

URBAN RENEWAL -- WHICH DIRECTION?

George S. Wright, AIA

A struggle for the control of the heart of the city is now in progress. Two groups, not clearly identified but none the less evident, are unknowingly engaged in a duel to control the restoration of the area known as downtown. On one side, there are the incumbent commercial and real estate interests with their assistants, the traffic and highway engineers, and, on the other side, there is a forward looking group of individuals who would rededicate the urban core to a new and more lastingly profitable use. If urban renewal — of which so much is heard — is to make a valid contribution, then the direction it takes must be a strong, positive one of lasting value to all. In simple terms, the issue may be reduced to what should be the basic usefulness of the heart of the city. The word usefulness is interpreted in the sense of use for all. If it is not of such use, then there is use only for a few. The latter case results in the decay and ultimate death of the heart of the city.

It appears to the observer that the commercial interests prefer a downtown shopping center. The real estate man and investor would seek to maintain property values. The banker would accept any solution that was sound for the economy and did not upset existing conditions. The city administration needs a sense of direction.

Before stating the case for the creation of the urban core, the basic terms should be defined and the existing situation reviewed. The expression "downtown" might be explained as that area of the city which contains the origin of the various commercial, banking and civic establishments. In the case of Albuquerque it is bounded by land of decaying residential use and is often referred to as the central business district. Specifically, in Albuquerque, this would include from Broadway on the east to Tenth Street on the west, and from Coal Avenue on the south to Lomas Boulevard on the north. There are areas of use contained therein which do not make this an absolute definition but the description will serve the purpose and is a commonly accepted one.

The phrase "urban core," as opposed to this, would be defined as the heart of the city where the cultural, civic, and commercial interests meet to represent and preserve the personality and history of the city. Specifically, there is no such area existing in Albuquerque.

In any analysis of existing conditions, it is simple to review the past but to predict the future involves considerable guesswork. The period of greatest growth, from 1940 to the present, is clearly marked by the breaking of the economic and commercial monopoly of the downtown area. What the future might hold will be examined later.

In 1940 Albuquerque numbered about 40,000 citizens; in 1960 the census showed approximately 201,000. In 1940 downtown Albuquerque was bounded roughly by Broadway on the east, Roma on the north, Lead on the south, and 9th or 10th Street on the west. Comparing this with our description above, this shows that in area the downtown has grown but little. In actuality the growth might be said to be more a vertical one than a horizontal one, with such additions as the Simms Building, the Bank of New Mexico Building, and several others, thereby increasing densities in a small area about the center.

In contrast to this relatively static situation, there has been over the same period of time a mushroom-like growth of the city. The limits push east to Tijeras Canyon, south to the Kirtland-Sandia complex, north to long-held ranch properties, and sporadic developments and incorporations across the Rio Grande on the west. While this has been chiefly a residential growth, the number of shopping centers constructed to serve this area has been far out of proportion to the growth of the "downtown" commercial area. From the small and conservative neighborhood Nob Hill Center, constructed in the late forties, to the huge Winrock Center, the trend has been to larger and more conveniently located shopping centers.

Winrock is the developers' dream of a sea of parking enveloping a central mall of retail stores in what has been described as a regional shopping center. Here Winrock has replaced the downtown central business district as offering the greatest variety of retail stores within a conveniently accessible whole. It is interesting to note the names of the downtown retail merchants who have opened branches in Winrock, and even Fedway, the one-time champion of the "downtown," evidently felt forced to protect its position by opening a large store in this center.

Robert Futterman, in the *Future of Our Cities*, points out that such a process of opening branch stores has often been a deceiving one for the merchants involved. Retail sales have not increased in corresponding proportion to the increase of overhead in operating two outlets in lieu of only one — one store will lose trade to the other, and so on. Not that this is necessarily true in Albuquerque but the observation has been relevant in many other localities.

