

THE CITY LIVABLE

12 Modest Suggestions for Making Memphis Great

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Streets like this one in Chicago embody a key aspect of what makes cities successful: all the necessary ingredients of active pedestrian life.

Most of this presentation deals with bringing these ingredients to Memphis in full force.

This presentation, and all of my work, is based on the conviction that a successful city is one in which people choose to walk.

They will also drive and take transit (which supports walking). But, if people are not comfortable using Memphis as pedestrians, then it will never provide the high quality of life that is now demanded of our communities, and those with a choice will choose to locate elsewhere.

Part 1

Principles

A successful city = people walking. How do you get people to walk?

There must be:

- A reason to walk (balance of uses)
- A safe walk (reality and perception)
- A comfortable walk (space and orientation)
- An interesting walk (signs of humanity)

All four conditions must be met.

We will address each in turn.

A successful city = people walking. How do you get people to walk?

- A reason to walk (balance of uses)

Jane Jacobs:

“Almost nobody travels willingly from sameness to sameness. . . even if the physical effort required is trivial.” The first precondition to pedestrian life is a healthy and balanced mix of uses within walking distance.

The story of our cities losing their mix of uses in the 20th century is the story of how suburban thinking replaced urban thinking in the planning profession.

Historically, there are only two established ways of building communities: the traditional neighborhood, and suburban sprawl. The traditional neighborhood evolved naturally in response to man's needs. Suburban sprawl was invented in response to the automobile, and now covers the majority of developed land in the U.S. Its principles and techniques have also profoundly impacted the design of our cities, which often accommodate automobiles at the expense of pedestrian life.



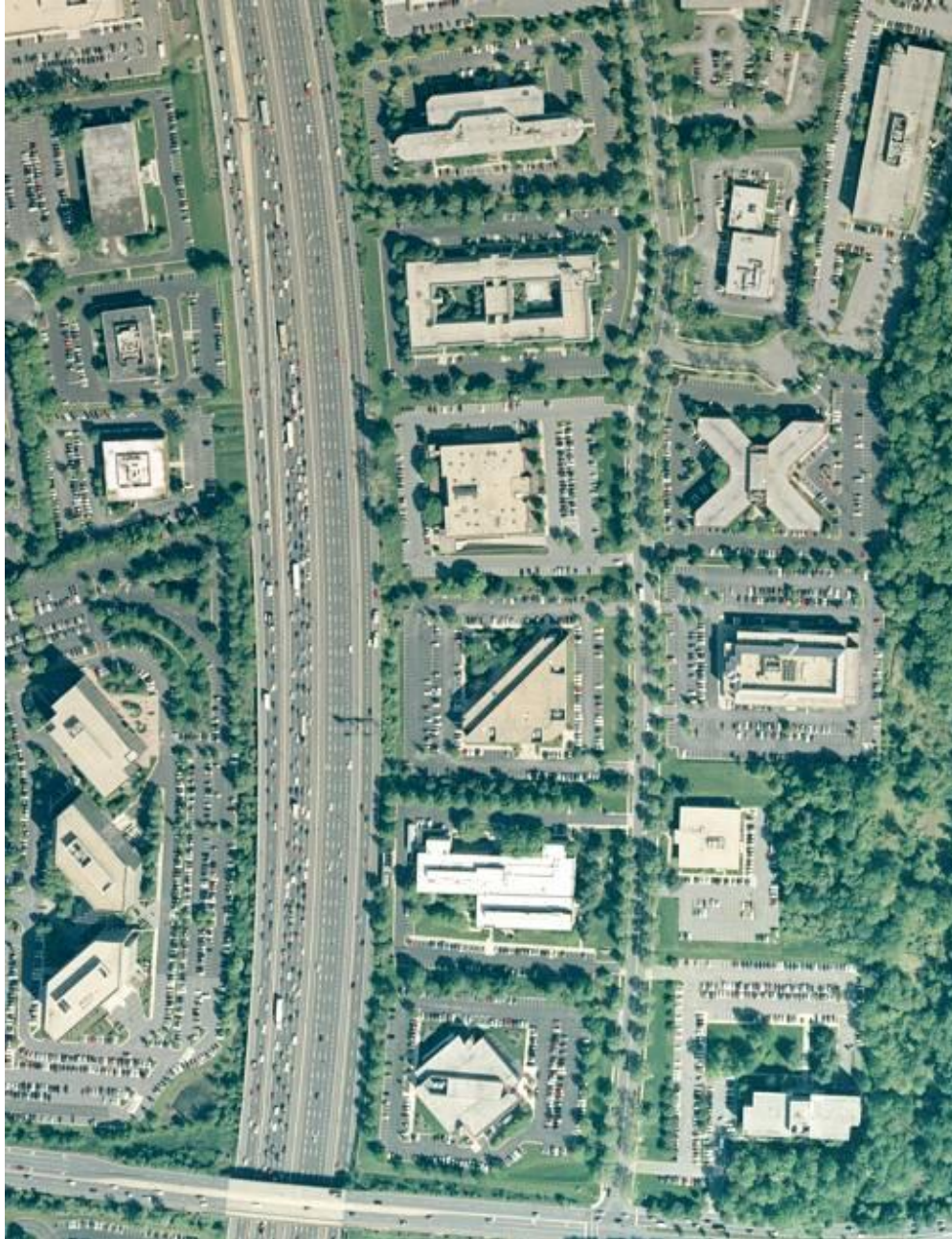
The traditional neighborhood is compact, walkable, and diverse, that is, fully mixed in use. Almost every aspect of daily life is within a close, comfortable walk. It is an extremely evolved and complex organism.



In contrast, suburban sprawl is not compact, walkable or diverse, and is extremely simple. It is composed of large areas of single use, each of which can be easily classified.



There are places to live.



There are places to work.



There are places to shop.



There are single-use institutional sites, usually consolidated and oversized, such as this high school to which no student will ever walk.



And the consolidated ball-field, the reason we need soccer moms (chauffeurs).



And finally, the massive automotive infrastructure necessary to reconnect all the areas we have oversized and separated.



With this,



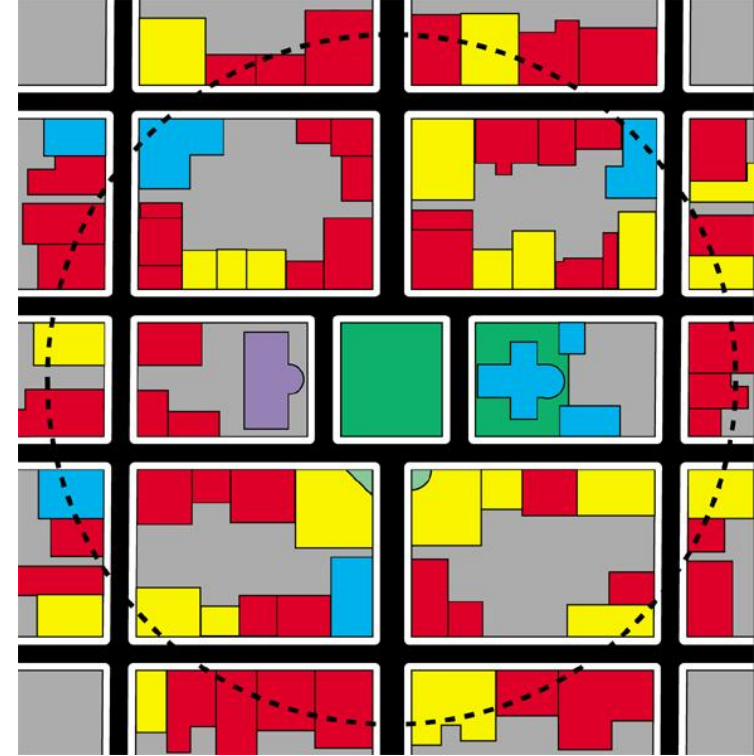
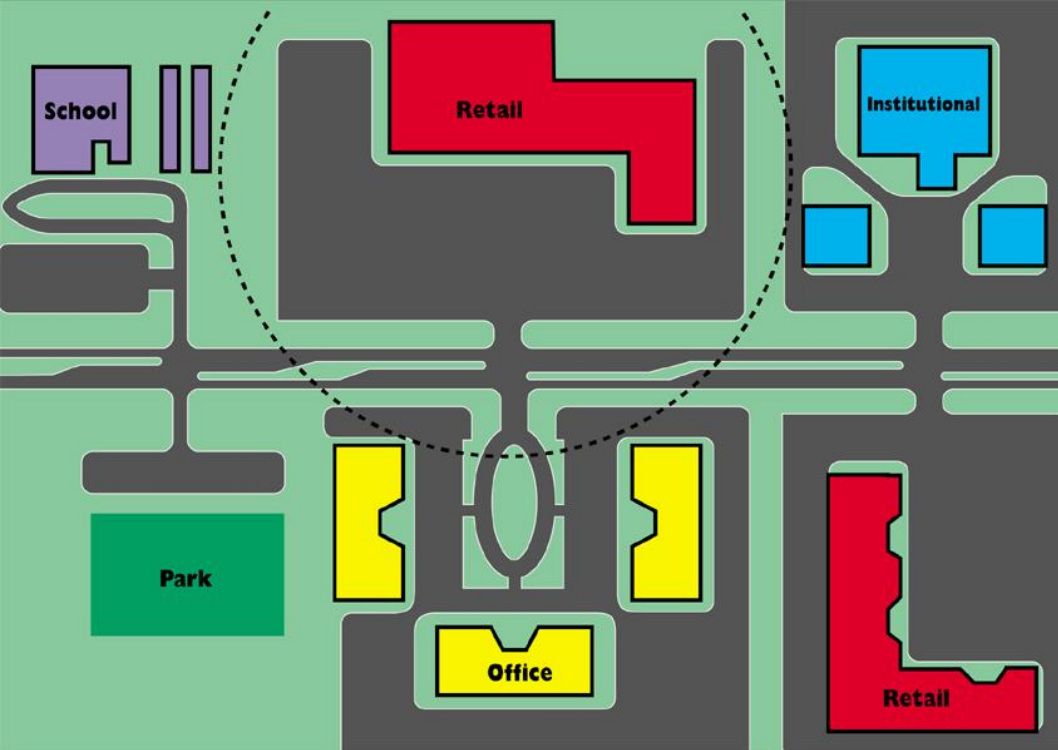
must come this



Sometimes to the point of silliness.



And a fair amount of frustration.



This comparison contrasts the two models, with sprawl on the left and the traditional neighborhood on the right. Both models contain the same land uses but, in the traditional neighborhood, those uses are proximate and of limited size, so that most of the aspects of daily life can be reached in a five-minute walk. This makes walking useful.



Downtown Memphis has made great strides in becoming more mixed-use.



But it contains some areas, such as your governmental campus, which would benefit from a greater integration of additional uses like dining, shopping, and housing.

Not all of your downtown will attract pedestrian life, nor does it all need to. But areas that are hoped to contain pedestrian activity should be planned to acquire the fullest possible mix of uses. For the largely single-use areas containing principally workplace, high quality walkable corridors to mixed use must be created.

A Successful city = people walking. How do you get people to walk?

- A reason to walk (balance of uses)
- A safe walk (reality and perception)

Once pedestrians have a reason to walk, they must also be safe, and feel safe, walking. This is not about crime – if you design a place to attract pedestrians, it will be too populous to attract crime. Rather, every aspect of the streetscape must help the pedestrian to feel unthreatened by automobiles. Each detail of the street must cause cars to drive slowly, and limit the pedestrians actual and perceived exposure to being hit.

Cars are not the problem. Cars moving quickly near pedestrians are the problem.

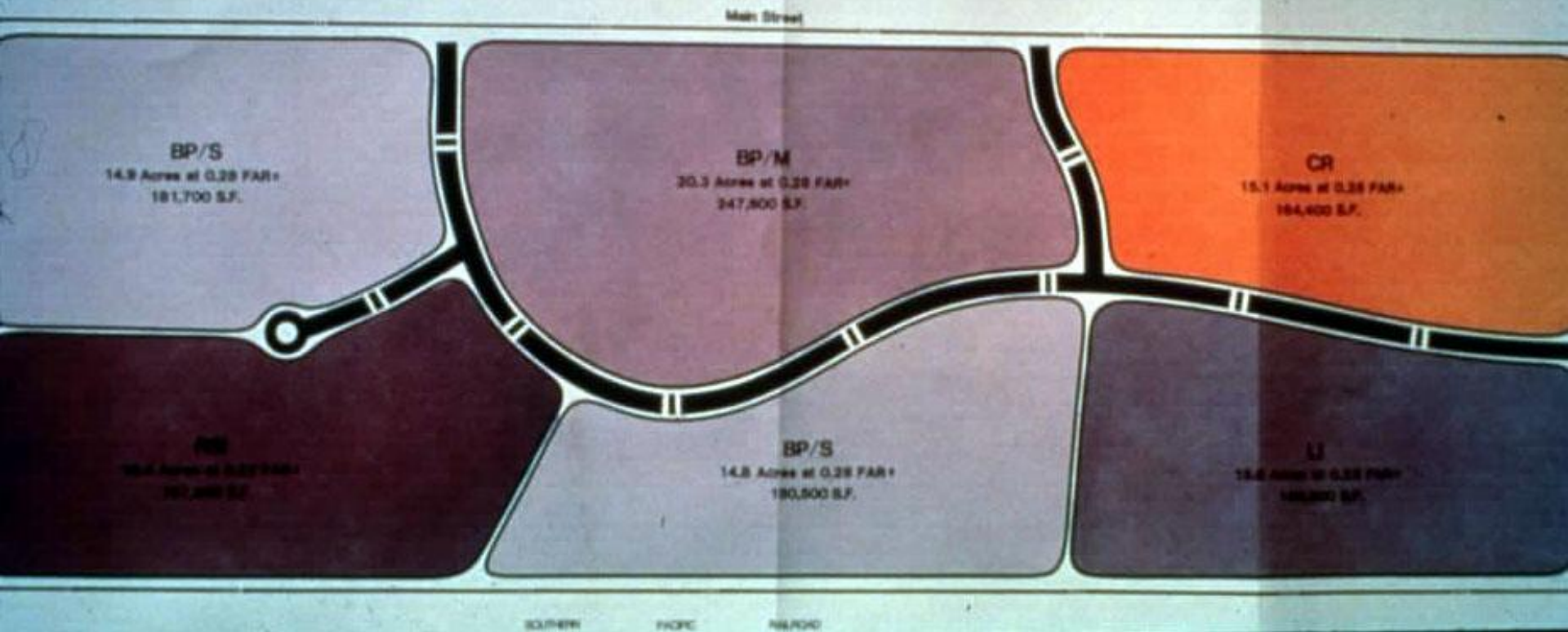
The principal criteria of a safe and safe-feeling streetscape are:

- Small blocks
- Few, narrow driving lanes
- Two-way traffic
- Parallel parking, and
- Street trees

Every street in your community that you wish to attract pedestrians should satisfy all five criteria.



