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**THE RELUCTANT CITY:
MILWAUKEE'S FRAGMENTED METROPOLIS, 1920-1960**

By

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Preface

This is a study of urbanization and suburbanization in twentieth century America, using Milwaukee as its focus. Originally, I intended to examine how Milwaukee's political leaders responded to urban decline in the post-World War Two years. However, during the course of my research, a broader story emerged. It became apparent that Milwaukee's policymakers did not "respond" to urban decline but rather proactively sought to reshape the urban landscape of the city by encouraging planned decentralization. They aggressively annexed land to enlarge the city's boundaries and reduce its population density. In the process, they brought so-called "urban issues" to rural and suburban communities that soon grew hostile to Milwaukee's growth. The region thus fragmented politically, as new suburban communities incorporated both to avoid annexation and consciously develop as entities separate from the city.

Equally compelling, this process did not begin after World War Two, but after World War One instead. The idea of reshaping and redefining the form and function of cities came from socialists like Charles Whitnall, who was Milwaukee's most influential city planner during the 1920's, and Daniel Hoan, who served as mayor from 1916 to 1940. Milwaukee's annexation program began in the 1920's, and was a direct product of the deep-seated fears of reformers that urbanization was ruining the lives of city dwellers, mainly because cities had become too densely populated. Whitnall and Hoan's ideas and policies remained tremendously influential on the post-World War II generation of policymakers, especially mayor Frank Zeidler, who governed Milwaukee from 1948 to 1960.

The chronology of this study, which runs from 1920 to 1960, hints at a re-conceptualization of “post-1945” history. Much of what occurred in Milwaukee’s city and suburban growth politics after World War Two was a culmination of earlier conflicts and not an open break from the past. Furthermore, Milwaukee is a useful city from which to study urbanization and suburbanization; it is at the same time unique in the scope and vision of its reformers, yet emblematic of much that ails metropolitan America today. The city’s socialist reformers experimented with a variety of innovative community developments schemes. In 1920, Milwaukee became the second city in America to adopt a comprehensive zoning ordinance. A few years later, it became the first city in America to finance and construct a cooperative housing project. These innovations helped attract federal policymakers to the city during the New Deal, when the U.S. Resettlement Administration built the planned suburb of Greendale southwest of Milwaukee. After World War II, Milwaukee’s policymakers tried to build an even larger planned community, a “satellite city,” fourteen miles away from the urban core in the farmlands of Waukesha County. Even though that project failed, it demonstrated a continued willingness on the part of Milwaukee’s reformers to proactively approach the problem of urban growth and decline.

Milwaukee’s metropolitan evolution also reflects broader, more familiar trends in twentieth century American city and suburban history. Most American cities failed to grow at a time of residential, commercial, and industrial decentralization, and lost thousands of middle class residents to suburbs on an ever-expanding fringe. The number of local governments in metropolitan America has multiplied exponentially in the twentieth century. Milwaukee’s leaders did increase the size of the city, but could not

avoid the political fragmentation that currently haunts American metropolitan areas. Suburbanization also exacerbated racial segregation. Milwaukee did not escape this intractable social problem either, as its suburbs remain overwhelmingly white and generally better off economically than the city. Thus while Milwaukee reformers grew reluctant to continue the trajectory of industrial urbanism that cities followed, their efforts indirectly contributed to a fragmenting metropolis, and this contest played itself out from 1920 to 1960.

Research into Milwaukee's history of fragmentation led to the exploration of a variety of archives, mostly in the city of Milwaukee. The Milwaukee County Historical Society (MCHS) houses the papers of Charles Whitnall and Daniel Hoan, both of which proved invaluable to this study. The MCHS also holds the records of the Milwaukee County Parks Commission as well as planning official Jerome Dretzka. Frank Zeidler's voluminous collection is in the able hands of the librarians and archivists in the Milwaukee Public Library's Frank P. Zeidler Humanities room, which also contains innumerable reports from planning and housing officials, which proved tremendously useful to this study. The archives of the Golda Meier Library at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM) also contain many important collections. They include the papers of the City Club, a Progressive Era political reform group in Milwaukee that supported the annexation efforts of the city. The UWM archives also contain the records of The Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce, the region's largest business organization, the Founding Industries of Wisconsin Project, which continues to preserve the history of industry in the state, and the Milwaukee Metropolitan Study Commission, created by the state of Wisconsin in the late 1950's as an attempt to resolve the region's

hostile city and suburban relationship. Another important source for this study was the governmental records of several communities highlighted in this study. The city of Milwaukee maintains its records at the Legislative Reference Bureau, located in Milwaukee's City Hall. Also of use were the records of the villages of Butler and Greendale, and the city of Menomonee Falls. I should add that the people who work so hard at these locations to preserve the rich local history of the region made this research considerably easier, and I am indebted to them. Milwaukee's stories should be more firmly embedded into the general fabric of American urban and suburban history than they currently are. Hopefully, this study will play a small part in helping make this happen.

List of Images

Milwaukee County Parkway Plans	44
Mixed Land Uses on a Milwaukee Street	54
Zoning Map of Milwaukee, 1933	57
Evading the Zoning Ordinance	65
“The Blockade of Milwaukee”	80
Anti-Annexation Pamphlet	96
Demolished Homes in Milwaukee, 1930-1933	119
Milwaukee County Municipalities, 1940	128
Inner City Population Decline, 1920-1940	143
Proposed Greendale Addition	178
Milwaukee’s Satellite City Plan	192
Milwaukee County Municipalities, 1950	208
Interurban Rail Car, 1950’s	225
Bungalow Home on Milwaukee’s South Side	232
Oak Creek’s First City Officials	246
Milwaukee County After the Annexation Wars	264
Harley Davidson Plant, Wauwatosa	282
Architect’s Drawings, Briggs and Stratton Plant, 1957, Wauwatosa	283
Architect’s Drawing, Mayfair Mall	283

List of Figures

1-1:	Population Densities, Twenty Largest American Cities, 1920	38
2-1:	Population of Incorporated Cities, and Villages in Milwaukee County, 1920 and 1927	93
2-2:	Suburban Employment in Milwaukee, Incorporated Villages and Cities, 1926	93
2-3:	Population of Unincorporated Towns Bordering Milwaukee, 1920 and 1927	100
2-4:	1934 Consolidation Referendum Results by Municipality, Milwaukee County	113
2-5:	Foreclosure Rates, Selected Counties in United States, 1932-1937	125
3-1:	Assessed Valuations, Milwaukee Central Business District, 1930-1939	138
5-1:	Total Square Miles of Land Posted for Notice of Intent to Annex, Milwaukee County, August 1951-April 1952	227
6-1:	Milwaukee's African American Population By Decade, 1910-1960	252
6-2:	Suburban Industrial/Heavy Commercial Zoning & Land Use Characteristics, 1958	280

The Reluctant City: Milwaukee's Fragmented Metropolis, 1920-1960

Introduction

One of the central themes of twentieth century American history has been, as Robert Self recently stated, “The over-development of suburbs and the underdevelopment of cities.”¹ While not all cities experienced disinvestments at the same rates and suburbs did not develop evenly, metropolitan areas across America have unquestionably undergone dramatic economic and demographic transformations. This has resulted in a metropolitan landscape where resources are distributed unevenly across municipal boundaries and within metropolitan areas. By any measure, central cities in America have, in varying degrees, suffered disproportionate losses of jobs and middle class residents, and continue to bear the social burdens of struggling educational systems and higher poverty and crime rates. City governments do not have the financial resources to combat these ills.