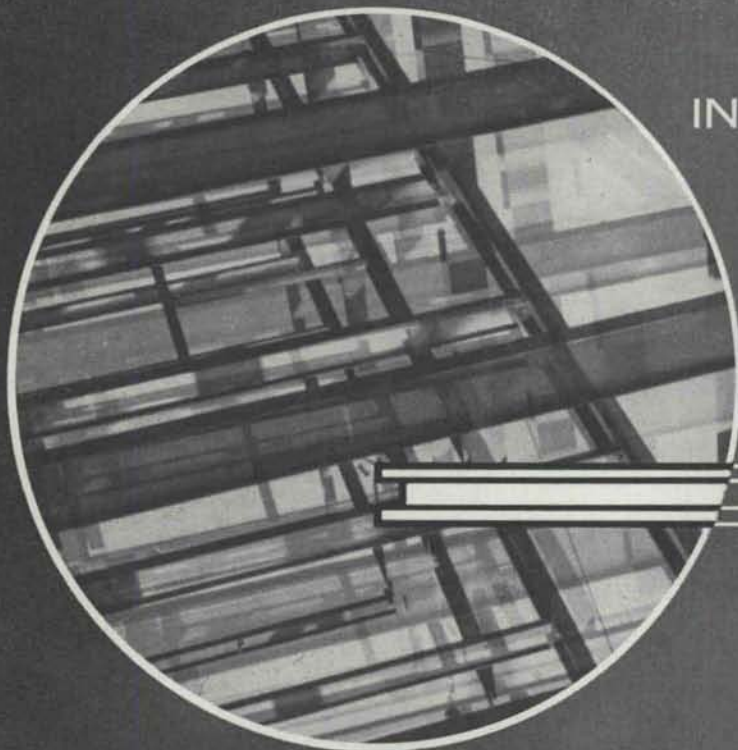
However, the emergence of the automobile as the chief means of transportation is the principal reason for the shift away from the downtown business district, the population growth notwithstanding. Combine this with the failure of surface type transportation to meet the public demands for speed and convenience and there is decay and defeat for the central business district.

The fact is that the mass of automobiles which would converge on the central business district, if it had maintained its monopoly, would result in catastrophic congestion. To construct more parking garages, or to destroy more buildings for parking lots would not alleviate the chaos on the approach streets. The present downtown traffic with current loads may move close to the present national average of ten miles per hour, but it is difficult to understand how even this slow pace would be maintained with many times the number of vehicles on the streets. To construct an artificial mall on Central Avenue in the downtown area (to imitate Winrock) is to miss the point when there is no workable solution for the traffic diverted. This traffic would be forced around the mall and bring further blight and congestion to already overloaded side streets. Toledo, Ohio experimented with such a plan and abandoned it as unworkable.

The best known example of the devastation caused by the surrender of the city to the automobile is the situation in the central business district of Los Angeles. Two-thirds of the total area is devoted to the parking garage, the parking lot, the expressways, and city streets.

STRUCTURAL STEEL

FOR NEW MEXICO'S
THRIVING BUILDING
INDUSTRY SINCE 1942



Miller & Smith
Mfg. Co., Inc.

500 PHOENIX AVENUE, N.W.
STATION B - P.O. BOX 6007
ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO

SPECIFY HYDRONICS^{*}

FOR THE BUILDINGS YOU ARE PLANNING

- **FREEDOM OF DESIGN** Hydronics places no restriction on design or layout, provides specialized equipment to meet every problem.
- **FREEDOM OF MATERIAL** Hydronics is easy to install in any construction, whether it be curtain wall, precast, glass, or metal. Long spans and open layout present no heating or cooling problems.
- **PLEASED CLIENTS** Comfortable, heating and cooling will increase client appreciation of outstanding design. Assurance the client will get the performance that is specified.
- **PROVISION FOR FUTURE** With a hydronic system the mechanical equipment has the durability and long life that outstanding structures deserve.
- **ECONOMY PLUS** Through advance construction techniques, through low owning and operating cost, and because the client is protected against future changes in energy sources.