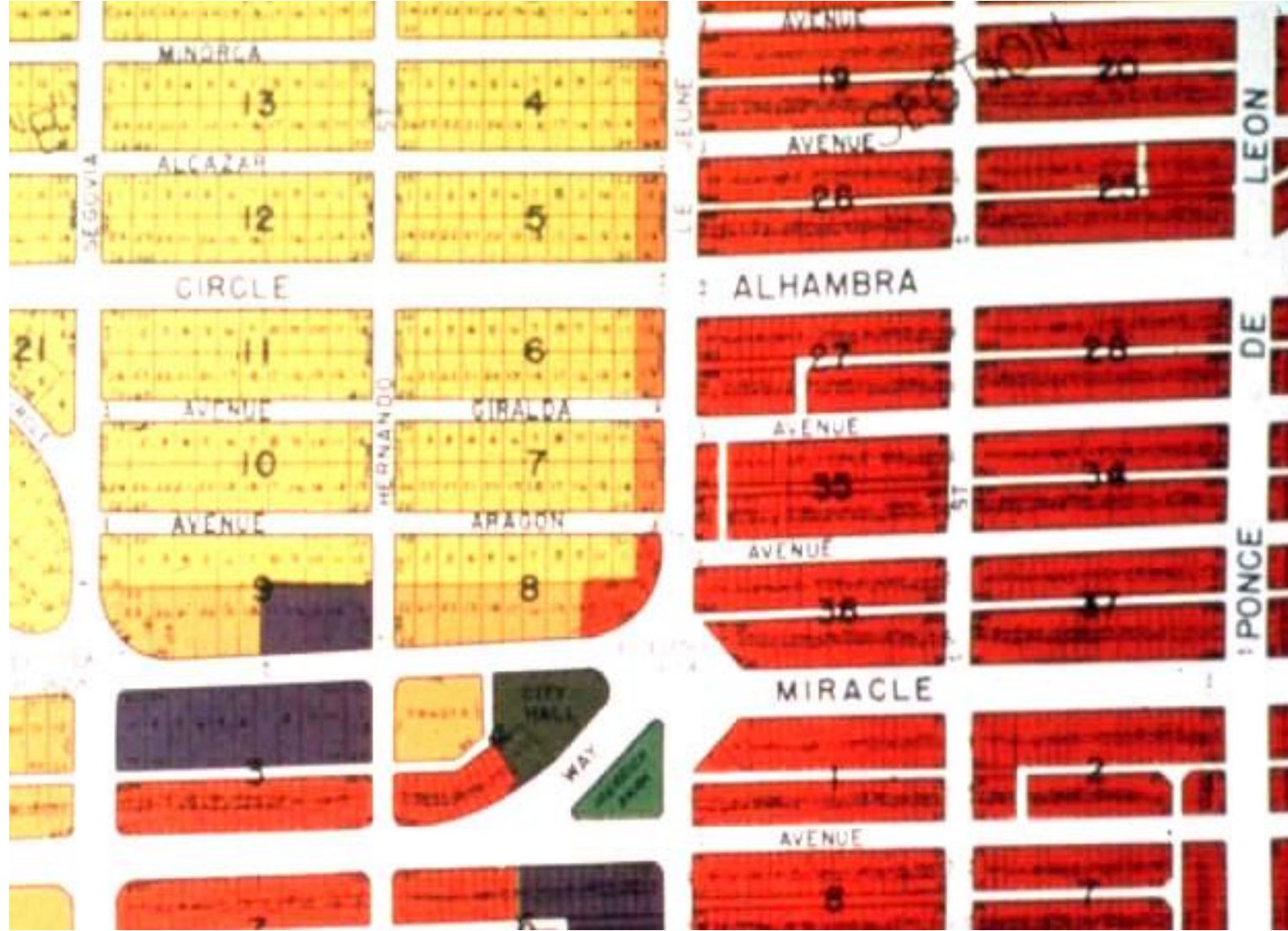
There are two models of street network design. The suburban model has few streets of great capacity, and does not support pedestrian life. It looks like this.



In plan, it looks like this. The same traffic engineers who create these systems every day in the suburbs are also creating street designs in your city, using the same manuals and templates. They are charged with moving as many cars through your city as quickly as possible. That is their job, and they do it well.



The other model of street network design looks like this. It is the traditional neighborhood model, in which many small streets disperse traffic over a large area. In all of Alexandria, Virginia, only a few streets contain more than one lane in each direction.



This model dominated planning through the 1930s. This map of Coral Gables, Florida, shows how providing many streets allows each street to be small.



Downtown Memphis is also blessed with a tight network of many streets, which means that each street can be small. There are now highways for those that wish to bypass downtown. For those who wish to move within it, automobile speed should not be allowed to trump pedestrian safety.



In addition to the number of lanes, the width of each lane also has a profound effect on driver speed and pedestrian safety. The past half-century has witnessed a dramatic inflation in lane widths. Residential streets that used to be 20' wide are now often 40' wide or wider. These wider lanes correspond to higher design speeds that endanger pedestrians and drivers alike.



These two photographs, taken from the same height, show how many subdivision street widths effectively doubled between 1960 and 1990. The same standards have also been applied to the downtowns of our cities.



As in this Miami Beach neighborhood, new standards result in sidewalks being cut in half during routine curb maintenance. Cars now drive faster while pedestrians get the squeeze.

Width of streets is narrowed by popular demand

BY HELEN NIDMIEC
STAFF WRITER

BIRMINGHAM

Complaints from residents about mandated street widths has resulted in an emerging street-width policy for improved roads in Birmingham.

The City Commission has narrowed the standard width for non-fire route streets and is expected to set a width for fire routes within a month.

"We need information and then we need to officially designate fire routes," said city commissioner Archie Damman III.

The city's engineering and public services department will present a report on street widths concerning fire routes at today's city commission meeting.

The new policy is that non-fire route streets can be 20-foot wide with parking on one side of the street or 26-foot wide with parking on both sides of the street.

Nine residents attended the Jan. 18 long-range planning session where the street width policy changed. Susan Giennapp, who has endorsed narrower streets, had given the commission a report from Portland, Oregon that showed how it had narrowed streets.

The idea of "traffic calming" and residential streets that had more of a small town flavor came up a number of times during the Downtown Master Plan study.

The policy affects the approximately half of Birmingham's roadways that still don't have curbs, gutters and storm sewers and currently are classified as unimproved roads. The city has 45 miles of improved streets; 25 miles of unimproved streets without curbs or gutters; and 20 miles of unimproved streets with curbs.

The petition of three streets in

the neighborhood immediately south of the downtown prompted the commission to rethink its policy which was reaffirmed last year as 29-foot wide. On citizen petitions to pave and improve the streets, the city engineering department had specified that improved streets would be done at 29-foot widths.

"I support this concept," said city commissioner Eleanor Stewart of the new widths. "We could handle something with options. I was very influenced by reading the Portland report. After the master plan, I've become more aware of what our streets look like."

City Manager Thomas Markus still has reservations about narrower streets. Portland, he noted, has a public transit system where Birmingham residents are reliant upon their cars and need more parking space.

Additionally, Markus expects that the narrower streets will become less used for cut-through traffic.

"When we downsize one neighborhood street, that will force traffic on the wider streets," Markus said.

Birmingham went with a 29-foot street width to allow safety vehicles, such as fire trucks and ambulances, to pass if cars are parked on both sides of a street. The large fire trucks are 8-foot, 10-inches wide. The street width policy last year was reaffirmed by a 4-3 city commission vote, though the topic of street width surfaced at every commission meeting where road improvements were discussed.

In some places, citizens are fighting back. Birmingham, Michigan, is one of many cities where traffic specialists are not allowed to design roads according to the sole criterion of maximum flow.

Pedestrian safety is taken in to account, and it is understood that lanes should be no wider than the measurement that corresponds to the desired automobile speed.



Many Memphis streets, like Peabody Place, have travel lanes of 14' or more. These are highway lane widths, created for speeds of 70 MPH and higher. Why are downtown streets designed for illegal speeds? Whenever a street is rebuilt, it should be made with 10' travel lanes to encourage non-highway speeds. In the meantime, this change can be accomplished through re-striping.



Downtown Memphis is lucky to have only one significant one-way pair: Second and Third Streets. Most mid-sized cities are cursed by dozens, and are reverting them back to 2-way because they cause speeding.

The signalization on Second and Third keep traffic fairly well under control, but a reversion to two-way traffic would improve walkability. It is also worth noting that this one-way pair, in combination with the I-40 ramp configurations, robs the Pinch District of vitality, because all traffic exits the highway heading south. Reconfiguring Second and Third two two-way could be combined with a new ramp layout that allows drivers the choice of heading south or north.



Parallel parking is an important element in protecting the sidewalk from speeding cars. A sidewalk unprotected by parking is not truly attractive.



Memphis has many streets that have lost their parallel parking in favor of increased traffic flow. This lack of parking is one of many reasons that these streets fail to attract pedestrians.



Street trees are also a key component of pedestrian safety, protecting the pedestrian from traffic as parked cars do. They are especially necessary if parallel parking cannot be provided.



Many streets in downtown Memphis are utterly lacking in trees of any quality. The goal – worth private funding – should be a continuous tree canopy throughout the city.

A Successful city = people walking. How do you get people to walk?

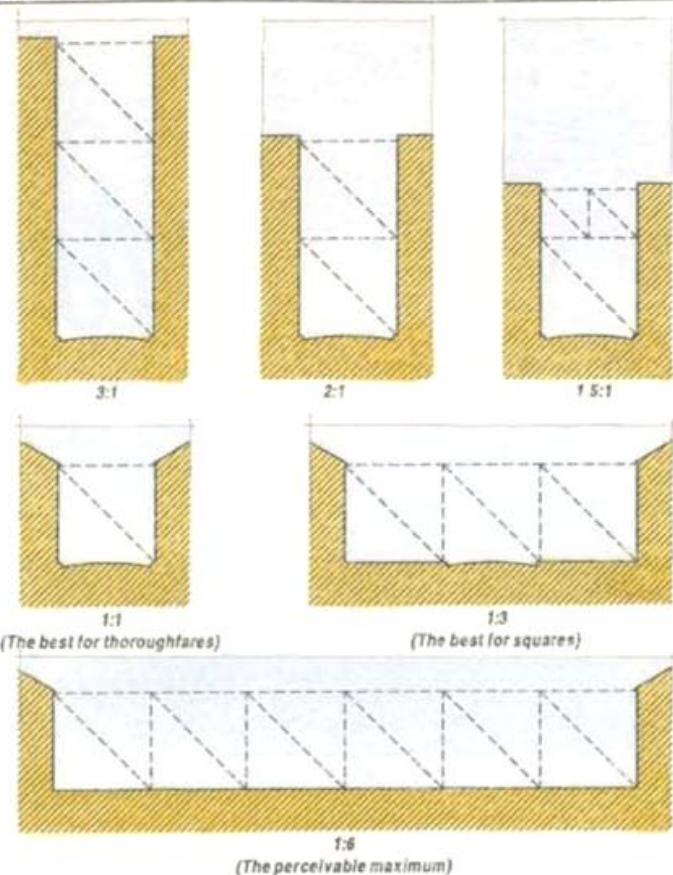
- A reason to walk (balance of uses)
- A safe walk (reality and perception)
- A comfortable walk (space and orientation)

For pedestrians to feel most comfortable, they must feel enclosed. This is counterintuitive – we do like open space – but all animals demand both prospect and *refuge*. We have developed this need over millennia and it cannot be unlearned quickly. That is why we prefer places that have strong edges, with street walls that provide spatial definition to the public realm. Many streets fail to attract pedestrians because they lack edges that are tall enough and close enough to provide that sense of refuge.

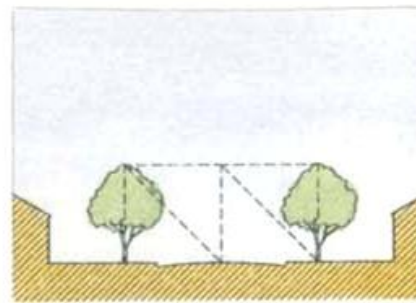


We choose to vacation in places like Paris and Split (Yugoslavia, shown here) because they provide places like this. Planners call these “outdoor living rooms.”

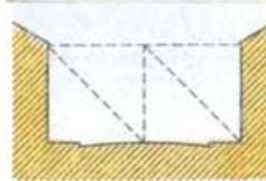
SPATIAL DEFINITION BY HEIGHT-TO-WIDTH RATIO



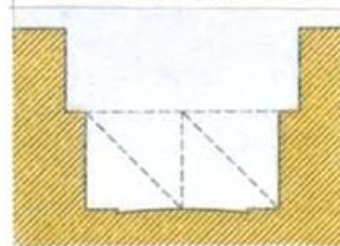
SPATIAL DEFINITION IN SECTION



Spatial enclosure by tree canopy



Spatial enclosure by building height



Spatial enclosure by recess line

Street height to width ratios have been studied since the Renaissance. If a space gets too wide for its height, spatial definition is lost, along with the feeling of containment and comfort.

- **Spatial Definition:** the fabric achieved when fronting facades are aligned in a coherent manner, and the defined space does not exceed a certain height-to-width ratio.
- **Height-to-Width Ratio:** the proportion of spatial enclosure related to the physiology of the human eye. If the width of space is such that the cone of vision encompasses less street wall than open sky, the degree of spatial enclosure is slight. As a general rule, the tighter the ratio, the stronger the sense of place and, often, the higher the real estate value. See: **Sense of Place**

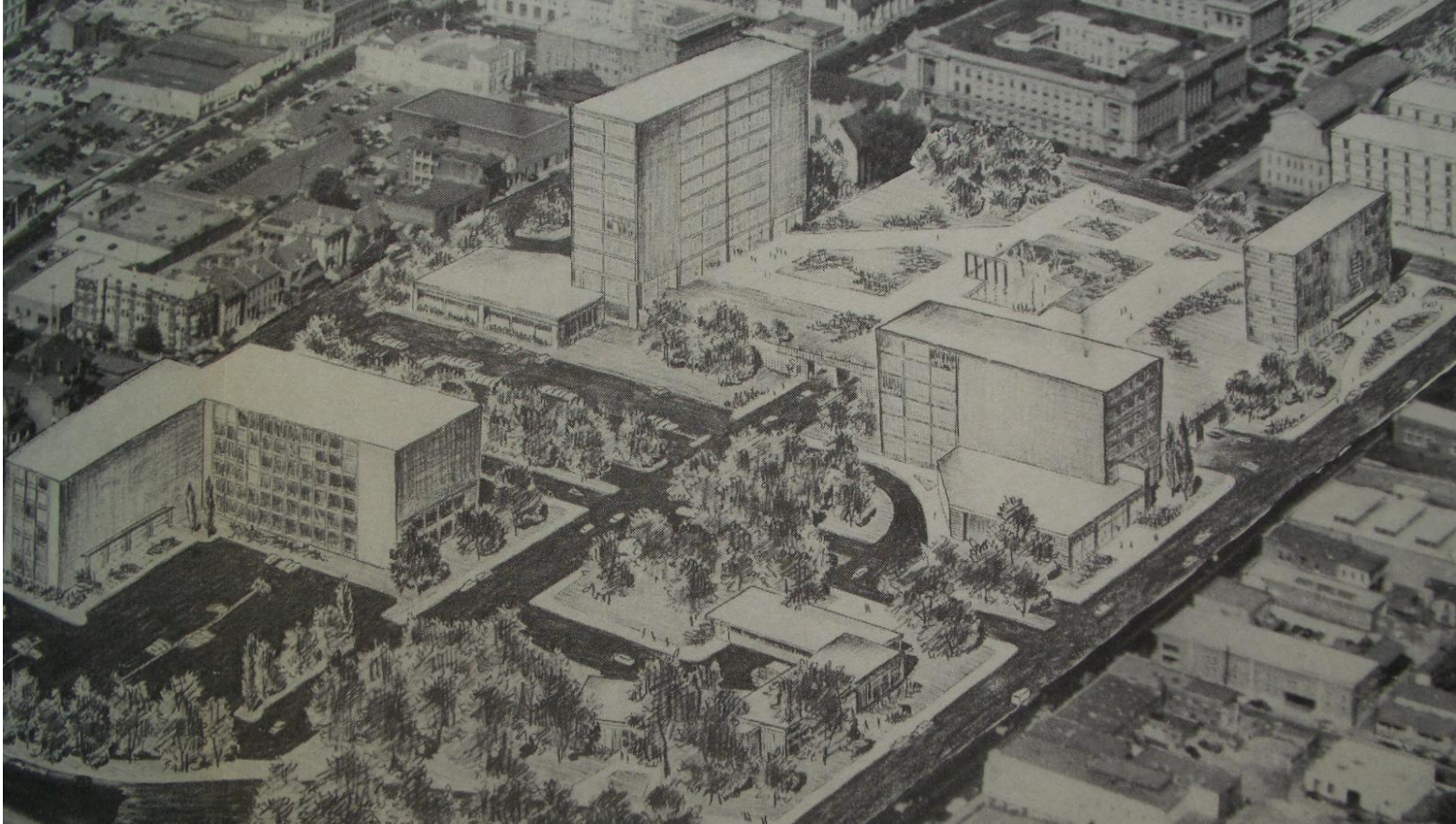
- **Spatial Enclosure:** the defining elements of a public space provided by facades with disciplined tree planting as an alternative. Trees aligned for spatial enclosure are necessary on thoroughfares that exceed the maximum height-to-width ratios.
- **Enclosure:** a physical attribute of thoroughfares and open spaces, contributing to a sense of place. Enclosure of the public realm involves the delimitation of the public space by frontages as a room is defined by its walls. Controlling the degree of enclosure is one of the principal variables in the creation of an urban-to-rural transect. Enclosure is adjusted through the selection of frontage types or by a build-to line specifying the minimum building frontage and the minimum building height.