American architect and urban scholar Jonathan Barnett has framed this problem as the “Fractured Metropolis,” divided by two distinct places: “old cities,” mostly central cities or older industrial communities, and “new cities,” usually suburban communities more recently built up. This conceptualization, while a generalization, offers stark clarity to America’s metropolitan dilemma. “The Old City,” notes Barnett, “has most of the deteriorated housing, the high crime areas, and what is left of the original smokestack industries....the old city is fighting for its life: its schools are in trouble; its streets are

¹ Robert Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003) p.1.

unsafe.”² One could add, quite generally, that the old city is densely populated. The new city is spacious. The old city is liberal and Democratic. The new city is conservative and Republican. The old city has public housing. The new city has homeowners associations. The federal government wrote off the old city. The federal government underwrote the new city.

Why and how did America’s metropolitan areas experience this transformation? Historians have wrestled with this question continuously since “urban history” emerged as a distinctive field in the 1960’s, with a variety of different conclusions. Many historians have focused on the central city after 1945, when both central city populations declined and suburbanization became more acute. City leaders, they often assert, failed to revitalize their aging economies and too often ignored the growing racial problems. As one strain of the postwar narrative argues, this resulted in the “urban crisis” of the 1960’s. Thomas Sugrue gave more nuances to this story in his influential book *Origins of the Urban Crisis*, where he noted that postwar Detroit experienced deindustrialization and racial conflict over access to housing well before the 1960’s. His story begins in 1945. Detroit’s neighborhoods festered with racially motivated realtors who exploited white fears of black encroachment and experienced real job losses through plant closing and relocations. While this occurred, its city leaders constructed explicitly segregated public housing projects and market-based redevelopment strategies that did not address the systemic racism or capital reallocation that devastated Detroit.³ Other scholars who have examined strictly central-city politics in the postwar era give greater attention to

² Jonathan Barnett, *The Fractured Metropolis: Improving the New City, Restoring the Old City, Reshaping the Region* (New York: Harper Collins, 1995)

³ Thomas Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

short-sighted urban renewal efforts. In his study of postwar Lancaster, David Schuyler criticizes that city's planners and political leaders for using redevelopment as virtually a bludgeon on the urban environment. "The planners and the local political culture failed Lancaster," writes Schuyler, noting that in the 1950's and 1960's, urban renewal did not revitalize the city's center or more equitably distribute economic resources to the city's African American population, who bore the heaviest burden of the failed policies.⁴ Arnold Hirsch's important book *Making the Second Ghetto*, demonstrated that Chicago's version of urban renewal resegregated the city along ever harder racial lines, again driven by misguided urban policy choices.⁵

When focus shifts away from the city to the periphery, suburbanization often appears to be a pathology emblematic of America's obsession with disposability. The most influential history of suburbanization remains Kenneth Jackson's *Crabgrass Frontier*. In this study, Jackson illuminates the crucial role the federal government played through the Federal Housing Administration, which underwrote millions of mortgages in suburbia. In effect, federal policy both created a mammoth housing industry and sustained racial inequality well into postwar America by "red-lining" inner city neighborhoods, steering investment dollars away from central cities.⁶ Other historians of suburbanization, such as Owen Gutfreund, call attention to a broader trend of "decentralization" with the relocation of industry along federally built highways, and tacitly approved reduction of housing densities and amplification of land consumption, in

⁴ David Schuyler, *A City Transformed: Redevelopment, Race, and Suburbanization in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, 1940-1980* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), 6.

⁵ Arnold R. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

⁶ Kenneth Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

effect, suburban “sprawl.”⁷ Whether planned or unplanned, the spatial reorientation of metropolitan America disproportionately hurt cities, as highways gave millions of Americans access to what became suburban spaces. Sprawl as defined by ever-increasing rates of land consumption is a by-product of decentralization. This remains a central concern to both environmentalists who fear the loss of open space and wetlands, and planners who argue that suburban communities lack a built environment conducive to communitarian ideals.

Recently historians, seeking greater coherence to the transformation of the American metropolis, have melded city and suburban history together. Jon C. Teaford, one of the most prolific authors of urban and suburban America of the past thirty years, amplified the importance of “political fragmentation,” as he aptly termed it, noting that as cities expanded, they failed to capture peripheral population growth through annexations or government consolidations. The result was a striking growth in the number of governmental units in American metropolitan areas, especially in older cities in the Northeast and Midwest.⁸ During the 1920’s and again in the 1950’s, reformers attempted to merge municipal units of governance into “metropolitan governments,” but with a few notable exceptions, this political tactic failed. Urban scholar and former Mayor of Albuquerque, New Mexico, David Rusk noted in his influential book *Cities Without Suburbs* that cities that have expanded territorially have been able to stave off suburbanization while maintaining more stable tax bases.⁹ Robert Self’s study of postwar Oakland reasserts the primacy of race as both a political and spatial phenomenon.

⁷ Owen Gutfreund, *Twentieth Century Sprawl: Highways and the Reshaping of the American Landscape* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁸ Jon C. Teaford, *City and Suburb: The Political Fragmentation of Metropolitan America, 1850-1970* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979).

⁹ David Rusk, *Cities Without Suburbs* (Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1993).

Oakland's East Bay suburbs grew as "industrial and residential property markets" at the same time African Americans asserted political power in the central city.¹⁰ The result is a type of parallel history of metropolitan space. In Oakland, a unique African American radicalism viewed the embattled central city as economically "occupied" territory. In the East Bay suburbs, an equally distinctive conservatism emerged that gave energy to the "tax revolt" of the 1970's and 1980's, which spread beyond California into national politics.

While there is no paucity of literature that dissects metropolitan transformation, there are noticeable gaps in the scholarly literature. One particular problem stems from periodization. World War II, obviously a central event in American history, provides a convenient point of departure for examining urban and suburban history. From an urban perspective, however, this line is arbitrary. If we interpret "urban renewal" narrowly, then the increased federal attention lavished on American cities certainly congealed after 1945 and reached its logical conclusion with the establishment of the Department of Housing and Urban Development in 1965. Such a chronological delineation is grossly misleading. Cities attempted to "renew" themselves well before heavier federal involvement. The "City Beautiful" movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century involved much of what federally funded urban renewal resulted in, namely the wholesale rebuilding of vast tracts of urban land and the dislocation of city residents pushed aside in favor of "growth." Max Page's study of Manhattan's transformation in the early twentieth century has illuminated the implementation of slum clearance, part of

¹⁰ Self, *American Babylon*, 96.

the process he terms “creative destruction,” in the Progressive Era.¹¹ Suburbanization also existed, albeit in a different form, well before increased federal involvement in the postwar era. Greg Hise has demonstrated that large-scale “community builders” in Los Angeles had a coherent understanding that population and industrial dispersion was “an advantage, something to be planned for.”¹² Suburbanization emerged as a process neither unplanned nor exemplified by upper class residential enclaves, since many community builders sought to utilize advanced production methods to make housing more affordable.