*** HYDRONICS — The science of heating and cooling with liquids.**

NEW MEXICO PIPE TRADES INDUSTRY PROGRAM

This leaves one-third of the area to produce revenues which are half what they might have been with better planning. It has been suggested that the remaining one-third be logically consigned to parking lots as the present rate of devastation leaves little reason for the continued existence of the area. The solution that Los Angeles has contrived would similarly be disastrous if applied to Albuquerque. Disastrous, that is, if the downtown is to be the urban core — the heart and heart beat of the entire community. Let massive permanent concrete parking garages not be built, all out of proportion in use and cost to the little headway made in arriving at a permanent solution. (Better the quickly demountable steel frame structures which can be replaced easily if the need should arise.)

To avoid such wasteful use of land, to avoid the confusion created by the automobile, people must be brought into the core by other means than the automobile — one hundred twenty square feet (the car) moving two square feet (the driver) is not a satisfactory means of mass transportation.

Those cities in the United States with good, fast, mass transportation have been singularly fortunate. New York, Chicago and Boston are alone in having reasonably fast and convenient subsurface electric trains. To say that the costs of operation far exceed revenues is to overlook the benefits accrued to both users, the untold numbers of retail merchants and investors benefitted from the service, and the attendant increase in real estate valuations. Elsewhere, cities have either felt they could not afford the subway or were in no financial position to consider such a system. Many other cities, at one time in their development, did have surface type electric railways, either on the streets or adjacent to them. These trains or cars could attain very high speeds, but for reasons of safety, they were permitted only to travel at the speed of the vehicular traffic about them. By the mid-twenties, the auto-bus slowly began to replace the electric trolley. The bus, as it is now known, was not restricted to tracks and could move any place there was a road and take on passengers.

The chief objection to the bus as an agent of mass transport is that it travels every place the automobile is permitted to travel. It can move no faster, unless it is at peril to public safety, than the other automotive traffic. Its frequent stops and the fact that it is surrounded by the omni-present automobile and truck, result in a considerably slower rate of advance than the automobile where congestion is present.

Albuquerque is in a position of being solely reliant on the bus and the automobile as a means for mass transport. This "mono-functional" means is one that creates problems which appear virtually unsolvable. The automobile has been given the right to destroy the city by the permission granted it to go everywhere, to park at will, and have equal access to all areas in the central business district. The traffic engineer and the highway engineer abet this privilege by such temporary devices as the parking meter, the one-way street, the urban expressway, and the parking lot and the parking garage. The latter are designed to place the individual's motor car as close as is physically possible to the office, the bank, or the store, without considering the possibility of other means of transportation. The highway engineer in many cities is asked to design great elevated structures such as have been constructed in larger communities, and these expressways enable the motorist to rush downtown as

fast as his car will enable him, and there plunge into a crushing mass of other vehicles in narrow, congested streets. Albuquerque, as yet, does not contemplate the urban expressway but a sample of its devastation can be seen in the swath cut by U. S. Interstate 25 (New Mexico 422) passing over Central as it goes through the city from north to south.

Accepting the thesis that the motor car and bus cannot solve the problem of mass transportation, forward looking city officials are interested in the experiment in Seattle with the elevated monorail. Built to serve Seattle's 1962 Fair, the monorail will be tested also as a means of mass transport for the commuters to the downtown area. Inexpensive to construct, maintain, and operate, the monorail offers the advantage of speed and convenience with little or no encroachment on urban real estate.

To conclude the case against the restoration of the monopoly of the downtown business district, it would be best to review the facts. To duplicate the parking and approach facilities of one large shopping center (Winrock for example) requires about 40 acres or about eighteen city blocks. Multiply this by the number of shopping centers in Albuquerque and it is not hard to visualize a downtown with nothing but asphaltic pavement. Add to this the example of such cities as Los Angeles and the blight of the urban expressway, and the case is a stronger one. No city and no individual can afford to give up the revenue from valuable properties to merely park automobiles (vertically or horizontally) nor can the city and downtown interests compete with the relatively inexpensive development of raw land in the suburbs. Lastly, to transport the automobile and buses to this central business district requires expressways which are wasteful of land and money to construct and which only dump traffic in mass confusion into the urban core.

What then is the alternative solution for the downtown, the central business district of our city? The solution lies in the step by step creation of an urban core along the lines of the definition offered at the beginning — an urban core should contain those elements where the cultural, civic, and commercial interests meet to represent and serve the personality and history of the city. The heart of the city is not a statistic of stores, parking lots, parking garages, and buildings, but a living organism, "census statisticians to the contrary."