Traditional urban fabric is made up of buildings that shape space. Often, the buildings can be quite irregular in order to create public spaces that are well-shaped. What matters is not the design of the buildings, but the design of the spaces between them.



Modernist urban fabric is made up of buildings floating freely in space. Each is a sculptural object meant to be admired in the round. This conception of planning, now discredited, results in oddly-shaped places that lack spatial definition.



Modernist planning has taken a limited toll on Memphis, most visibly in the Civic Center. This image shows Harlan Bartholomew's 1956 proposal that inspired the current layout, in which object-buildings float in space.



The other major contributor to a lack of spatial definition is a preponderance of surface parking lots, each of which creates a tear in the traditional urban fabric. Along important pedestrian routes, these street edges should be incentivized for development, with parking placed in mid-block structures, located off-site or, in some cases, eliminated.



Street trees are important for comfort as well as safety. They help to enclose space, make climates more mild, and improve air quality. They also contribute mightily to real estate value.



The Cap at Union Station in Columbus, Ohio, is a recent project that shows how spatial definition across a previously inhospitable seam can dramatically improve pedestrian activity in both of the neighborhoods that it connects.



- A reason to walk (balance of uses)
- A safe walk (reality and perception)
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- An interesting walk (signs of humanity)



Our house is built with the living room in the back, so in the evenings we sit out front of the garage and watch the traffic go by.

Humans are among the social primates. Nothing interests us more than other humans. To attract pedestrian life, the fronts of buildings must expose -- or at least suggest -- human activity. Blank walls, parking structures, surface parking lots and even plant life are a poor substitute for windows and doors.



In Memphis, one can find blank walls and service doors along key pedestrian routes.



Many streets are lined by parking structures.
The message: people don't live here, cars do.



Memphis has some very interesting parking garages, but almost nothing is less interesting to pedestrians than walking along the edge of a parking lot.



What many cities now demand: It takes only 20' of building to make the edge of a parking structure delightful. This street is in Charleston, South Carolina.



Just a reminder: you *can* solve your parking problem. But do you want to? As long as parking costs less to the user than it is really worth, it will comply with the economics of the “free good,” in which demand always outstrips supply.



Developments like South Bluffs put walls and gates against city streets, rather than building fronts with doors and windows. This is partially a response to high-speed street geometries, but it is also an anti-urban impulse that privileges privacy over walkability.



This image shows the spectrum from anti-urban to pro-pedestrian, where buildings face the street, and landscape further enhances the environment. Form-based land-use codes, which Memphis is investigating, should require the latter outcome in areas designated for heavy pedestrian activity.



In conclusion: we know what types of places attract pedestrian life, and they can be easily emulated.

In many cases they are beautiful, but often they are not.



But like this street in San Francisco, which attracts people despite its messiness, they all share four qualities: they are mixed-use, safe, comfortable, and interesting.

The Rise of Sprawl

SUBURBAN

and the Decline of

NATION

the American Dream

Andres Duany, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, and Jeff Speck

For further information, please refer to Suburban Nation, which I wrote with my former colleagues Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk. They deserve credit for most of the ideas discussed here.

Part 2

Recommendations

TWELVE MODEST PROPOSALS

General:

- 1. Build Memphis for humans, not just cars.**
- 2. Stop demolishing your economic advantage.**
- 3. Plant trees.**
- 4. Organize neighborhoods around schools around neighborhoods.**
- 5. Fix downtown first.**
- 6. Practice urban triage.**

Specific:

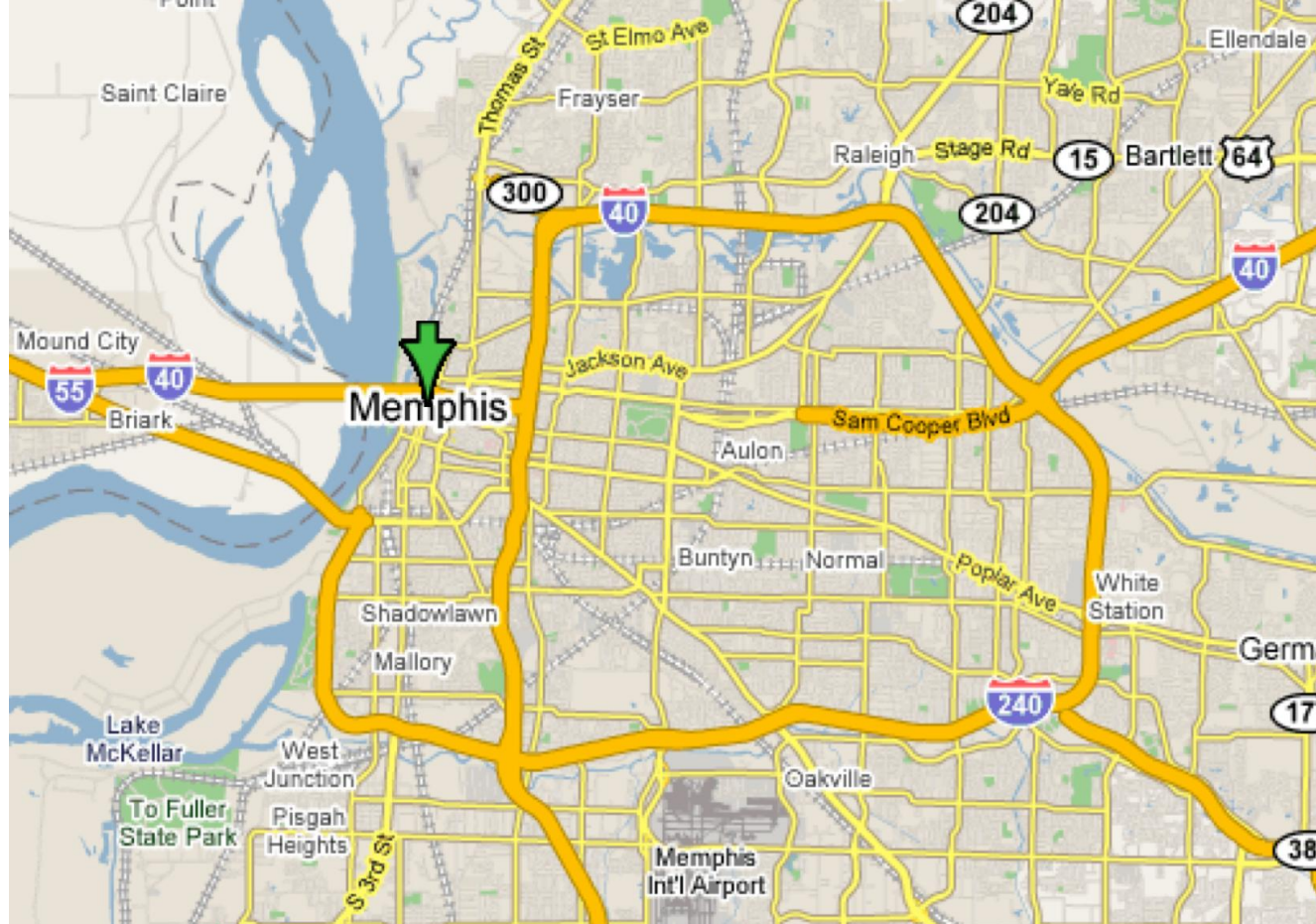
- 7. Fix the Third Street Promenot.**
- 8. Heal the Main / South Main knuckle.**
- 9. Build the missing monument.**
- 10. You deserve just a little urban waterfront.**
- 11. Put cars back on Main.**
- 12. Stop the Outer Loop.**

1.

Build Memphis for humans, not just cars,

or:

Don't leave the design of your city to the highway engineers.



Downtown Memphis is well served by highways from the north and south, but east-west traffic finds itself on surface roads like Poplar, which are continually widened in an attempt to alleviate traffic.



Well east of downtown, Poplar is by necessity an automotive-oriented, anti-pedestrian strip, a place that will never attract walking in any volume. Businesses respond to its highway geometrics by placing their parking lots in front, further eroding the pedestrian experience. For much of Poplar, this is unavoidable.



But as Poplar crosses I-240 and enters the heart of the city, much of its traffic load has been diverted onto other streets. For this location, between the new Legends housing development and the new LeBonheur Children's Hospital, it would be possible to introduce trees and parallel parking as a gateway to downtown. Both Legends and LeBonheur need to respond with buildings and front doors directly facing the street.

From this point west, Poplar, as the principal axis into downtown, needs to be beautified and made more pedestrian and bike-friendly. However, it will remain principally automotive, and it is rather in your downtown core that truly pedestrian-friendly streets are possible, and are generally lacking due to the work of your highway engineers.

Most cities in America suffer from giving free rein to traffic engineers, who do their job well, constantly improving through-flow at the expense of pedestrian viability. In the absence of other leadership, these engineers effectively become city planners, determining the physical future of their communities more profoundly than any other single influence.



It must be admitted that Memphis suffers from this syndrome more extremely than most. There are few American downtowns where traffic engineers have so consistently applied high-speed automotive geometrics to the direct detriment of pedestrian activity and civic life.



It makes sense for Auction Avenue to take on highway geometrics as it crosses to Mud island. But the same 70 MPH lane widths are applied east of Front Street as well, creating an unpleasant barrier between the Pinch and Greenlaw districts.



These highway geometrics make even less sense in the heart of downtown. Increased flow for peak events can be enabled by providing multiple paths, and when necessary, additional lanes. But *wider* lanes increase speed and danger while not measurably improving flow.



Streets continue to be widened – here against Bridges -- in anticipation of traffic that will only be generated by the widening itself. One hopes that the youth there are old enough to drive, since few parents will allow their children to walk or bike in this environment.

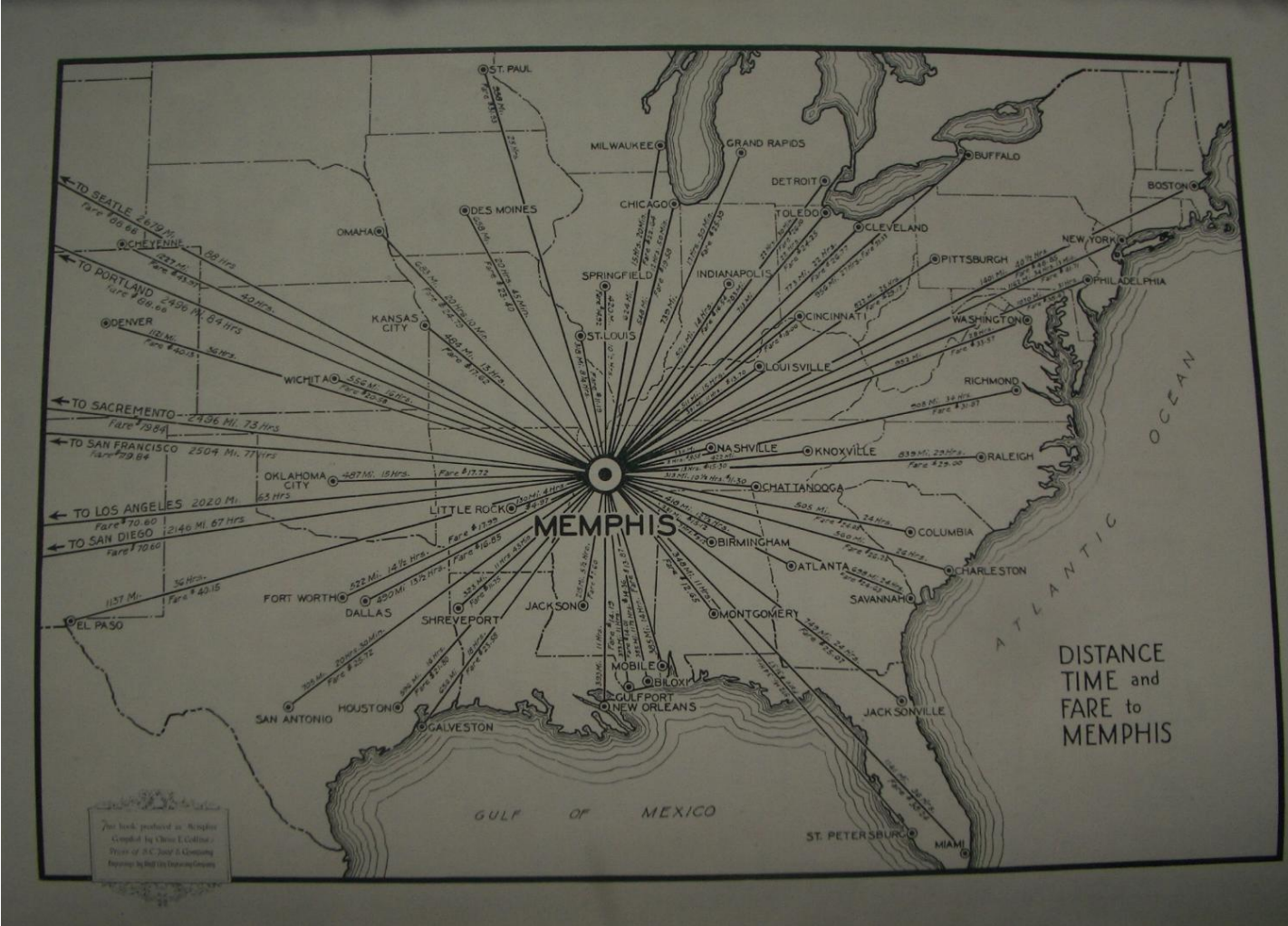




It is clear from streets being rebuilt, like Mill, that your standards are only becoming more excessive. Viewed in a national context, these streets are preposterous. It can be said unequivocally that Memphis needs to change either its engineering or its engineer.