Moreover state, not federal, laws dictated the process of physical urban expansion, whether by annexation or governmental consolidation. Annexation laws have been defined and redefined by state legislatures and courts throughout the history of cities. They had tremendous impact on the trajectory of modern urban and suburban development. The legal structure of American federalism makes case studies of urban and suburban history crucial to understanding the existing limits and possibilities that existed for actors on the metropolitan stage. For example, Texas state law allowed cities to annex territory without the consent of residents or landowners, allowing Dallas, San Antonio, Austin, and Houston to grow dramatically in the twentieth century.¹³ There were no such laws in Pennsylvania and subsequently Pittsburgh’s leaders turned to revitalization, rather than physical growth, as the chief reform strategy in the twentieth century.¹⁴

¹¹ Max Page, *The Creative Destruction of Manhattan, 1900-1940* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

¹² Greg Hise, *Magnetic Los Angeles: Planning the Twentieth Century Metropolis* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 10.

¹³ Arnold Fleischmann, “The Politics of Annexation and Urban Development: A Clash of Two Paradigms,” Ph.D. Diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1984.

¹⁴ Roy S. Lubove, *Twentieth Century Pittsburgh: Government, Business, and Environmental Change* (New York, Wiley Books, 1969).

Finally, the role of city planners in reshaping the city remains a central problem for urban historians. Scholars of urban history remain divided over the intentions of planners and their control over reshaping the twentieth century city. In her analysis of twentieth century planning M. Christie Boyer emphasizes the use planners made of zoning to promote homeownership and economic consumption as befitting a free market society. In the process, Boyer notes, planners released the forces of decentralization onto urban America, resulting ultimately (and somewhat accidentally) in suburbanization.¹⁵ Other historians, such as Eric Sandweiss, have criticized the monolithic characterization of planners, arguing that planners did not exert the influence that past studies accorded them and that the entire profession was only one of several “improvised responses” to rapid urbanization.¹⁶ Historians of the post-World War Two era often argue that city planners enjoyed still less influence. June Manning-Thomas asserts that planners in Detroit did not have the needed political or economic resources to address the city’s problems.¹⁷ Redevelopment efforts in Detroit, then, failed as the city’s industrial base eroded.

Unfortunately, urban history is too often notable for what is excluded. Existing “paradigms” revolve around the fulcrum of America’s three largest cities: New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago. Urban observers heap great amounts of praise or criticism at New York as a successful or unsuccessful model, depending upon the author. When Jane Jacobs wrote her landmark critique of planning in 1961, *The Death and Life of American*

¹⁵ M. Christine Boyer, *Dreaming the Rational City: The Myth of American City Planning*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press).

¹⁶ Eric Sandweiss, “Fenced Off Corners and Wider Settings: The Logic of Public Improvement in Early Twentieth Century St. Louis,” in Mary Corbin Sies and Christopher Silver, eds. *Planning the Twentieth Century American City* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 79. See also Eric Sandweiss, *St. Louis: The Evolution of an American Urban Landscape* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001).

¹⁷ June Manning-Thomas, *Redevelopment and Race: Planning a Finer City in Postwar Detroit* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

Cities, she used Greenwich Village as the common example of a functional “urban” neighborhood.¹⁸ Ironically, Jacobs would have been hard-pressed to find a more unique urban neighborhood in the entire country. Conversely, Robert Caro’s massive biography of Robert Moses made New York a metaphor for centralized and undemocratic urban renewal.¹⁹ No other individual in urban America had the consolidated power of Moses. Scholars of Los Angeles, moreover, often characterize that city as America’s ultimate symbol of sprawl.²⁰ Chicago often appears as a symbol of late nineteenth century industrial growth and twentieth century deindustrialization. American race relations also are often nationally defined by America’s largest cities. Two scholars, Allan Spear of Chicago, and Gilbert Osofsky of New York, essentially created the “ghetto synthesis” of urban history that examined black neighborhoods as self-contained cities within a city.²¹ The African American populations of most northern cities were not anywhere near as large. Finally, urban politics also often take their cue from America’s largest cities. “Urban liberalism,” wrote historian Fred Siegel “was born in America’s largest cities,” namely New York, Los Angeles, and Washington DC, and died there as well. Smaller cities in America do not go ignored by urban scholars. Instead, analytical models that bear little relevance to their own reality measure mid-sized cities. Chicago is the largest city of the Midwest, but it is more than three times as large as the Midwest’s second largest city, Detroit, and Chicago is also larger than the populations of St. Paul, Minneapolis, St. Louis, Cleveland, Cincinnati, and Kansas City *combined*. Clearly,

¹⁸ Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, (New York: Random House, 1961).

¹⁹ Robert Caro, *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York* (New York: Knopf, 1974).

²⁰ For example, see Robert Fogelson, *The Fragmented Metropolis: Los Angeles, 1850-1930* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967). Robert Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia* (New York, Basic Books, 1987).

²¹ Gilbert Osofsky, *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto; Negro New York, 1890-1930* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971) Allan Spear, *Black Chicago; The making of a Negro Ghetto, 1890-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967).

paradigms of urban America are not sufficient if they foist the events of the nation's largest cities onto places that simply do not resemble them. In fact, their smaller scale makes mid-sized cities easier to study holistically, with city and suburban transformation given more even attention.

The city of Milwaukee is one such place. Milwaukee was, for most of its history, a compact and densely populated industrial city. From its municipal birth in 1846, Milwaukee grew to encompass over 400,000 residents by 1920. Its rapid urban growth appeared problematic to the generation of urban reformers who emerged in the 1910's and 1920's. These new civic leaders, especially city planner Charles Whitnall, came to believe that the form and function of the industrial city, especially its density, needed to be replaced. Milwaukee had grown, dramatically so, but growth had produced a grotesque form that fostered inequality and even exploitation. The city, in effect, needed to be dispersed over a large area of land, whose direction would be shaped by newer tools of development such as land use controls and community planning. The result would be a "reluctant" city, one not centralized by any functional meaning. The new shape of the city was multinucleated, with garden suburbs dispersed away from the core, connected by parkways and politically knitted together as a single metropolitan unit. Whitnall was the chief visionary in Milwaukee's reshaping, but Mayor Daniel Hoan (who served from 1916 to 1940) actively supported him. Whitnall's ideas remained influential on many of Milwaukee's next generation of leaders, especially Mayor Frank Zeidler, who served from 1948 to 1960. This vision was not realized. Milwaukee's population did decentralize, but it also suburbanized, as old and new communities resisted the city's physical expansion.