What then should be contained in the urban core? First would be the unique functions which only a central core can furnish and are not duplicated elsewhere. Briefly they would be listed as follows:

1. *Cultural Facilities:* The central art museum, the main library and the civic theatre and concert hall would be in this group and serve to represent the cultural heritage of the city.
2. *Civic Facilities:* The central city offices seat of government. (This does not include all functions such as sanitation, shops, etc., but does include the headquarters for the various branches.)
3. *Central Commercial Interests:* The central offices of the banking, insurance, investment houses, real estate interests, and legal offices, supporting the business interests of the entire city.

These elements would serve as a nucleus for a living organism which, designed with room for expansion, will remain always as the heart of the city. These are facilities not duplicated elsewhere and which will serve as the focus and magnet for all citizens regardless of

DOVER
ELECTRIC
ELEVATORS
FOR HIGH-RISE BUILDINGS

Mr. Architect

let us show you why a large percent of
Building owners in New Mexico rely upon
us for dependable Vertical Transportation.



HUNTER-HAYES ELEVATOR CO.

SUBSIDIARY, DOVER CORP.

106 Buena Vista Drive, S.E.
Albuquerque, New Mexico 87106

— Serving the Southwest since 1902 —



NEW MEXICO STATE CAPITOL BUILDING

Santa Fe, New Mexico

TWO: Geared Passenger Elevators

SEVEN: Rotary Oildraulic Elevators

Hunter-Hayes Elevator Co.

106 Buena Vista Dr. S.E.
Albuquerque, New Mexico 87106

Please have Representative Call _____

Send data on General Equipment _____

Name _____

Address _____



TINGLEY COLISEUM

New Mexico State Fair Grounds

Bradbury and Stamm Construction Co., Contractors
Brittelle - Ginner & Dekker, Assoc. Arch. - Eng.

CREGO MASONRY UNITS USED THROUGHOUT

CREGO BLOCK CO., Inc.

6026 - Second NW
Albuquerque, N. Mexico
344-3475

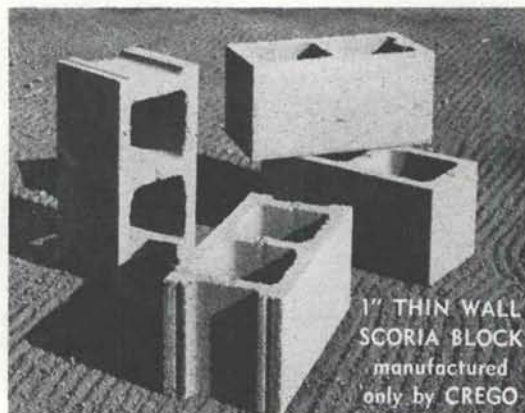
1311 Siler Road
Santa Fe, N. Mexico
983-7341

Makers of the finest Autoclave Blocks in New Mexico
Meeting or surpassing ASTM minimum code requirements

ARCHITECTS — BUILDERS

Visit Our Showrooms—displaying such
products as;

- **Normal**, all sizes of Scoria Blocks
- **"SLUMPROK"** Double faced hollowcore only by CREGO. Soft shadows & highlights, in 4 colors.
- **SPECIAL**, Lightweight (25#) Scoria Block with 1" sidewalls — extra large cores — only by CREGO —See Photo
- **SHADOW, Sculptured & Sun Screen** blocks in all sizes and varieties
- Miscellaneous materials of interest



1" THIN WALL
SCORIA BLOCK
manufactured
only by CREGO

location and distance from the heart. The properties therein contained will have a permanent value as long as the city exists.

Where then is the solution for the small business man in the downtown business district as opposed to these three items referred to above? For the small business seeking the casual motorist, the urban center has little to offer. It is difficult to comprehend why a motorist should drive three miles to purchase an inexpensive item which he might find in the store in the neighborhood shopping center. In short, where items can be duplicated, the urban core (or central business district) will not compete with the neighborhood center. For certain supporting businesses there is hope. Office supply houses, a limited number of drug stores, restaurants, etc., will of course be required and should prosper.