2.

**Stop demolishing your
economic advantage.**



Memphis, shown here in a 1920's convention brochure, is competing nationally for residents and businesses. Every decision it makes about its physical form needs to be made in the light of its competitive position.



BLAKE BUILDING, 2005. The Masonic Lodge was torn down in the early 1900s and replaced with the Germania Bank Building. The Blake Building, constructed in the late 1950s, occupies the site today.



MASONIC LODGE, 1895. After the fall of Nashville during the Civil War, Gov. Isham Harris convened the state legislature on this site in early 1862. The state archives were also briefly stored here.

MARKET HOUSE, 2005. Built in 1899 as a market for a variety of businesses including groceries, dentists, barbers, and shoemakers, the Beale Street Market was one-stop shopping for residents of the famous neighborhood.



HANDY PARK, 2005. The Market House was razed in 1930 to make way for a public park in honor of W. C. Handy. A statue of Handy was added in 1960, and for many years, the park was host to local musicians and jug bands. In 1998, the park was reconfigured with a modern stage and gift shop. Today the sounds of the blues can still be heard echoing down Beale.



Each of these pages shows a beautiful historic building that has been demolished, as well as its replacement.



J. K. PORTER RESIDENCE, 1895.
 The J. K. Porter Residence was on the southeast corner of Vance and Orleans. The house stood just west of the St. Agnes Academy. Vance Avenue was known for its many fine homes at the turn of the 19th century; now they are but a memory.



VANCE AVENUE MIDDLE SCHOOL, 2005. Vance Avenue Middle School opened in 1971 at the corner of Vance and Orleans. Today it serves more than 550 students in grades six, seven, and eight.



MADISON AT THIRD, 1915.
 An early taxi would take you anywhere for five cents, while reminding you to "Shop at Brys." The Cordova Hotel on the right was one of Memphis's early hotels. Just up the street was the Southern Bowling Alley.



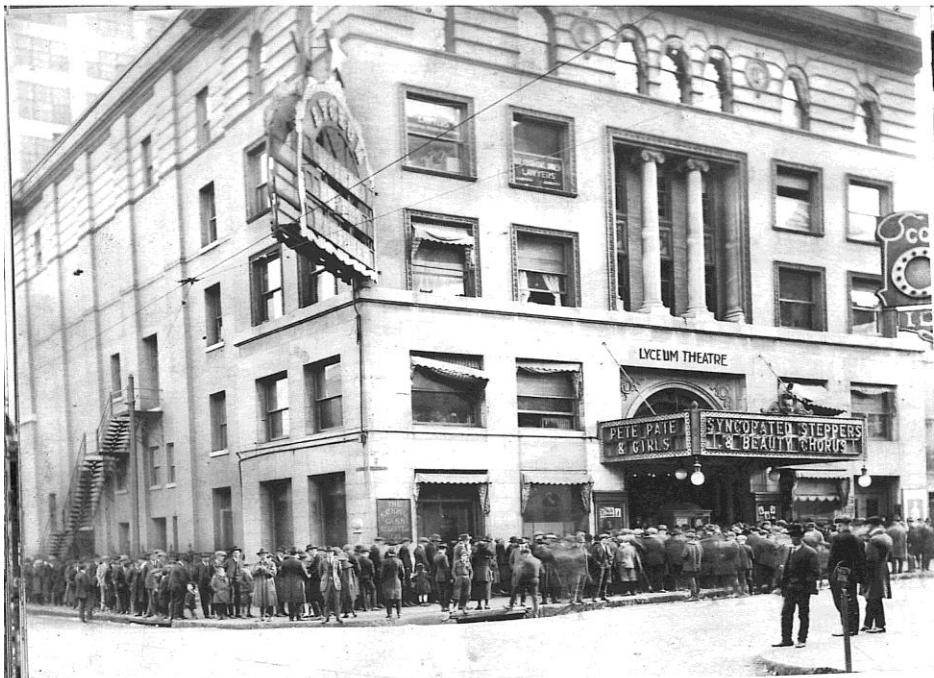
MADISON AT THIRD, 2005. Today Third and Madison is quite different. The large building in the background is the Exchange Building, constructed in 1910.

Most of these demolitions and replacements were made in the name of economic development, with the idea that historic preservation and economic development were somehow two opposing alternatives.

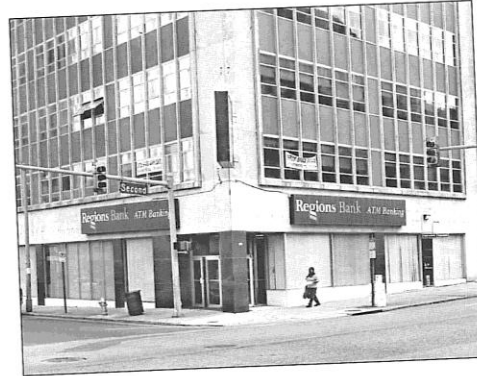
PARKING CAN BE FUN, 2005. Today the site of Lowes Palace is a parking garage. Often large parties and concerts are held on its roof.



LOWES PALACE, 1951. Located on Union Avenue between Front and Main, the Lowes Palace was one of the largest movie palaces in Memphis. Elvis Presley worked briefly as an usher just around the corner at the Lowes State theater.



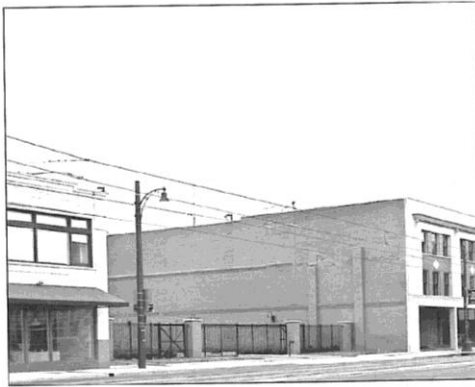
LYCEUM THEATER, 1935. Built in 1894 by H. L. Brinkley, the Lyceum Theater was a legitimate theater until 1919 when it turned to Vaudeville, motion pictures, and boxing. It closed in 1935.



LYCEUM THEATER, 2005. Today the site of the Lyceum Theater is occupied by the Regions Bank Building.

“...either we have historic preservation OR we have economic growth.” As discussed by the economist Donovan Rypkema, this is a false choice.

LYRIC THEATER, 2005. Today the site where so many were entertained sits empty. In 1921, the American Legion held a minstrel show there, with a parade led by Mayor Rowlett Paine to advertise the show.

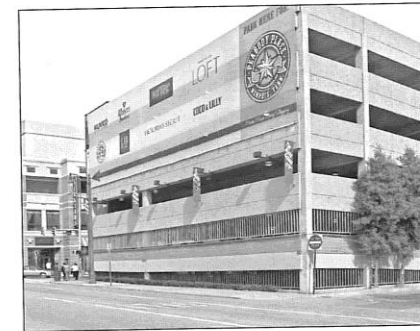


LYRIC THEATER, 1935. Opening in 1908 on Madison, the Lyric was a 1,400-seat musical theater. The best in stage and vaudeville played there, including Sarah Bernhardt and Efram Zimbalist. In its later years, prizefights were held there. The theater burned on January 23, 1941.

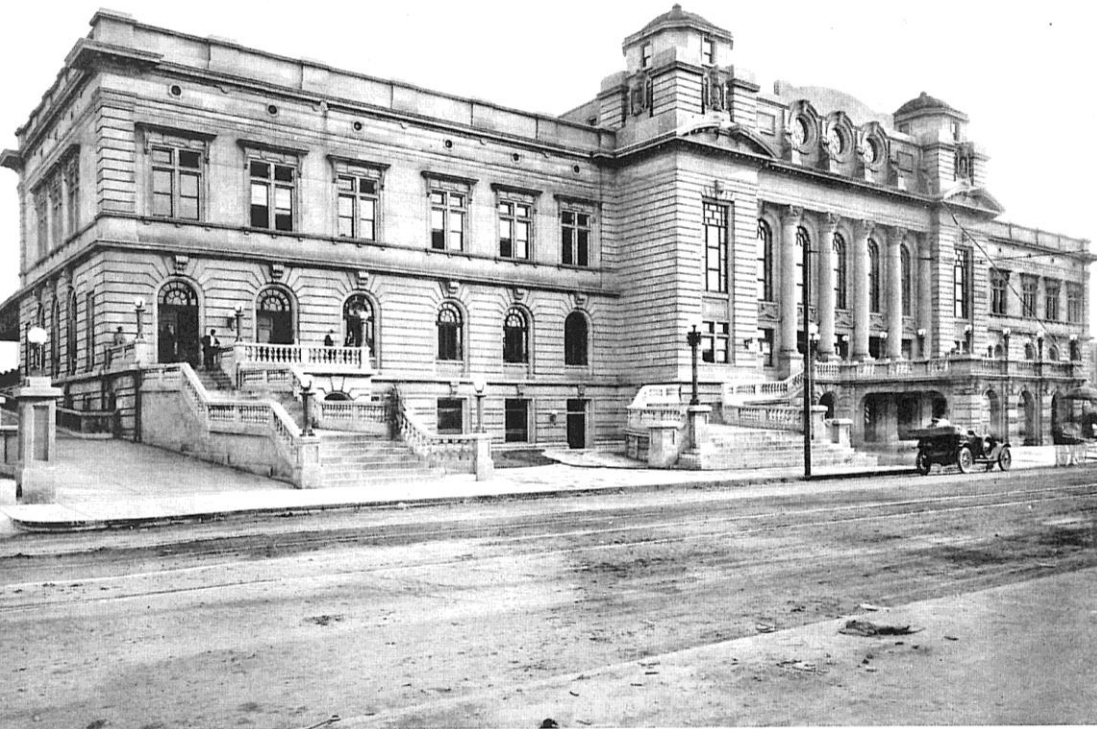


CENTRAL BAPTIST CHURCH, 1890. Located on Second Street between Beale and Gayoso, this structure literally stood above all others. Built by Edward Culliatt Jones between 1868 and 1885, the church was best known for its 125-foot steeple, the tallest in the city. Memphis had more than 90 churches in or near downtown. Today fewer than 20 are still standing.

PARKING GARAGE, 2005. The church and its grand steeple were torn down early in the 20th century. The land was used for many years as a filling station and parking lot. The modern multistory parking garage was built for Peabody Place in the late 1990s.



“Increasingly around the world, historic preservation is becoming a uniquely effective vehicle for economic growth.”



“In economics, it is the differentiated product that commands a monetary premium. A community which in the long term wants to be a ‘valuable place, however that is defined, needs to identify its attributes that add to its differentiation from anywhere else.”

- Donovan Rypkema



UNION STATION, 1912. Located on Calhoun at Third, Union Station was, to many, the most beautiful station in Memphis. In the 1940s, the grand station had 17 trains arriving daily. It was demolished in 1967.

POSTAL SERVICE BUILDING, 2005. Built in 1970 and designed by Francis Mah and Walk Jones, the United States Automated Handling Facility, as it is formally known, replaced the grand Union Station.



Bruce School – 1205 Carr Avenue Built 1908, demolished 2003.



A B Hill School – 1362 Latham Built 1909, demolished.



Kortrecht School – 162 Webster Avenue Built 1873, last year of operation 1960/61, demolished.



Christine School – 164 Market Avenue (Market & Third) Built 1872, last in operation 1963/64, demolished.

These are some of the school buildings that Memphis has demolished in recent years.



Crockett School – 317 Poplar Built 1899, became the MCS Administration Building, demolished 1962.

Memphis ranks sixth in the U.S. in its number of nationally registered historic buildings. In addition to your musical heritage, you have an equally impressive and unique architectural heritage. It is one of your key economic differentiators. Yet historic teardowns are still occurring in Memphis, often without warning.



When faced with a historic building that is currently unused or under-performing, remember that old adage:

“Don’t do something. . . Just stand there!”

3.

Plant trees.



As already mentioned, Memphis has a severe lack of tree cover on its streets. When planted, trees do exceptionally well in your soil and climate. All the more disappointing, then, that you compare so unfavorably with other American cities on this measure.



Even some of your better streets are entirely devoid of trees. Imagine how nice South Main Street would be with a continuous canopy of trees. The sidewalks are wide enough to hold them, but they have not been planted.

In addition to protecting the pedestrian from traffic and better shaping the street space, studies show that continuous street trees provide the following benefits:

- absorption of the first 30% of most precipitation, reducing storm-water runoff.
- 5 to 15 degrees local sidewalk heat reduction.
- 4 to 7 degree reduction in overall urban temperature.
- UV protection.
- significant absorption of tailpipe emissions.
- significant reduction in ozone.
- \$15-25,000 increase in home or business value.
- 12% higher income streams to businesses.
- 40% to 60% lengthening of pavement life.

According to Dan Burden of Glattig Jackson:

“For planting costs of \$250-\$600 (includes first 3 years of maintenance) a single street tree returns over \$90,000 of direct benefits (not including aesthetic, social and natural) in the lifetime of the tree.”

It is hard to imagine a better investment, and most cities are making more tree investments than can be seen in downtown Memphis. The wisest approach, whether funded publically or privately, would be to create a Memphis *Continuous Canopy Campaign*, with the goal of complete tree cover by 2030.

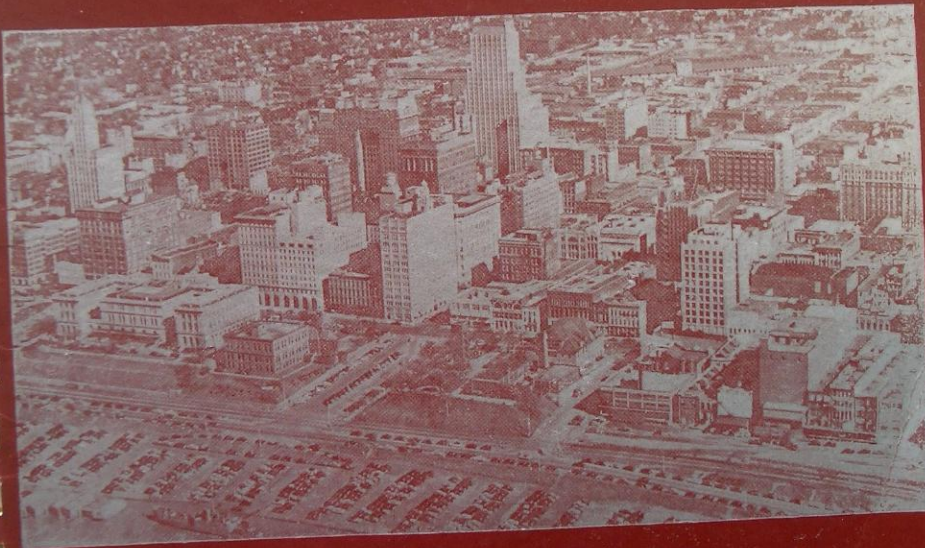
**4.
Organize neighborhoods
around schools around
neighborhoods.**



As any city plans for its future, a strategy regarding its schools is essential.

