement is another major part of the new plan. MAPS 4 also includes: the construction of youth centers as well as senior wellness centers a family justice center, a new animal shelter, a so-called "Innovation District" to be established in near northeast Oklahoma City to encourage economic development, the creation of a "diversion hub" to help with crime prevention, renovation and upkeep of the Paycom Center (formerly known as the Chesapeake Arena), and the construction of a new arena at the Oklahoma City Fairgrounds. In addition, several hundred million dollars will be invested in city beautification, transit, parks, mental health and addiction services, sidewalk, bike lane, trail and streetlight improvements, and homelessness. Still funded by the penny sales tax over a period of eight years, MAPS 4 is expected to cost over $978 million.[304]

[303] "MAPS 3," The City of Oklahoma City, accessed November 2, 2021, https://www.okc.gov/government/maps-3.
[304] "MAPS 4," The City of Oklahoma City, accessed November 2, 2021, https://www.okc.gov/government/maps-4.

In the end, the question must be asked: was urban renewal good for Oklahoma City? In the short term, the answer is undoubtably no. OKC's downtown found itself on the verge of being a ghost town by the mid-to-late 1980s, at a time when I.M. Pei had envisioned a bustling urban core community that lived, worked, and played in the city center. The biggest problem with this plan (and others like it) stems from its top-down structure, with city leaders – both elected and unelected – coming up with grand plans and not always taking into account the needs of the populace. This then combined with economic currents outside the planners' control to create a serious mess for Oklahoma City for decades. In the long term, however, although urban renewal itself was not successful for OKC, it did lay the groundwork for the overwhelming success of MAPS. Had the city not been in such a desperate need for a turn about in the early 1990s, a need caused by the failure of urban renewal and the economic issues of the 1980s, Ron Norick and his administration would not have had to create such a plan that has created a positive change in many parts of the city, and has unquestionably reestablished a sense of "place" in the downtown of Oklahoma's capital. Part of MAPS continued success has been greater community involvement in the form of a citizens advisory board: each city council member nominates a member of the board from the ward they represent, along with two at-large members nominated by the full council, and one member of the council also serving a one-year rotational seat on the board. In addition, there are sixty other people involved in eight subcommittees that also feed information to the advisory board.[305] This increased involvement of local citizens, in addition to the projects having to be voter approved at least in broad outline, has overcome the top-down deficit of the old urban renewal era.

[305] "Citizens Advisory Board," MAPS 3, The City of Oklahoma City, accessed November 2, 2021, https://www.okc.gov/government/maps-3/citizens-advisory-board.

Reflecting back on the concept of space in the context of this research, a certain irony surfaces when we consider that the Pei Plan was implemented by Draper, Gaylord, McGee, Norick and other city leaders as an attempt to keep Oklahoma City's downtown area relevant at a time when the national trend was that of people largely abandoning urban centers for the suburbs. Their actions ended up accelerating this trend for Oklahoma's capital. Priority was also given to the big-ticket items such as the convention center, and not the more practical matters like downtown housing, which resulted in the nine-to-five community that largely emptied out into a ghost town after business hours. When we look at the Eastside and consider space, it can't be ignored that urban renewal was used to relocate people of color and the poor farther away from the state capitol – though this was more likely a sign of systemic, imbedded racism that has been part and parcel of American life in the century and a half since the Civil War than an overt assault on OKC's African-American community.

The ultimate lesson of the urban renewal experiment in OKC is this: A city cannot remake or restore itself without the consent and support of those who live, work and play there. Great minds can come up with the most visionary plans, plans that are award winning and awe-inspiring. When those plans are dictated down and instead of being voted on and discussed and reviewed by the governed, they run the risk of failure, because the citizens lack ownership. When the people of a community lack ownership in such a big project, a failure can simply be blamed on those in office who will then face consequences at the next election. Increased involvement, like we see with MAPS, makes sure that citizens are invested in the success of the program and will be more apt to hold officials to account to ensure success. As Oklahoma Citiyans look to the future, with a downtown core now vibrant and alive in a way envisioned by Pei in 1964 – at least in the broadest forms if not in the details, the issue now will be how to translate the new

economic success in a way that can benefit all residents, expanding the redevelopment and investment into more neighborhoods outside the core itself. The city's Eastside, in particular, still bears the scars of urban renewal. There are signs of new development, and the newest MAPs plan has projects specifically for this neighborhood, but it remains to be seen whether or not the community can avoid the worst pitfalls of gentrification.

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