What follows is a study of twentieth century urban policy, the circumstances that informed the policy, and the eclipse of a distinctive reformist vision as America transformed from an urban to a suburban nation. Milwaukee's experience is in many ways no different from many cities, although its actors made decisions that both reflected and defied national developments. Politically, Milwaukee is unique because three different socialists governed the city between 1910 and 1960, two of whom, Hoan and Zeidler, held office for a total of thirty-eight years. Milwaukee's socialism has not gone unnoticed by historians. However, it is usually examined from an ideological context that treats local municipal developments as a litmus test measuring how "socialistic" city leaders actually were. Other historians such as Frederick Olson use party politics as the primary unit of analysis, tracing the voting patterns of Milwaukee citizens and party membership to denote the rise and decline of a political movement.²² While these studies are useful, they too often separate ideology and party politics from its urban context. Contemporaries of men like Daniel Hoan and Charles Whitnall did the same, scoffing at a "sewer socialism" that was decidedly not revolutionary in any political way and in fact differed little from the urban progressivism of other cities. To this study, what is more important is identifying what policy the city's socialists *executed* and what assumptions they made about the industrial city that informed their decisions. Equally important is the political world within which Whitnall, Hoan, and Zeidler operated. What constricted their ability to enact urban reform? This is not a study of urban socialism, although many of its key actors were committed socialists. Rather, it is a case study of how a city's leaders confronted rapid growth, the steps they took to reshape its future, and why

²² Olson, Frederick "The Milwaukee Socialists, 1897-1941," Doctoral Dissertation, Harvard University, 1952.

suburbanization first gradually affected the city and ultimately overwhelmed it. Cities and suburbs are not self-contained units, although as will be demonstrated municipal leaders often govern as if they are. Relationships between city, suburb, town, county, region, state, and nation are fluid.

The literature on the political and policy histories of Wisconsin's largest city remains scant, although not of poor quality. Anthony Orum skillfully used Milwaukee as a model of city building, comparing its growth to that of Cleveland, Minneapolis, and Austin. Orum demonstrated that Milwaukee, like Cleveland and most other northern industrial cities, was unable to form regional alliances that could have more equitably distributed resources across the metropolitan area.²³ Minneapolis, conversely, benefited from metropolitan revenue sharing and the existence of the state's flagship university within its borders, enriching the city with financial and entrepreneurial capital. Kate Foss-Mollan's recent history of conflicts over Milwaukee's water supply has amplified the importance of public utilities as a determinant of urban growth.²⁴ Other scholars, such as Richard Pifer and Eric Fure-Slocum, have examined Milwaukee's rich twentieth century labor history, connecting its conflicts to the city's politics in unique modes of analysis.²⁵ Fure-Slocum rejects the notion that "growth coalitions" of private business and civic elites and city officials were a common feature of postwar American politics. Milwaukee's strong tradition of left-wing labor politics, buttressed in part by Frank Zeidler's election as Mayor in 1948, provided a powerful counterpoint to market-driven solutions of downtown redevelopment. Fure-Slocum deftly intertwines race with the

²³ Anthony Orum, *City Building in America* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995).

²⁴ Kate Foss-Mollan, *Hard Water: Politics and Water Supply in Milwaukee, 1870-1995*, (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2001).

²⁵ Richard Pifer, *A City at War: Milwaukee Labor During World War II* (Madison, WI: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2003).

intractable issues of public housing and “urban citizenship” asserting that Milwaukeeans’ assumptions of good citizenship infected decisions as to the type, location, and quality of public housing as it related to whites and African Americans. Furthermore, as the city’s labor movement gained more institutional power, it lost much of its left-wing militancy, thus limiting the extent of reform that took place in the postwar city.²⁶

This study of Milwaukee broadens the political and economic response to industrialization and urbanization across a longer time period, from 1920 to 1960. Milwaukee grew from twenty-six to 98 square miles from 1920 to 1962 (the Town of Granville consolidated with the city in 1956, but this consolidation did not become official until a 1962 ruling of the state Supreme Court), and remains that same size today. As the city grew, opposition to its growth also increased, resulting in a distinct form of suburbanization and community development fundamentally based on keeping local taxes as low as possible through restrictive residential development and the ability to attract industry. Thus Milwaukee’s growth both impacted its suburbs and directly spawned suburbanization shaped by state court decisions, state government legislation, and local urban and suburban development strategies.

The vocabulary of place requires a fuller explanation. “Decentralization” has been both a process and a policy. Cities have, obviously, “spread out” since their inception, with transportation innovations such as railroads, streetcars, and automobiles accelerating the process of decentralization. In the same way, human desires to live in communities free of the noise, pollution, and general disorder of the industrialized city have certainly given energy to population decentralization. However, decentralization

²⁶ Fure-Slocum, Eric, “The Challenge of the Working Class City: Recasting Growth Politics and Liberalism in Milwaukee, 1937-1952,” Doctoral Dissertation, University of Iowa, 2001

was also an explicit policy response to urbanization. In the early twentieth century, an entire generation of American city planners were gravely concerned that urbanization had divorced millions of people from nature. Milwaukee's Charles Whitnall was one of these reformers and he continually referred to "decentralization" as the city's best future outcome, if managed properly. All planners did not object to residents moving away from the city into more spacious dwellings; it was the political ramifications of decentralization that concerned them. "Suburbanization" was not simply the mass movement of people, commerce, and industry away from the urban core; it also consisted of the act of incorporating new cities or villages, according to ever-changing state laws. Suburbanization's political dimension, it is argued here, is crucial to understand not just what constricted Milwaukee's growth, but how economic and racial inequality corresponded to man-made political boundaries.

The word "suburb" has had multiple meanings throughout urban history. A suburb in the nineteenth century may well have existed within city limits, but in relative isolation from the urban core, such as Chestnut Hill five miles from Philadelphia's downtown.²⁷ Not incidentally, a nineteenth century suburb also denoted a separate politically incorporated entity adjacent to or near the central city. Wauwatosa, Wisconsin, was one of Milwaukee's first incorporated suburbs. In the twentieth century, as many older cities' annexations slowed down and population decentralization continued, "suburbanization" began to be understood more strictly as development located outside of the political borders of the central city. Again, state law dictated this process differently across the country. In many states, such as Pennsylvania, Virginia,

²⁷ David R. Contosta, *Suburb in the City: Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia, 1850-1990* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1992).

and Maryland unincorporated townships near or adjacent to the city developed into residential or even industrial “suburbs” without ever changing their political status. County governments often took on functions of municipal governments, as Jon Teaford notes in *Post-Suburbia: Government and Politics in the Edge Cities*. In Wisconsin, the process of twentieth century suburbanization shaped political incorporations. Located in the Old Northwest, surveyors laid out Wisconsin’s first governmental units onto square grids. Gaining separate political status as a city or village (the only two designations in the state) required an act of the state legislature. Residents in Wisconsin have always referred to unincorporated townships as “towns” and in the early twentieth century the vast majority of land in Milwaukee County consisted of towns. The region’s earliest “suburbs” often incorporated as a result of conflicts within rural towns that were developing. Thus nineteenth century suburbanization was only tangentially related to the city of Milwaukee.

However, as Milwaukee continued to develop rapidly and increasingly look outside its borders to expand, the nature of suburbanization changed dramatically. The act of incorporating part of a town into a village or city emerged as a direct response to Milwaukee’s aggressive annexation program, and it pitted the city and its neighbors directly against each other. Furthermore, the Depression and World War II only temporarily halted annexation, which resumed with even greater fervor in the late 1940’s and early 1950’s. By the end of Frank Zeidler’s mayoral administration in 1960, the political landscape of Milwaukee County was thoroughly transformed: every square foot of land within Milwaukee County was incorporated into nineteen different cities or villages. The vision of a reluctant city defined by planned decentralization had

transmuted into a fragmented metropolis with city and suburbs regarding one another with striking hostility.