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE

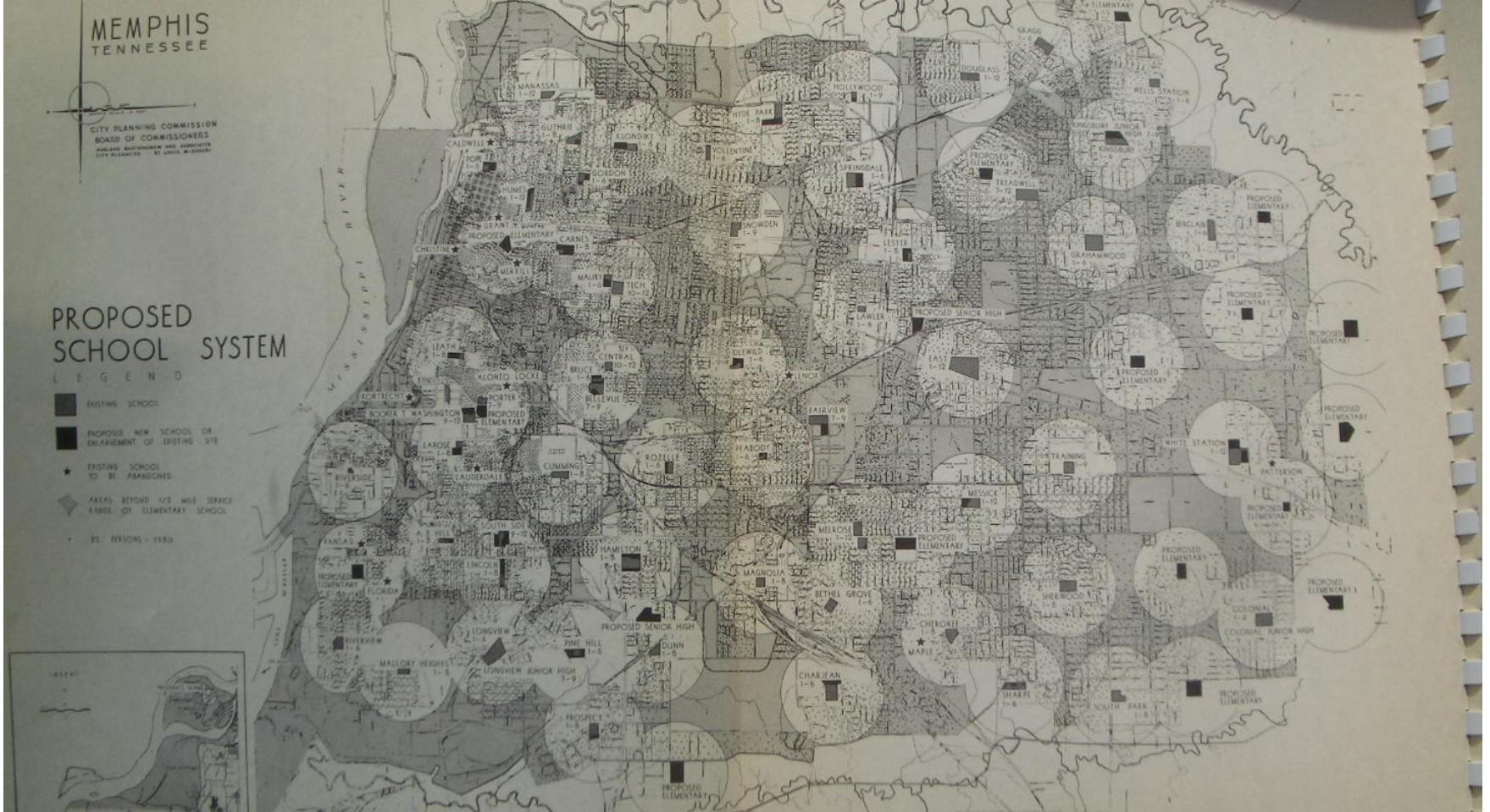


PREPARED FOR THE
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

BY
HARLAND BARTHOLOMEW AND ASSOCIATES
SAINT LOUIS, MISSOURI

Price \$4.00

Your comprehensive plan from the 1950's, while flawed in other respects, contained superior wisdom about the size and location of schools and seems to have had a significant effect on the current organization of your school system.



In it, schools are structured by neighborhood, such that most children are within a 10-minute walk of their facility. Over time, neighborhoods have become associated with schools-, and schools have become thought of as community centers.

Many Memphis schools also have additional open fields that are used for recreation by the surrounding community, reinforcing the school's important role as a neighborhood center. This circumstance, which is lacking in other cities, should be applauded and reinforced.

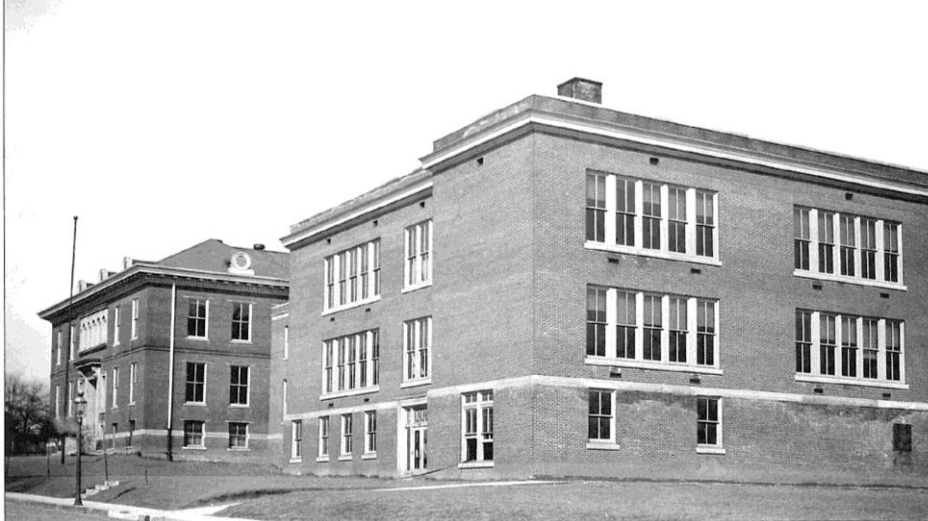
But furthermore, as decisions are made about the size and location of future schools, the neighborhood measure and the 10-minute walk cannot be forgotten. These are essential for preserving the school's role in the community as well as the students' walk to school.

The walk to school is an important part of a child's physical and intellectual development. The child obesity and early-onset diabetes crises in this country are partially outcomes of the systematic elimination nationwide of the walk to school. In the 1970's, more than 70% of American children walked to school. The number now is approximately 13%.

And busing is expensive. Decisions to eliminate historic schools and replace them with consolidated facilities are often made without taking the full costs of busing into account.



Facilities are consolidated for ease of maintenance or the pride of the school board, without considering the true costs to society of eliminating child independence. Large facilities also cause increased parent and older-student driving, further contributing to infrastructure costs and traffic woes. As the price of oil heads upward from \$100 per barrel, school size and location can be a key tool in cost control.



Idlewild School — 1950 Linden Avenue Built 1903, listed on the National Register of Historic Places 1982.



Peabody School — 2086 Young Avenue Built 1909, listed on the National Register of Historic Places 1982.



Rozelle School — 993 Roland Built 1914, listed on the National Register of Historic Places 1982.

Memphis' already well-organized school system needs to move into the future with a three-point strategy of:

- Preserving historic school buildings.
- Keeping schools small and organized by neighborhood.
- Encouraging and assisting the walk to school.

5.

Fix downtown first.

There are many areas of Memphis which would benefit from concerted planning efforts and all such efforts are worthwhile. However, in these days of tremendous private wealth and strained public resources, one has to set priorities about where municipal planning dollars should be invested. This study argues that the place to spend money first is in the downtown core, specifically in the areas bounded by Interstate 40, Danny Thomas Boulevard, Patterson Avenue, and the river.

Other neighborhoods may be in greater need of assistance. But it is important to remember that a city's downtown is its one neighborhood that really belongs to every resident, wherever they may live. In addition, the condition of a city's downtown plays a disproportionate role in the city's reputation and thus its future success.

Make a residential neighborhood better, and its residents benefit. Make the downtown better, and the entire city benefits.

The six specific recommendations that follow are are focused on locations within your downtown core.

6.

Practice urban triage.

By trying to be universally good, most cities end up universally mediocre. This is particularly the case when it comes to pedestrian activity. Only certain areas of your city have the potential to attract and sustain pedestrian life. Improvements intended to attract pedestrians to other \ areas will only succeed at great expense.

By studying existing conditions, we can see where limited investment can quickly produce significant improvement in pedestrian activity, and focus there.

This technique is called *urban triage*. It may seem mercenary and unfair, but it results in money being spent wisely.



This drawing shows a very quick and dirty (and probably error-laden) A/B Walkability Map for just a part of your downtown. This map rates each block subjectively in terms of its pedestrian quality, based on the criteria already discussed: safety, comfort, and interest.

Green = Good

Red = Poor.



The areas that are outlined in black are key problem segments, where a limited stretch of unwalkability interrupts and otherwise continuous network. As will become apparent in the interventions recommended ahead, it is these interruptions that offer the greatest potential payback for a limited investment.

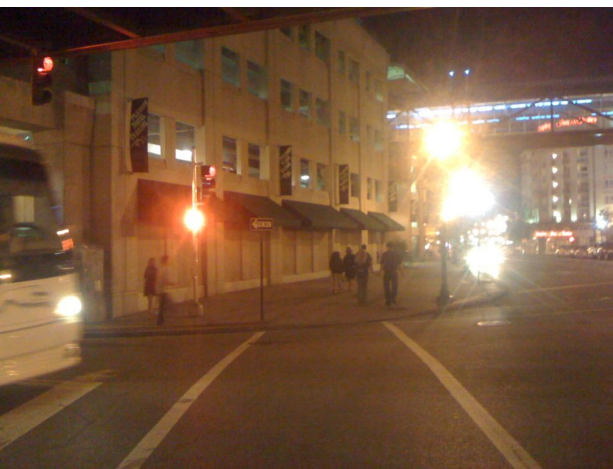


By way of illustration:

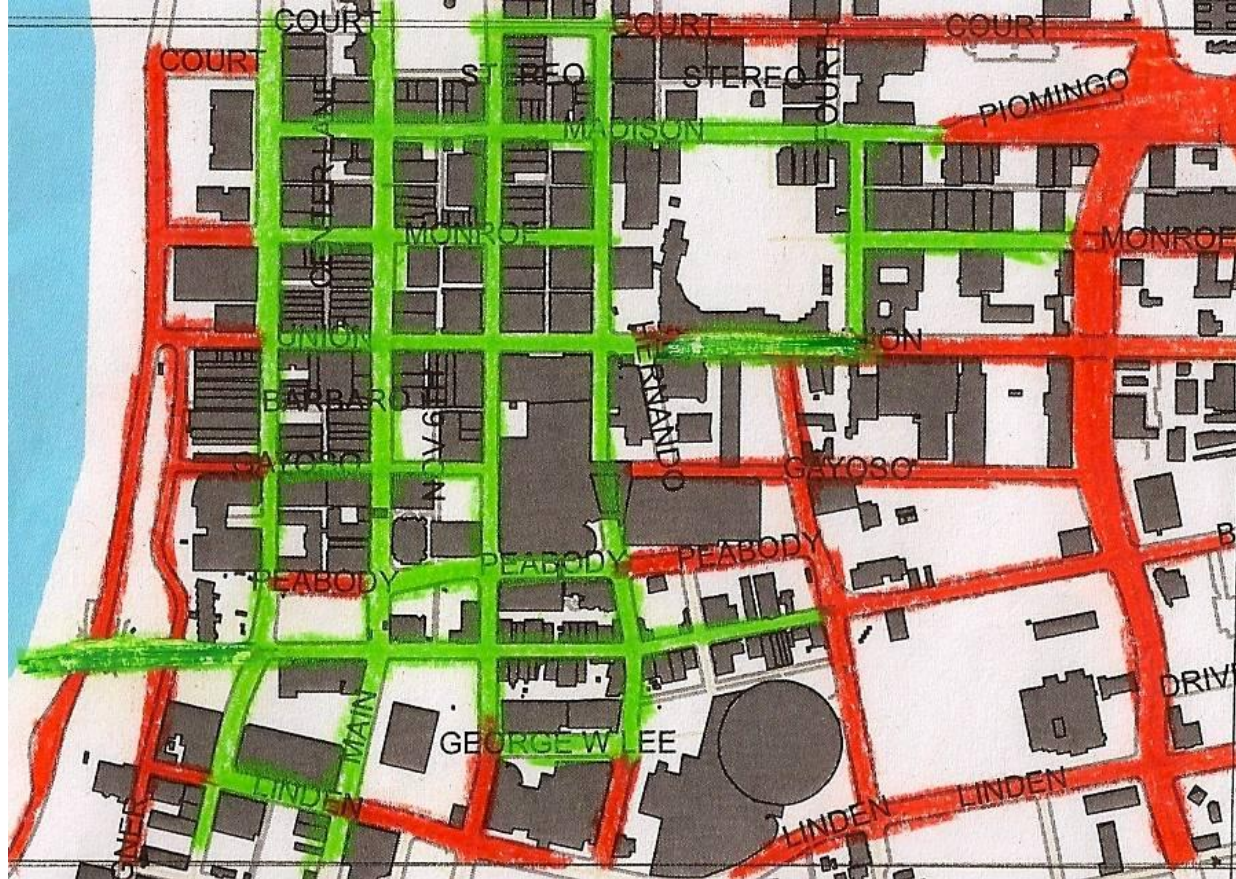
Areas in green are, generally, safe, comfortable, and interesting, and therefore attract pedestrians.



Areas in red are principally automotive, and it is hard to imagine how limited interventions could turn them into places where pedestrians would feel comfortable.



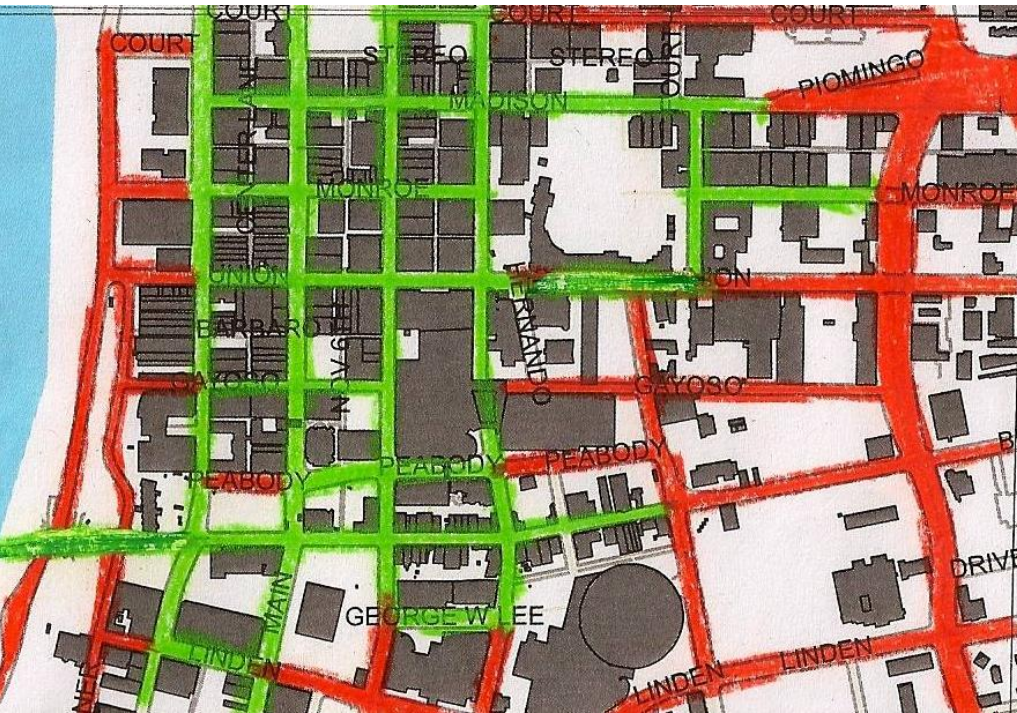
And outlined areas are places where an otherwise viable pedestrian environment is temporarily interrupted and where an intervention could reap great rewards.