Central and regional type department stores would, by the definition, along with a limited number of specialty stores, find a place in an urban core. The planning of the core would not start with these enterprises but these elements would be likely to follow as an adjunct to the development of the core itself.

Thus equipped with a permanent nucleus, the urban core offers attractions to many people. One aspect, often overlooked by real estate interests, would be the development of living facilities within (or immediately adjacent to) the core itself. Where there is a high density of employment, apartment house units could be built which would compensate the worker who has no desire to cultivate the desert and fight his way back and forth to work five and six days a week. From his apartment, this worker could walk to work, walk to the cultural center, walk to the largest department store, a fine restaurant, an urban park, to name but a few attractions. Furthermore, the range of types of apartments constructed might include the luxury unit on down to the compact efficiency apartment.

The introduction of the apartment dweller and the apartment building might go a long way to compensate for the loss of business suffered by the downtown merchant with the creation of the outlying shopping centers. Land values and income would be compensated where these units supplanted decaying commercial interests.

As for planning such urban core as is contemplated, it must come in stages or increments which are both feasible and practicable. Many years would be required before such a dream could be totally accomplished, and the economic cost would be high. A first step (after a master plan has been accepted) might be the establishment of the civic offices in an area suited to the requirements of the master plan and in areas of considerable blight where paper property values are really that — paper values based upon inflated land values. This selection might be a compromise but ideal solutions are found only in Utopia. All master plans are a series of compromises of what planners would most desire. Successive increments would be constructed as is economically feasible and the problems of parking and access are solved. One unit of a cultural center should be related to this complex and constructed simultaneously to give true validity and personality to the first increment.

Transportation within the urban core would be changed gradually from the automobile to the pedestrian. Strategically placed parking compounds would allow for dispersal of those entering the core with

drives for service vehicles limited to that basic use. The dream of the monorail as an adjunct to transport, as fantastic as it may sound, could greatly alleviate the parking problem in some future year.

To help maintain the density of the urban core at a satisfactory standard, aesthetically and practically, it would be hoped that a certain amount of open space would be allotted in and about the urban core. Green spaces should penetrate the core itself and extend outward, not only to serve the possible apartment dweller but to offer both a change of pace for the worker in the core and an attraction to the casual visitor. It is interesting to note that this programming of open space for urban planning is a focal point of the redevelopment of the urban cores in Philadelphia, New Haven, and many other cities.

One other unique aspect the urban core would afford would be the close proximity of the interlocking elements. The central offices of the banks and investment houses would be close to the insurance and legal establishments, and the commercial and governmental life of the city would revolve about this core. The benefits resulting to these important establishments would be manifold from a business standpoint. Good, modern housing would be conveniently available for all office workers. Communication within the area would be simple and direct, relatively free from congestion. Careful design of open spaces would give a sense of serenity and eye appeal not evident in the senseless confusion of the existing downtown area.

Let it be noted that the processes involved in creating the urban core do not require the demolition of the entire downtown area. On the contrary, a large percentage of the existing structures should be retained as having possibilities for renovation and dedication to a new and more profitable use. Many substandard structures, decayed past the point of renewal, should be removed to the benefit of the owner and the community. The balance, comprising the newer buildings, could be retained and given greater vitality with new neighbors, whether this takes the form of open space, or structures.

Urban renewal would take its truest meaning from this dedication to the principle of rebirth of use. In brief, the process must not be one of recreating a commercial area with remodeled store fronts and pedestrian malls. Rather it must be the creation of a unique and lasting entity which goes beyond this limited objective. It is within the city's grasp at this moment in its history to act in this direction.

Above all, the urban core should serve a unique function. As long as it would be unique, it would have validity from an economic standpoint. As long as it would have a social and historic appeal, it would have validity from a cultural standpoint — something very few shopping centers could hope to offer. —G. S. W.

NEW ADDRESS

The Circulation Office for NEW MEXICO ARCHITECTURE has a new address:

Box 290, University Station
Albuquerque

Please direct new subscriptions and changes of address to this office.