Scholars are increasingly loath to view the American metropolis through the prisms of “city” and “suburb.” “The old city-versus-suburb view is outdated and untenable. We can no longer talk about ‘the suburbs’ as an undifferentiated band of prosperous, safe, and white communities,” wrote Brookings Institute researchers Bruce Katz and Jennifer Bradley in 1998.²⁸ Since residents often live in one community, work in another, and shop in still others, they argue, municipalities are more “interdependent” upon one another than ever before. “Metropolitanism,” Katz and Bradley argue, “describes not only where but also in some sense how Americans live -- and it does this in a way that the city-suburb dichotomy does not.”²⁹ Historians have also taken to applying the concept “metropolitanism” to twentieth century urbanism as a way to replace narratives of “urban decline” with a clearer explanation of metropolitan evolution. Taken at a fundamental level of analysis, it is simplistic to merely state, for example, that Milwaukee declined from 1950 to 1980 even though demographic and economic evidence points to such word usage. After all, Milwaukee’s economy did create new jobs, developers built new structures, and people moved to the city during this time. Furthermore, older industrial suburbs such as West Allis experienced population decline and deindustrialization as acutely as the city. The type of suburb varies greatly as well; there are industrial satellites, residential enclaves, “employing suburbs” with large concentrations of offices, and in many cities African Americans are migrating to suburbia

²⁸ Katz, Bruce, and Bradley, Jennifer, “Divided We Sprawl” *Atlantic Monthly* 99.2 (Part Two); Volume 284, No. 6; pp. 26-42.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

at the same rates as middle class whites. In other words, suburbs are so diverse that it seems meaningless to impose upon them a single descriptive word.

“Metropolitanism” however is problematic on its own terms. The term may be new, but the concept of city and suburban interdependency is at least seventy years old. During the Great Depression, an eclectic variety of civic organizations tried to create a single government in Milwaukee County, noting that the county was “one trade area burdened with 93 local governments.” Nor was the notion of city and suburban interdependency unique to Milwaukee; vigorous metropolitan government movements arose in Pittsburgh, Cleveland, and St. Louis in the 1920’s as well.³⁰ Each failed. In Milwaukee’s case, consolidation failed because suburbanites wanted no part of the metropolitan concept, as they would demonstrate time and again in the postwar years as well. Therefore, “metropolitanism” may have its uses as a framework through which to shape contemporary policy. Historically, as a political movement, it was unsuccessful in countless regions, Milwaukee included.

This dissertation tells the story of Milwaukee’s metropolitan failure, situating it within the interconnected but politically oppositional process of urbanization and suburbanization. This study’s chronology, 1920 to 1960, is not arbitrary. The 1920 census revealed Milwaukee to be America’s second most densely populated city, after New York. This demographic byproduct of urban growth, above all other factors, inspired Milwaukee’s policymakers to expand the city’s borders toward the ultimate goal of the complete governmental unification of Milwaukee County. The year 1960 marked the end of Mayor Frank Zeidler’s three terms in office, during which he actively sought to continue many of the policies originally set forth forty years earlier. The political

³⁰ Teaford, *City and Suburb*, 123-152.

borders of Milwaukee County had hardened by then and, while Milwaukee had succeeded in dramatically increasing its size, its relationship with its suburbs had strained nearly beyond repair. “The city consults with suburban governments, but we do not believe they have [a] reason for existing,” summed up Zeidler in 1958.³¹

Suburbs did exist, however, and residents reveled in the creation of new communities or the transformation of old ones. A common theme of the political act of suburbanization was the perceived independence that incorporation signified. This complicated Milwaukee’s relationship with its burgeoning communities on the urban periphery. It became common to view Milwaukee as a giant community intent on swallowing up smaller communities that stood in its way. Certainly, city leaders sought metropolitan unification, but they also watched as suburbs actively sought out industries located in the city and often succeeded. New municipalities also explicitly zoned themselves to attract middle class residents, leaving the poorest residents in the region, increasingly African Americans, with little residential mobility. Suburbanization was not an inevitable outgrowth of decentralization, nor did only federal policy define it. Just as importantly, it was both an intentional and unintentional outgrowth of urbanization.

Suburbanization eventually outpaced and economically overwhelmed Milwaukee. At the same time, the inner core of the city was left neglected by comparison, another indirect result of policy decisions first made not after World War Two with urban renewal, but after World War I with the institutionalization of city planning. Milwaukee’s planners adopted an eclectic and often contradictory set of city building principles in addressing the oldest neighborhoods. On one hand, as a socialist, Charles

³¹ As quoted in John Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee* (Milwaukee, WI: Milwaukee County Historical Society), 249.

Whitnall firmly believed that residents of the densely packed neighborhoods north and south of downtown were exploited by urban capitalism. Yet Whitnall worked closely with Milwaukee's real estate community in developing land use principles, giving market-based strategies a key voice in community development. Milwaukee's policymakers hoped to apply land use principles to the built environment that would encourage people to leave the inner city for well-planned garden suburbs on the periphery. To that end, Milwaukee became the first large city in America to develop cooperative housing, building the Garden Homes project in the 1920's. As a result, the city earned a national reputation for city planning. This recognition helped bring one of three U.S. Resettlement Administration Greenbelt towns, Greendale, to the region during the New Deal. However, the same planning principles that earned the city a progressive character also, somewhat ironically, explain why Milwaukee's building inspector condemned and demolished over 3,000 homes in the 1930's. This slum clearance was, in theory, to be accompanied by planned satellite communities on the periphery. Frank Zeidler made satellite city building a key part of his first term as mayor. The satellite city garnered national attention, but suburban and rural opposition helped stop it in its tracks and further estranged intergovernmental relationships.

This study makes several contributions to existing scholarship. First, it adds to a growing body of literature that aims to examine urbanization and suburbanization together. Many historians and sociologists call this "uneven development," but they often examine only its *consequences*. Its causes are equally important, and they manifest not from broad and impersonal forces but the human decisions about how communities should develop. Local policy is accorded primary attention here, although national forces

are acknowledged as well. Kenneth Jackson and Gail Radford, most notably, have brilliantly tied suburbanization and urban disinvestments to federal policy decisions.³² The politics of place played a key role in both developments as well. Secondly, the three crucibles of industrialization, urbanization, and immigration that transformed America had a profound effect on the institutionalization of city planning, as the case of Milwaukee demonstrates. Whitnall and Hoan's visions of urban transformation, what I term a "reluctant city" were a direct response to those forces. Planning, however, never operated monolithically nor with the authority its chief architects wished. It reverberated outside Milwaukee's borders because urban transformation could not occur without planned decentralization. As Hoan wrote in the *American City* in 1930; "By financing a cooperative housing project, by developing newly annexed districts, and by systematically razing old and unsanitary buildings, Milwaukee is in large measure coping with the housing problem."³³ In other words, Milwaukee's chronic inner city housing issues and its peripheral expansion were not mutually exclusive. These not only gave city builders in Milwaukee a "metropolitan" outlook, but it made the undeveloped fringe of the region politically contested terrain for decades.