The A/B Walkability Map is then used to create the above proposed A/B Street Assignment. This drawing, rather than representing reality, proposes a slightly altered future in which limited interventions have created a pedestrian-friendly network that is intact and uninterrupted.

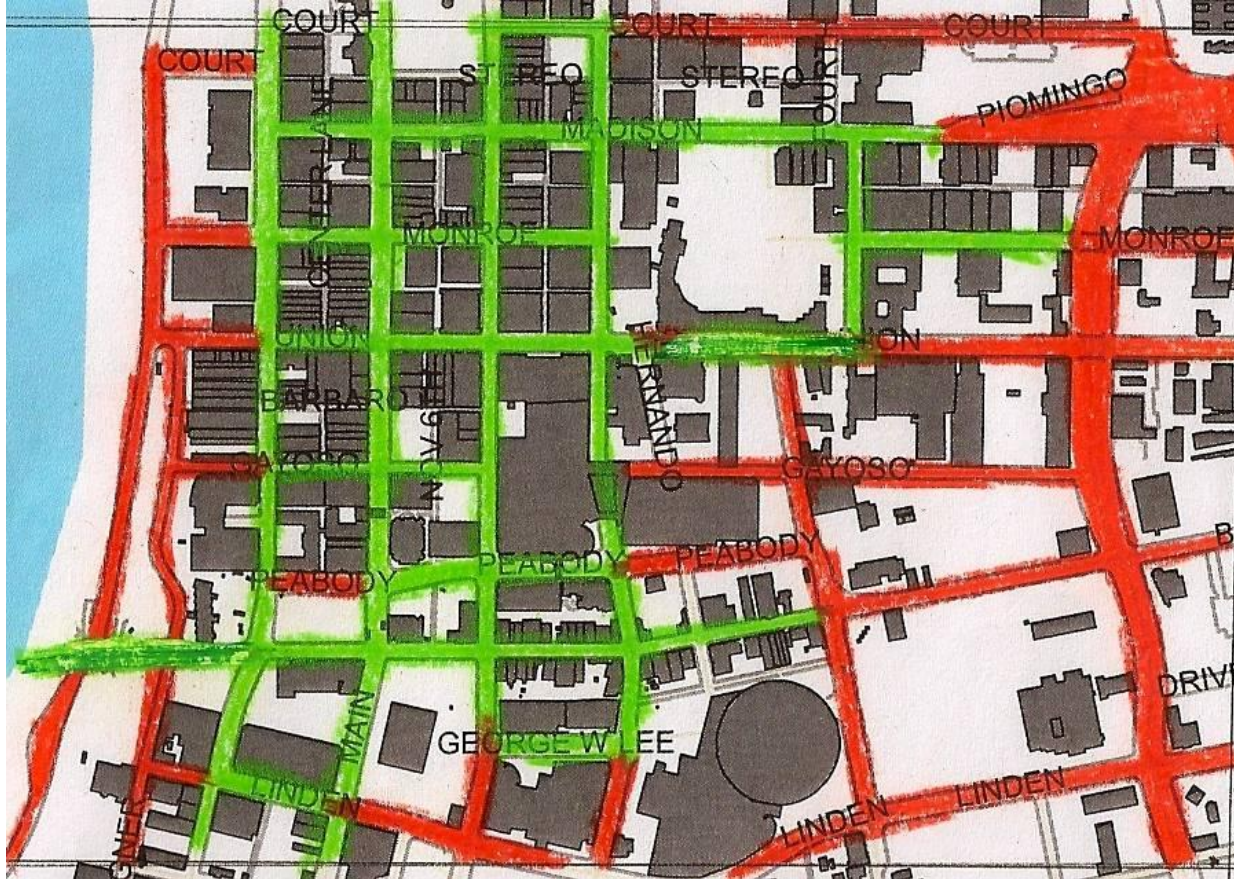


Comparing the two drawings, one sees how interruptions have been eliminated, and how one proposal has been made for extension of the network, from Beale Street to the river.

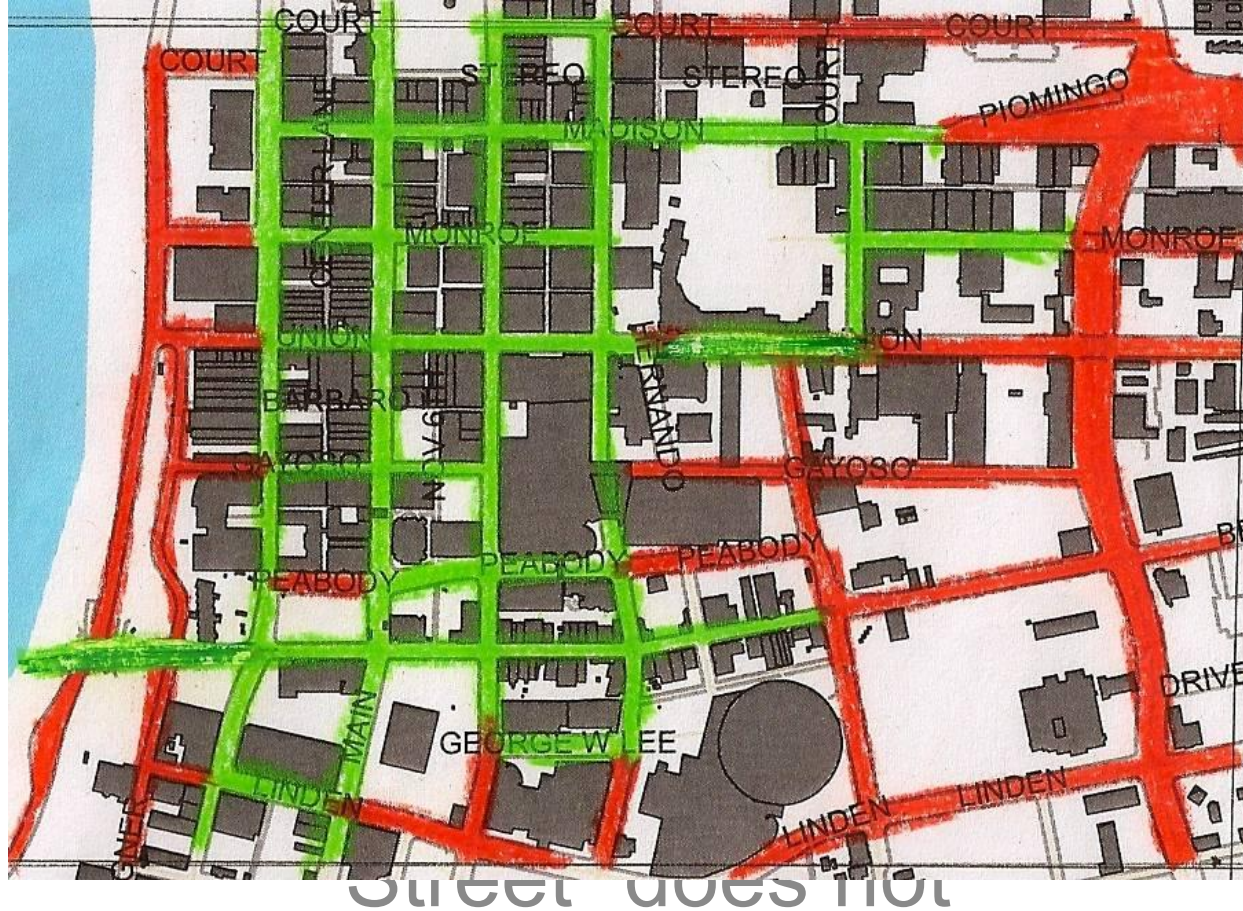


The A/B Street Assignment is an essential tool in the application of new land-use codes to the downtown. As the city experiments (wisely) with form-based codes, which are created to improve walkability, it needs to understand that there is no point in applying these codes, with their more stringent requirements, to B streets. Buildings should only be asked to perform urbanistically in areas where the street and streetscape also support pedestrian life.

Given the significance of this distinction, it should not be applied until an A/B assignment is completed that is more carefully considered than this quick effort here.



B-Street designation is not a condemnation. “B-Street” does not mean ignoring routine maintenance or trash pick-up. It simply means automobile-oriented. And it is not permanent. The city and a street segment’s property owners can jointly agree to opt into A-Street designation in the future.



Again, this Designation is incomplete and only quickly studied. A more thorough and thoughtful Designation should inform future decisions about where to locate streetscape improvements and how to apply new form-based codes.

7.

**Fix the Third Street
Promenot.**



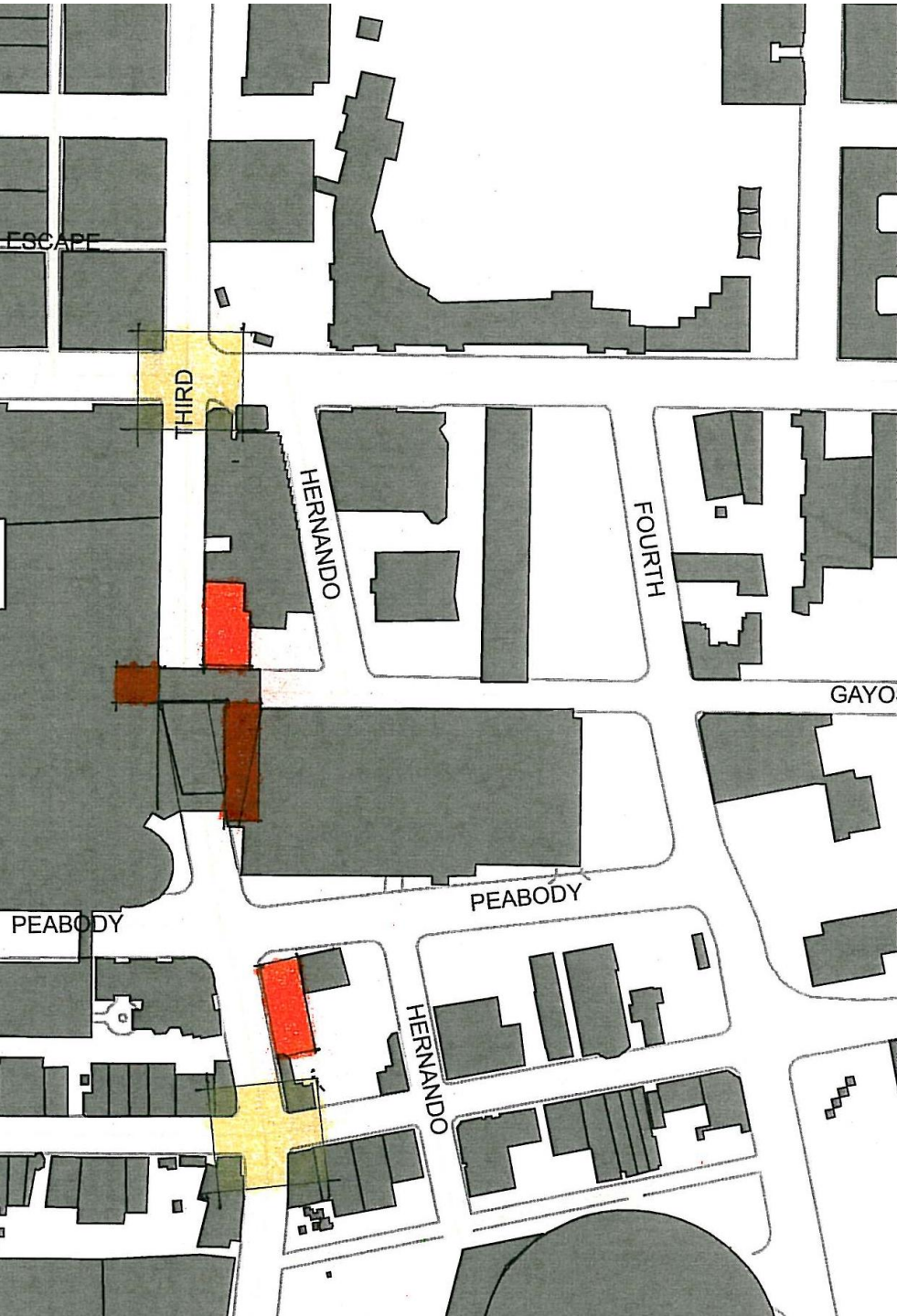
The first intervention suggested by the A/B Street Designation is for the stretch of Third Street between AutoZone Park and Beale Street. Here we find two spectacular anchors that both generate and attract pedestrian activity and demand to be well-connected.



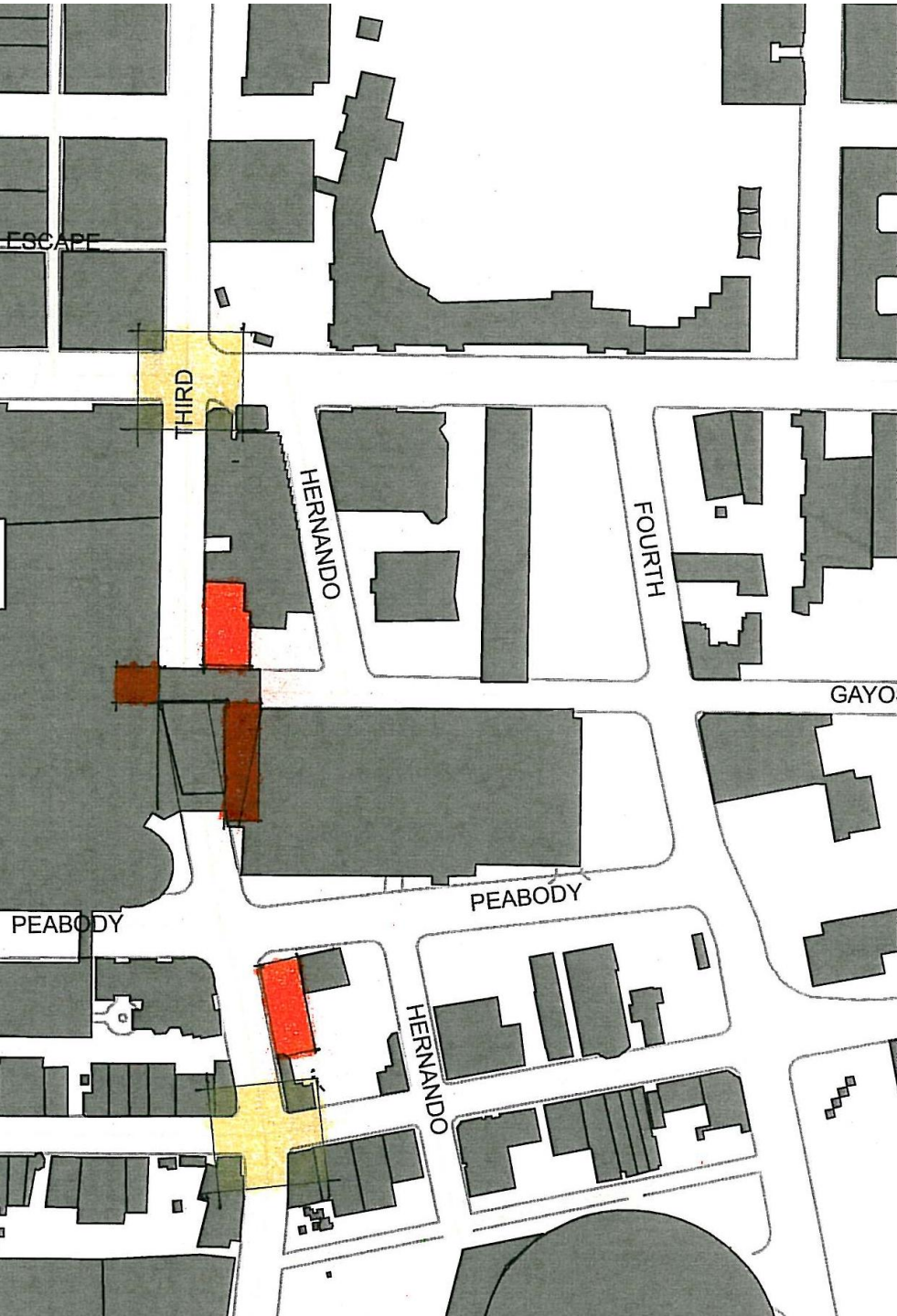
Yet as one walks past Gayoso Street, what does one find?
A surface parking lot and a structured parking lot to the east.



. . . And to the west, a brick wall interrupted only by auto ramps, air vents, and a few blacked-out windows. It's hard to imagine an environment less interesting to walk in. What should be a promenade is instead a promenot.



This drawing shows the two anchor intersections in yellow and, in red, the areas along the path where interventions are possible. From north to south, we see the surface lot to the east, the blacked-out windows (and door) to the west, the parking structure to the east, and finally the corner of Peabody Place and Third, which is missing its building.



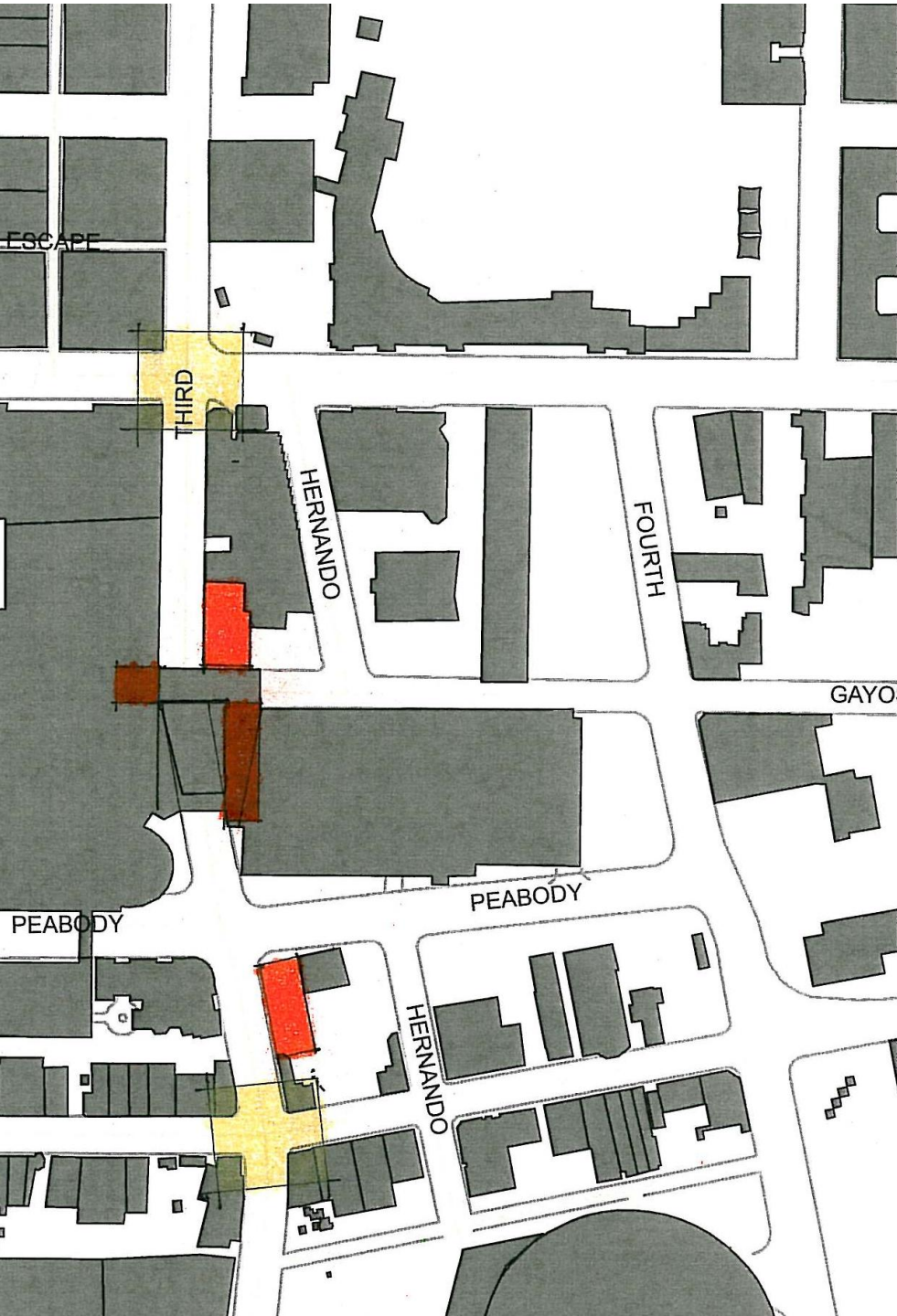
The volume of pedestrians that move from one anchor to another suggests that retail stores should do well in these locations. Retail only requires a 20' depth, which means that only one row of parking needs to be sacrificed from each of the parking locations.



Placing retail against this entire length of sidewalk would do wonders for increasing pedestrian activity.



Across the street, this Peabody Place storeroom (seen through its venetians at right) is large enough to hold a restaurant or café facing the street.



Cumulatively, these changes along Third Street would provide enough interest and activity to heal this small but debilitating wound in Memphis' pedestrian fabric.

8.
Heal the Main / South Main
knuckle.

The same challenges posed by Third Street are presented at a larger scale by the stretch of Main Street from Peabody Place south to Pontotoc. Here we have two separate pedestrian-viable areas which fail to achieve synergy because they are separated by empty buildings, parking lots, and a massive suburban office building.



The south end of Main Street, while still struggling, has staged an impressive comeback. It is the *cool* part of downtown, and includes the kind of restaurants and shops that attract the sort of “cultural creatives” that every city is now competing for.



For six full blocks, this street presents an acceptable, if not ideal, pedestrian environment. But only hearty souls choose to walk from it to Beale Street or points north. It is easy to see why.



First one comes across the empty Chisca Hotel, which takes up an entire block. This building has stayed empty for so long because its owners are unwilling to either develop it or to sell it for its true value. One can only hope that a renewed sense of civic responsibility might motivate a better outcome.



The negative impact of this hotel standing empty is only compounded by its modernist addition, since no one likes to walk on a sidewalk along a covered parking zone. A future renovation should be sure to place a lobby, shop, or restaurant in this location.



On the next block sits one of the largest planning errors in the history of Memphis. Someone, mistaking downtown for an office park, has built a huge suburban office building, complete with deep setbacks and landscaped berms.



THE RURAL TO URBAN TRANSECT



This is what planners refer to as a “transect violation,” a misunderstanding of the urban design appropriate to a site’s location on the continuum between rural and urban. Suburban building types and site design do not belong in the inner city, principally because they do not invite pedestrian activity.



Set well back from the street, the MLGW headquarters fails to enclose the street. Dark glass and landscaped berms are the opposite of interesting. This building is an extremely effective pedestrian eliminator.



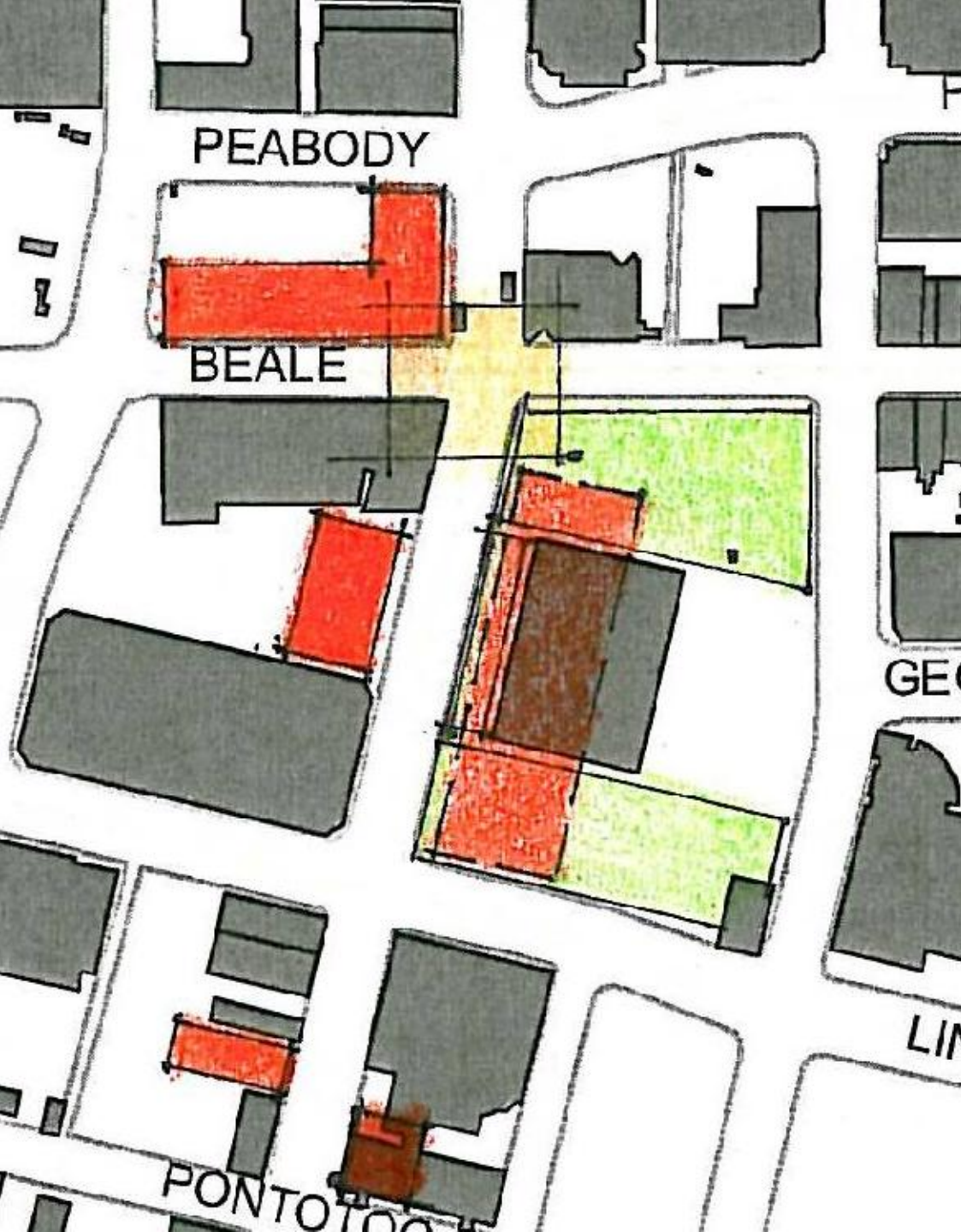
Worse yet, it sits across the street from a structured parking lot and a surface parking lot, both destructive to pedestrian activity.



While the structured lot would be hard to change, it would be very easy to line the surface lot with a thin building providing a pleasant and active edge to Main Street.



Finally, the procession ends at the block between Peabody Place and Beale, which contains a surface parking lot that provides the *coup de grace* to any hopes of pedestrian connectivity in this area. Given its importance to Beale Street as well, this lot could be the highest priority development site in Memphis.



This drawing shows the challenge and the proposed interventions: new buildings at the front of the surface parking lot and between Peabody Place and Beale, and the replacement of MLGW, which is not seismically sound, with a building that holds the edge of the sidewalk in an urban manner.



The MLGW replacement can be understood as the second part of a two-step process. The interventions across the street should proceed as quickly as possible, even if MLGW can't be replaced for years.



The success of South Main Street depends partially on the reformation of this knuckle, but it presents additional infill opportunities to the south as well.



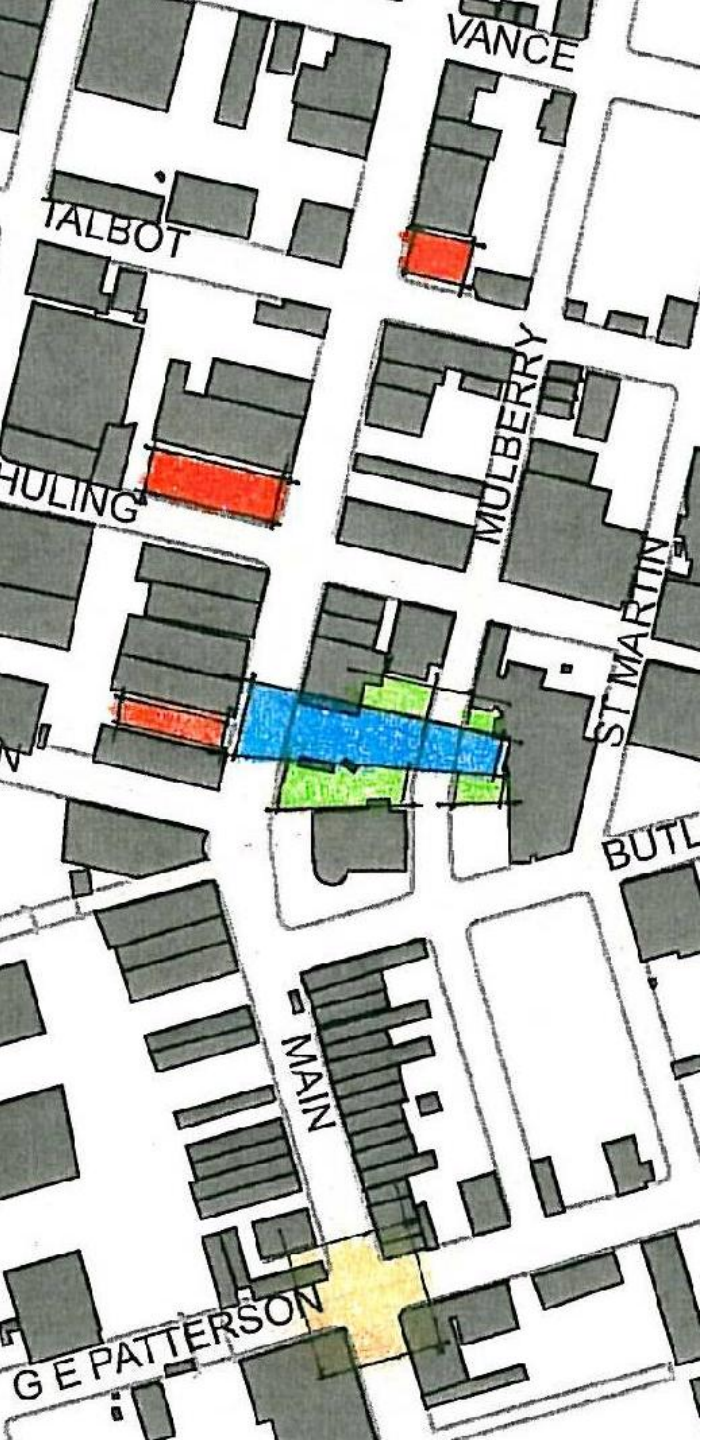
These include filling in some of the missing teeth that currently damage the quality of South Main. If a comprehensive parking plan cannot relocate this parking lot, then the edges of the lot could be made more attractive with a decorative wall.