Thirdly, as implied in the chronology of this study, post-World War Two urbanization and suburbanization are not by any means divorced from the interwar period. Certainly, World War II reindustrialized America, Milwaukee included. However, the city's problems after 1945 were strikingly similar to those policymakers faced in 1920. A housing shortage existed. The city's physical growth had slowed. City

³² Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, Gail Radford, *Modern Housing for America: Policy Struggles in the New Deal Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

³³ Daniel Hoan, "How Milwaukee is Solving the Housing Problem," *American City*, July 1934; *Milwaukee Leader*, July 12, 1930, Housing Clipping File, Legislative Reference Bureau, Milwaukee Wisconsin.

leaders also worried that Milwaukee remained overcrowded. Like their predecessors, they envisioned the transformation of the inner core to work in concert with community development on the fringe. In a 1950 article in the *American City*, Milwaukee Housing Authority Director Richard Perrin struck a remarkably similar note to that illuminated by Daniel Hoan twenty years before in the same publication, when he wrote; “If the core of the city is to be rebuilt according to a sound and logical plan, then it is equally important that the expanding periphery of the city be developed on an equally well-ordered basis.”³⁴ Clearly, prewar notions of urbanism had not disappeared.

Finally, Sam Bass Warner has famously stated that the private search for wealth has driven the process of urbanization.³⁵ Other historians have refined the notion of “privatism” in critiques of urban policy, correctly noting that city leaders too often responded to the demands of the private market in formulating policy. The “relentless logic of the market,” writes Max Page of slum clearance in Manhattan, helps explain capitalism’s imprint on an ever-changing cityscape. The racial exclusivity of much of postwar suburbia is defined in similar terms, since realtors often took advantage of white fears of heterogeneity when creating a racially conditioned marketplace. These insights are invaluable in considering how urban America evolved. However, it is equally important to understand how public policy conditioned the market. Implicit in the story of Milwaukee, and, I suspect, other cities as well, is the search for *public wealth* as a process. Public land use decisions, annexation battles, court decisions, and state legislation profoundly affected the nature of urban and suburban development in the Milwaukee region. As the Milwaukee region fragmented politically, economic

³⁴ As quoted in *The American City*, May 1950, pp. 5-6.

³⁵ Sam Bass Warner, *The Private City: Philadelphia in its Three Periods of Growth* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 198).

development atomized, as each municipality sought to maximize its revenue.

Acknowledging that the private search for wealth in the modern metropolis helps define the life cycle of cities should not circumscribe the reality of political balkanization as the context in which that search took place.

Chapter 1: Dreaming the Decentralized Metropolis

"It should be borne in mind constantly that the zoning ordinance is for the welfare of those who do the living rather than those who do the exploiting." Charles Whitnall, 1931.

In 1918, the women's editor of one of Milwaukee's largest daily newspapers decided to "tour" the city's poorest neighborhoods and report to the reading public on their conditions. Accompanied by an official from the city's health department, the editor did not have to venture far from Milwaukee's central business district along Grand Avenue to find urban poverty. Adjacent to downtown on both the northwest and the south sides were two of the city's most conspicuous slums. The Third Ward, east of the Milwaukee River and just south of Grand Avenue, had already been the subject of many stories of "how the other half" of the city lived. Alexander Fisher, the health inspector who accompanied the women's editor on her tour, found most of the housing in the Third Ward "hardly fit for beasts." Two years earlier, Fisher had conducted a survey of 973 dwelling units in the Third Ward. Only 80 contained bathtubs, no doubt contributing to the health inspector's characterization of the Third Ward's mostly Italian inhabitants as "filthy."¹

The article from the women's editor beseeched Milwaukeeans to see for themselves the squalid conditions of the city's slums. "Clannish foreigners" were crowding one another out of inner city ghettos; African Americans had replaced Jews in the 6th Ward neighborhood centered on 7th and Poplar; Slovaks and Greeks had "chased" the Irish from Tory Hill adjacent to downtown on the west. The family unit was in discord; "Children run about all day while their

¹ *Milwaukee Sentinel*, November 26, 1916, Housing Clipping File, Legislative Reference Bureau, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

mother is at work.” Households of this type were so prevalent that the editor dubbed many of the homes “bachelor halls, for they are inhabited by men alone trying to overcome the need of the touch of a woman’s hand in homemaking.” The women’s editor was most concerned with overcrowding, in both the Third Ward and the Sixth Ward (adjacent to downtown on the north and west). The headline of her October article warned Milwaukeeans that over 2,800 families in the city lived in basement apartments, which mocked the city’s reputation as a center of solid Germanic orderliness. The article specifically challenged Milwaukee’s elite “limousine class” to drop their Sunday automobile drives in the countryside and spend at least one afternoon immersing themselves in urban poverty.²

Exposes of this sort were common in American newspapers during the Progressive Era. The vivid imagery of Jacob Riis’s *How the Other Half Lives* brought the slum-like conditions of New York’s Lower East to a shocked nation. Journalists like Lincoln Steffens had made “muckraking” journalism a cottage industry with tales of both urban corruption and physical decay.³ Since their middle class reading audiences had very little personal experience with urban poverty, stories such as these provided shock value just as assuredly as they urgently called for reform.⁴ In this regard, the newspaper story about Milwaukee’s slums certainly was similar: a dramatic story of poverty and urban despair aimed at the middle and upper classes. What made the story truly distinctive more than its content was the source. The 1918 story, and others like it, ran in the *Milwaukee Leader*, the largest daily Socialist newspaper in the country.

² *Milwaukee Leader*, October 3, 1918, Housing Clipping File, Legislative Reference Bureau, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

³ Jacob Riis, *How the Other Half Lives: Studies of the Tenements of New York*, 1890, Lincoln Steffens, *The Shame of the Cities*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1904)

⁴ The best analysis of early twentieth century urban reformers remains Roy Lubove, *The Progressives and the Slums: Tenement House Reform in New York City, 1890-1917* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1962)

The Milwaukee Leader's frequent articles on the slums of Milwaukee provided more than merely tabloid reading. They frequently highlighted the reform efforts of Daniel Hoan, Milwaukee's socialist mayor from 1916 to 1940.⁵ Newspaper accounts of slum-like conditions challenged Milwaukee's reputation as a city of homeowners and placed housing squarely at the center of the political agenda. In 1918, Mayor Hoan formed a housing commission to find answers to the city's crisis of poor housing and congested neighborhoods. Hoan and other reformers also vigorously promoted comprehensive zoning as a way to prevent past planning mistakes and guide Milwaukee's growth in a more orderly manner. These concerns of overcrowding and "congestion" were infused with urgency when, to the shock of many, the 1920 U.S. census revealed Milwaukee to be the second most densely populated city in America.

Housing, congestion, planning, and zoning remained on Milwaukee's agenda throughout the 1920's and, in different forms, bridged the interwar period. Reform efforts were most successful when they meshed with the interests of actors on the private market and least successful when they did not. This chapter examines municipal socialists' attempts at reforming the built environment of Milwaukee. Planning and zoning became the chief weapons of the city's leaders in addressing urban congestion in general and the housing crisis in particular during the decade after World War I. Milwaukee's own policymakers, primarily Mayor Hoan and Charles Whitnall, the city's leading planner and another committed socialist, continuously defined congestion as the city's most pressing problem and used the newly gained municipal powers of zoning and planning to lessen congestion's effects. Whitnall, especially, believed that the congested industrial city was ruining urban America. Most of his reform efforts revolved around a policy of planned decentralization; Milwaukee's growth would be determined by a rigid

⁵ For example, see *Milwaukee Leader*, October 3, 1918, July 14-15, 1919, December 17, 1925, January 6, February 19, 1929, in Housing Clipping Files, Legislative Reference Bureau, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

zoning ordinance that promoted the detached single-family home. Decentralization would bring urban dwellers closer to the regenerative powers of nature and produce a better life for citizens of the new city.

Whitnall's concepts of how cities should function were not unique to Milwaukee. America's first generation of professional city planners and urban theorists had targeted much of their efforts at reducing the population densities of cities throughout the Progressive Era. John Nolen, Nelson Lewis, Edward Bassett, and Lewis Mumford envisioned the role of city planning much in the same way as Whitnall, as a means to achieve a type of metropolis that would balance the urban and suburban to bring workers more closely in harmony with nature in decentralized garden communities.⁶ The form of this decentralized metropolis was to be horizontal and its function would allow industry to reach outward onto the urban fringe, thus continuing America's economic expansion, yet keeping urban dwellers in close proximity to the places where they worked. This vision was never fully realized in any American city, Milwaukee included. Historian M. Christine Boyer has argued that most planners encouraged decentralization, the ideal of the single-family home, and—ultimately— zoning as a way to functionally and economically segregate cities. In the process, planners unknowingly helped create the urban decline they and other city policymakers were hard-pressed to overturn during the latter half of the twentieth century.⁷ Under this mode of analysis, city planning appears to have been an arm of capitalism, working to ensure economic growth and to marginalize countervailing forces that got in the way of market expansion. According to Boyer, "Planners

⁶ For a review of early planning leaders, see Mel Scott, *American City Planning Since 1890* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969); for literature by the planners themselves, see Nelson Lewis, *The Planning of the Modern City* (New York: Wiley and Sons, 1923), Clarence Stein, *Toward New Towns for America*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1957), Edward Bassett, *Zoning; The Laws, Administration, and Court Decisions During the First Twenty Years* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1936), Lewis Mumford, *The City in History: Its Origins, Its Transformations, and Its Prospects* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1961).

⁷ M. Christine Boyer, *Dreaming the Rational City: The Myth of American City Planning*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press) pp.169-170.

have detailed and discussed the problems of urbanization but not to remove the structural deficiencies of the capitalist economic system, which creates the disintegration of cities and the irrationality of urban life.”⁸

Numerous historians have successfully demonstrated that planners in the twentieth century failed to act as agents for the revitalization of cities, ignoring the structural inequalities in cities that were left to other reformers and even future generations of planners to attempt to remove.⁹ Planning, however, did not solely operate as an extension of elitism, nor did it operate monolithically. In Milwaukee, Daniel Hoan’s Socialist mayoralty extended some twenty-four years and Whitnall was able to exert tremendous influence as both Milwaukee city and county’s chief planner. Because of these local leftist political actors, Milwaukee provides a notable exception to the paradigm of planning as a strict product of capitalist elites. Certainly planners like Whitnall and civic leaders such as Daniel Hoan, to borrow Boyer’s phrase, “detailed and discussed the problems of urbanization” and recognized the same symptoms—population congestion, poor housing, inadequate infrastructure, and other impediments to economic growth—as other civic leaders. However, planning proponents in Milwaukee often *blamed* capitalism as a prime culprit in the creation of inequality in America. Like many other socialists, Hoan saw the primary cause of World War I as a growing clash of imperial capitalists for new markets. As one scholar has noted, Hoan saw the solution in the abolition of the causes of war “by returning to labor the full value of its toil and making imperialism unnecessary.”¹⁰ More specifically to the context of American cities, Whitnall saw the poorly regulated urban real estate

⁸ Boyer, *Dreaming the Rational City*, 129.

⁹ Boyer, *Dreaming the Rational City*, and Patricia Burgess, *Planning for the Private Interest: Land Use Controls and Residential Patterns in Columbus, Ohio, 1900-1970* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1994), Marc A. Weiss, *The Rise of the Community Builders: The American Real Estate Industry and Urban Land Planning* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), and Max Page, *The Creative Destruction of Manhattan, 1900-1940* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

¹⁰ Floyd John Stachowski, *The Political Career of Daniel Webster Hoan*, PhD Dissertation, Northwestern University, 1966, p. 69.

market as one that benefited from congestion at the expense of city dwellers. Only a fundamental restructuring of the American economy could redress urban inequality. Whitnall believed this strongly enough to help organize in 1912 the Commonwealth Mutual Savings Bank as an alternative mode of financing, “a cooperative venture for the wage earner.”

Furthermore, both Hoan and Whitnall believed that city planning as a means of achieving decentralization could act as a democratizing and even socializing force on American urban landscapes. To be sure, city planning and urban policy in Milwaukee paid homage to industrial expansion and a booming real estate market, i.e. “market forces.” Civic-minded organizations like the City Club and market-oriented interest groups like the Milwaukee Real Estate Board generally supported city planning and zoning to further their own, very different agendas. But decentralization’s socialist and progressive architects—men like Charles Whitnall, Daniel Hoan, and others—believed that they could harness the market, redirect its trajectory, and even redistribute its resources to the benefits of common urban citizens. In many important ways, the Milwaukee socialists failed to achieve their goals. Hoan was unable to achieve many of his more “socialistic” goals, such as municipal ownership of public transportation, because the Common Council, dominated by a nonpartisan majority for most of his mayoralty, was consistently at odds with his policies.¹¹ Whitnall, too, became extremely frustrated with the slow pace of reform in Milwaukee in the 1920’s.