But more important are the missing corners at Talbot and Huling. Missing corners severely erode pedestrian comfort, because they eliminate the pedestrian's sense of enclosure. These sites need to be given high priority for infill development.

Please note that the infill opportunities presented in this report were chosen for discussion over all other such opportunities *in the entire city of Memphis*. The desire to have a more successful downtown, coupled with a realistic understanding of where minimal investment can reap the greatest rewards, led to their selection. If the City and its leaders agree with the logic of this document, they will take the necessary steps to direct development first to the sites here designated.

9.
**Build the missing
monument.**

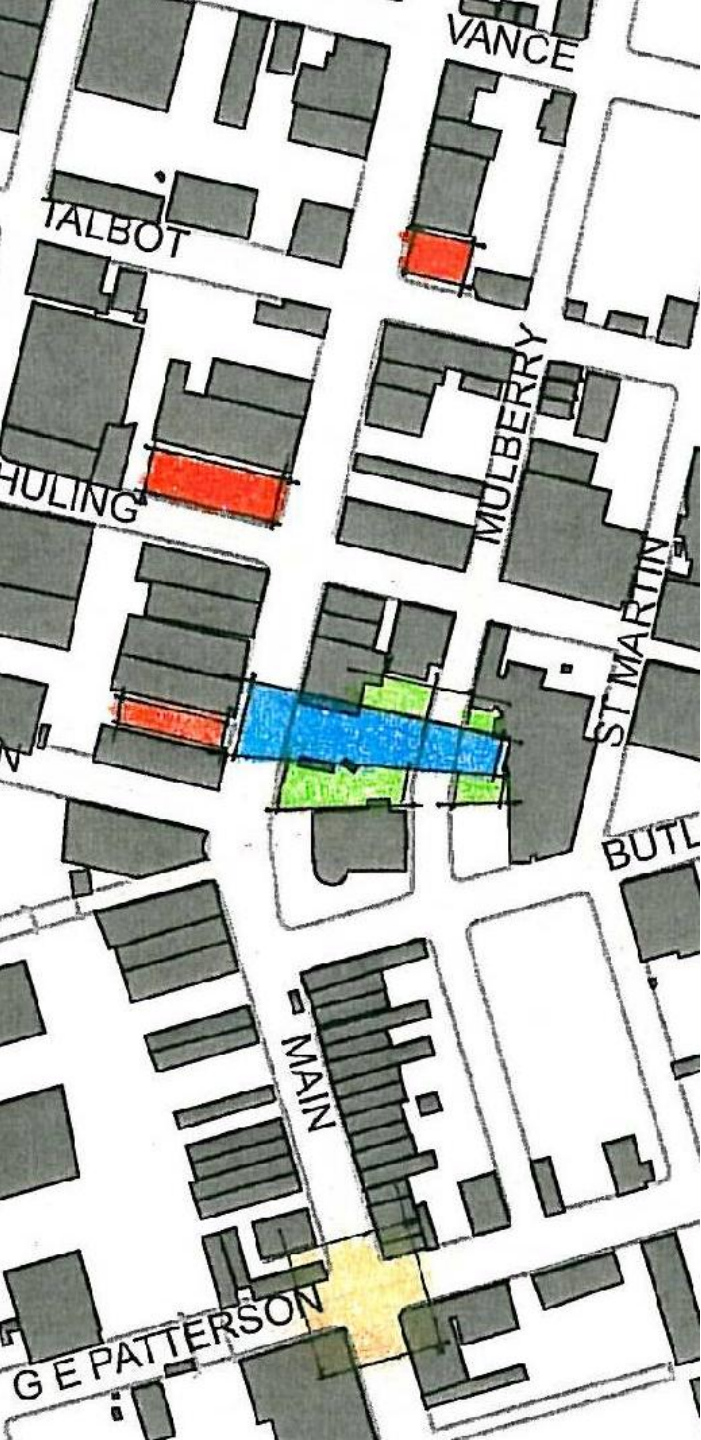


A bit further down Main Street, marked here in blue, sits perhaps the biggest single missed opportunity in the physical adornment of Memphis. At the historic site of the Martin Luther King assassination sits a commemorative open space that is in no way worthy of the great man nor of the world-changing events that unfolded in that location.



In a slot between two buildings, a sloping grass lawn is flanked by simple concrete steps with a pipe-metal rail. Across the street, an empty lot terminates the view from MLK's balcony with a blank hole. The current layout of this site is not an embarrassment, but it is a far cry from what is possible and appropriate for this site.





Taking advantage of the full extent of the site, including the property west of Main, one could create a memorial truly worthy of its subject. This memorial should be commissioned through an international design competition like the one that created the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial in Washington, DC. If properly managed, both the competition and the memorial itself would draw many people to Memphis and could be funded entirely by outside public and private donations.



Be it traditional or modern, a new monument of the highest quality would exert a tremendous positive impact on South Main.

10.

**You deserve just a little
urban waterfront.**



Memphis is blessed with a beautiful riverfront along the Mississippi, but it fails to provide its residents and visitors with the experience that the best riverfront cities provide: the opportunity to arrive at the edge of the water within the urban fabric of the city and, once there, to eat, drink, shop, and live right above the river's edge.



Much of the riverfront looks like this: temporary, industrial, and separated by a surface road that has been allowed to become a highway.



This is the sort of scene (here in Oslo) that attracts people to waterfront cities. These environments only thrive when they are a pleasant walk from the heart of downtown and fully mixed in use. It is their walkability and their urban amenities that cause them to be so well populated and used.



This outcome is not possible if the riverfront is separated by a highway barrier, nor if only public uses are allowed at the water's edge. It needs to be asserted that Memphis is a large, urbane city, and its citizens deserve to enjoy this sort of waterfront experience. Such an outcome is within reach.



An important step currently under way is the construction of One Beale. This complex will bring many citizens close to the river's edge and should stretch the walkable length of Beale much closer to Riverside Drive.



Across Riverside Drive is currently planned Beale Street Landing, a beautifully designed waterfront edge.

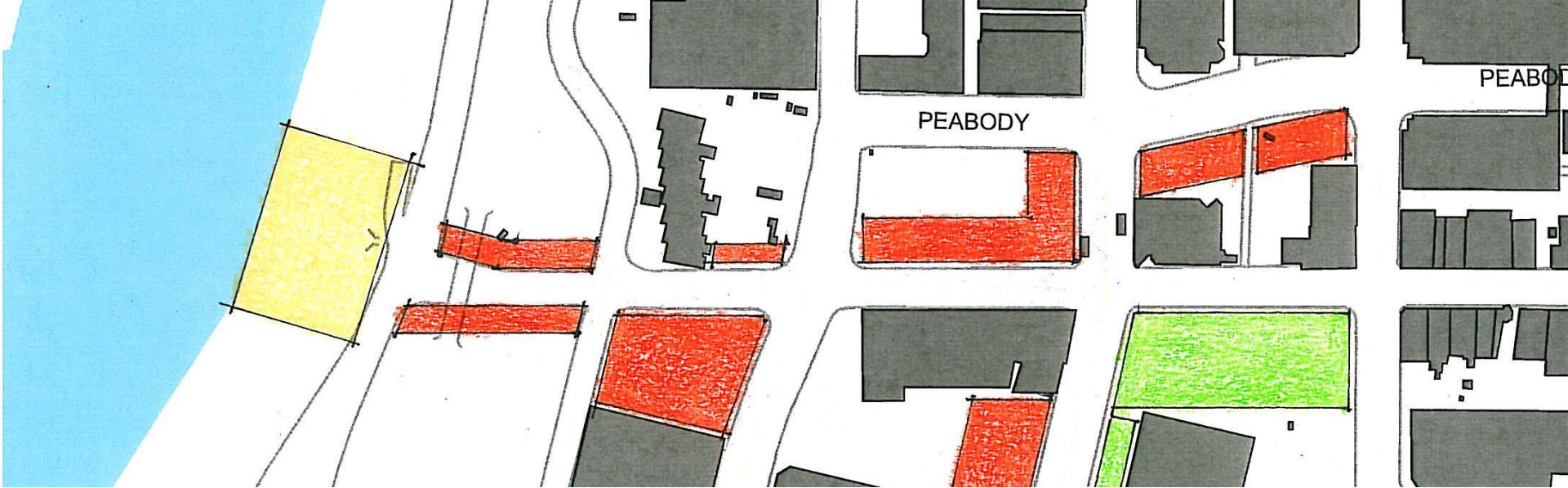


But as currently designed, this edge is the opposite of urban. Like the MLGW building, it is more rural in its imagination, to the point that it tries to make itself invisible against Riverside Drive, which is still conceptualized as a four-lane highway without parallel parking or street trees.



If this solution is set in stone for this site, then making it more urban is probably not possible. But it is worth suggesting, for this site or another, that Memphis would benefit from an urban waterfront. And where better than as a termination to Beale Street?





This drawing shows how buildings continuously lining Beale Street could draw visitors the full width of the downtown, all the way to the water's edge. Whether that edge is more urban or more rural is open for discussion, but neither solution will thrive unless Riverside Drive takes on urban rather than highway characteristics.



The challenge of Riverside Drive brings to mind the Cap at Union Station. One solution is to cross it in the air. The wiser solution, though, is to slow it down, with urban geometries, trees, and parallel parking, so that crossing it is no longer perceived as life-threatening. The future of Riverside Drive is as an urban street, not as a misnamed highway.

11.

Put cars back on Main.



Whether or not to return cars to Main Street is a subject of great debate. To planners who work nationally and study the past for its lessons, this debate in Memphis seems anachronistic and parochial.



The history of pedestrianized main streets in America is, simply put, a history of failure. Of the approximately 135 main streets pedestrianized in the sixties and seventies, almost all of them failed almost instantly.



The rare exceptions are college towns like Burlington, Madison, and Boulder, and a few centrally-managed roofless malls like Third Street Santa Monica. But almost all the others have failed and, when cars have been brought back, they have begun to thrive again.



The facts on the ground in Memphis are plain enough. What is less obvious is why pedestrian malls fail in America. The first reason is that, here, retail needs cars. We have discussed how cars moving quickly are destructive to pedestrian life. But cars moving *slowly* support pedestrian life, and are great for shops, especially if teaser parking is provided out front.



Also important to pedestrian life are small blocks. Generally, the smaller the blocks in a city, the more pedestrian activity generated. For example, Portland, with 200'-square blocks, and New Orleans, with 250'-square blocks, are among the most walkable cities in America. We have already discussed how Memphis was originally blessed with a network of small blocks.



The many small streets among these blocks constitute the circulatory system of the city. The pedestrians *and* vehicles that they carry are the city's lifeblood. When one of these capillaries fails, that lifeblood fails to reach the city's businesses. This is why Alan Jacobs, the famous planning professor, is known for saying: "Never close a street!"



This drawing shows what happened to Memphis' circulatory system when Main Street was closed to cars. In addition to creating many blocks of double length, it also created several blocks that were effectively over 600' square. At left, one of these blocks is compared to a typical block in Portland.



Reintroducing cars to the streets shown in yellow on this map would allow Memphis to once again have one of the better block systems in the country.



Ideally, that would include the megablock created by the government complex, which would only benefit from cars moving slowly.

Discussion about returning cars to Third Street is also bogged down in concerns about cost, with some people quoting \$500,000 or more as a startup cost to solving this problem. These discussions are based on the outdated premise that cars, trolleys, pedestrians, and bicyclists cannot mix freely (as they do all over Europe), and that cars can't drive in the presence of catenary poles and other obstacles near the roadway. The fear that such obstacles will make driving dangerous have it exactly backward. It is nearby obstacles like poles and trees that make driving slow and therefore safe.



Indeed, cars now drive, and park, on Main Street as a matter of course. They just do so illegally.



A preliminary but serious study of Main Street suggests that no reconfiguration whatsoever is necessary in order to bring cars back. Travel paths wide enough for trolleys are wide enough for cars. New signage and striping will be necessary, as will the removal of a few curbs.



These curbs, on the Court Streets, seem to be the only built impediments to bringing a free flow of traffic back to Main Street.



This message, coming from a planner, bears little weight. A traffic engineer expert in the urban concatenation of trolleys, cars, and pedestrians should be retained to demonstrate and attest that this proposal is possible.



A plan should then be made that designates locations for diagonal and/or parallel parking wherever possible, with the understanding that every block will have a unique solution. This entire effort, if not bogged down in legal red tape, should not cost more than \$50,000.

12.

Stop the outer loop.



This issue is so obvious, and supposedly hopeless, that it needs to be taken on.

From a planning perspective, there is no intelligent argument to be made for the construction of the outer loop. It is the exact opposite of smart growth.

It will speed the outward sprawl of Memphis, to the direct detriment of East Memphis, Wolf Chase, and the Germantown Corridor. This would not be the case if retail zoning could be prohibited at off-ramps, but the likelihood of such a ban is approximately zero.

This is such a large issue because Memphis, and the United States, is severely over-retailed. New retail establishments, which are arriving every day, are not being built to meet new demand. Rather, they are being built to hijack demand from existing retail establishments.

Consider the following statistics:

SQUARE FEET OF RETAIL PER CAPITA:

China:	0.5
Germany:	2.0
Spain:	4.0
Italy:	6.0
Japan:	9.0
UK:	10.0
USA:	39.5
Estimated U.S. demand:	18.0

It is due to these statistics that so much retail in the U.S. is abandoned. History tells us that such will be the fate of much east Memphis retail if the outer loop is built. So, even if the funding is coming principally from non-local sources, that does not mean that it will not be built at great cost to Memphis.

The outer loop is not yet built. Therefore, it is not too late to stop. There are many smart-growth reasons to stop it, but the more effective reasons are probably local and economical. In any case, the best outcome for Memphis would be for the federal funding to fall through. But much more honorable would be for the city to reject the project for the sake of its existing east-side neighborhoods.

The preceding 12 proposals are offered informally as a call to action for the government, business community, and citizens of Memphis. As a group, they may seem a bit overwhelming but, individually, none is particularly difficult.

I look forward to hearing of future progress, and participating where welcome.

-- Jeff Speck AICP

With thanks to:

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