In spite of these setbacks, the rise of city planning in Milwaukee emerged as one of urban socialism’s clearest victories. In 1919, Hoan wrote that his greatest accomplishment as Milwaukee’s mayor up that point was “the complete crystallization and functioning of popular

¹¹ Stachowski, “The Political Career of Daniel Webster Hoan,” and Edward Kerstein, *Milwaukee’s All-American Mayor: A Portrait of Daniel Webster Hoan* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1966).

opinion in favor of city planning.”¹² Hoan also called the comprehensive zoning ordinance of 1920 “perhaps the greatest single advancement ever made by Milwaukee.”¹³ Accordingly, Whitnall, the primary architect and executor of city planning in Milwaukee, saw the ideal future American city as one where “there will be no slums, no dark alleys, no intersections where children and heavy traffic meet, no congestion and overcrowding, no subways, no skyscrapers, and no lack of recreation facilities.”¹⁴ In essence, institutionalized city planning was to serve as a means to remove from Milwaukee the features that made it “urban” in the first place by decentralizing the city in the name of equality. In its intent, city planning was not an elitist exercise in capitalism but instead—at least in Milwaukee—an attempt to integrate some of the principles of municipal socialism to the structure of city building. During the interwar period Milwaukee, in large part at the behest of Hoan, Whitnall, and other prominent Socialists, became one of the first cities in America to adopt a comprehensive zoning ordinance. Milwaukee embarked on a municipally driven cooperative housing project, the first of its kind in any large city in America. Work began on a system of parks and parkways, designed by Whitnall, which functionally knit the newly decentralized metropolis together. To ensure that peripheral expansion remained under city control, the Hoan administration also embarked on an ambitious annexation program that would politically unify the Milwaukee region. In the process, decentralization emerged not only as a logical extension of urbanization nor as policy goal of city planners, but also as a highly politicized and hotly contested exercise in urban reform that remained unfinished and unresolved after World War Two.

¹² In 1919, a St. Paul, Minnesota business association asked the mayors of fifteen American cities to rank their top three accomplishments. Hoan’s reply is listed in a document sent back to him on December 8, 1919, titled “Biggest Things in Several Cities,” Letter from Paul N. Myers to Daniel Hoan, December 8, 1919, File 517, Box 21, Daniel Hoan Papers, MCHS.

¹³ Gurda, p. 265.

¹⁴ “Land Use Economics—Second Lecture of Planning Course Given by C.B. Whitnall, University of Southern California, June 14-18, 1937,” Housing Folder, Box 1, Charles Whitnall Papers, Milwaukee County Historical Society (MCHS).

Compared to many other cities of the Progressive Era, Milwaukee did not appear to be in much need of housing reform. While congestion afflicted every industrial city in America to one degree or another, it appeared to be a problem most often determined by size and region, with larger cities of the northeast—such as New York and Boston—often the subjects of the most concern for reformers. For a variety of reasons, cities of the Midwest appeared to be relatively immune from congestion. Single-family homes were more prevalent on Midwest urban landscapes than the dumbbell tenements and row houses of the urban Northeast. Chicago and Detroit were low-rise cities, horizontally organized and less obviously crowded. As a quintessentially Midwest metropolis, Milwaukee seemed to fall into this category. The balloon frame house dominated Milwaukee’s built landscape, particularly in the working class neighborhoods north by northwest and south of downtown. The city’s two predominant ethnic groups, Germans and Poles, strongly valued the ownership of property, making homeownership rates somewhat higher than other cities of the Midwest.¹⁵ Because of these physical and social trends, the often-repeated characterization of Milwaukee as a “city of homes” seemed all the more apt. The congestion of a New York, Boston, or even Chicago was less visibly present in Milwaukee.

However, while Milwaukee’s physical landscape may have deviated from other cities, urbanization had yielded the same social, political, and functional problems. The city’s population had risen steadily, growing from just over 71,000 in 1870 to 373,857 by 1910. World War I had greatly slowed home construction, but Milwaukee’s population continued to rise,

¹⁵ Judith Kenny, “Polish Routes to Americanization: House Form and Landscape on Milwaukee’s Polish South Side” in Robert C. Ostergren and Thomas R. Vale, ed., *Wisconsin Land and Life*, (Madison; University of Wisconsin Press, 1997).

reaching 464,689 by 1920.¹⁶ Already crowded neighborhoods virtually overflowed with new residents. People with especially modest means often settled in basements, attics, and back alley sheds. Even more ominously to planners and reformers, the city's population density crept upward during the war, as housing construction ground to a halt.

The city's increasingly crowded conditions drew the attention of the City Club, an organization dedicated to progressive political reform. The club's members worried that the Milwaukee had reached or neared its population capacity and would therefore fall behind other cities in size, diminishing Milwaukee's national presence. In 1915, the City Club joined the Milwaukee Real Estate Association, the Wisconsin chapter of the American Institute of Architects, and several other prominent local civic groups in sponsoring a study of the viability of city planning in Milwaukee. Werner Hegemann, the famed German landscape architect, authored the report, which he finished in 1916. In it, Hegemann noted with alarm that Milwaukee's "checkerboard pattern" of streets, high concentrations of industry, and preponderance of basement dwellings all contributed to making Milwaukee "one of the most congested" of any city its size.¹⁷ With virtually no regulation, landlords squeezed as many houses onto their lots as possible and in these Milwaukee's "submerged tenth" were deemed no less miserable than New York City's infamous tenement dwellers. Hegeman urged Milwaukeeans to give city planners greater control over land use decisions as the best way to limit congestion.

¹⁶ "Wisconsin City Growth, 1900, 1910, 1920" from *Milwaukee Sentinel*, February 17, 1921, Population Clipping File, Legislative Reference Bureau, Milwaukee, WI.

¹⁷ Werner Hegeman, "City Planning for Milwaukee: What It is and why It Needs to be Secured" a Report Submitted to Wisconsin chapter of the American Institute of Architects, the City Club, The Milwaukee Real Estate Association, Westminster League, South Side Civic Association. Milwaukee, February 1916, Milwaukee Public Library.

Like many city planners, Hegeman also framed his advocacy of planning in terms of economic growth. In his conclusion, he noted: “City planning means the coordination of activities that make for the growth of the city, especially the activities of railroad and harbor engineers, landscape architects, street building and civil engineers, builders of factories, of offices, of public buildings and dwelling houses.”¹⁸ Hegeman’s implication that government experts could refine all of these generators of economic growth gave planning needed legitimacy in the city’s key private institutions. The Milwaukee Association of Commerce (MAC), the city’s largest business organization whose members included many prominent real estate officials, also fretted over congestion, but worried less about the social problems it spawned than its impediment to future economic growth. Due to Wisconsin Supreme Court decisions that more closely regulated annexation, Milwaukee’s capability to absorb and develop new lands on the city’s fringe had evaporated in recent years. Realtors within the MAC worried that without open land that was under Milwaukee’s jurisdiction, real estate speculation would pose a greater gamble because there were no guarantees that land outside Milwaukee’s borders would receive valuable and cost-efficient city water and sewage services.

In fact, reformers had perceived urban congestion as a social ill and a challenge to future economic growth for decades. The existence of slums in Milwaukee had been a concern throughout the late nineteenth century when immigration increased, but poor neighborhoods seemed to have been contained to a few well-defined sections of the city. Upwardly mobile Milwaukeeans had long looked askance at the city’s Polish South Side. Located immediately south of the factories along the Menomonee River, the South Side had grown into Milwaukee’s *Polonia* with its tightly packed bungalows and distinctive “Polish flats” (raised basements that

¹⁸ Hegeman, “City Planning for Milwaukee,” 36.

owners often rented as apartments to help pay off their mortgages).¹⁹ This type of additive architecture helped make home ownership rates in the South Side disproportionately high and also negated the need for dumbbell tenements. Nevertheless, despite this low-rise nature, the South Side's neighborhoods were densely populated and thus a concern to reformers. Another predominantly Polish neighborhood north of the central business district in the First Ward contained 104 people per acre, with as many as three or four homes located on a single lot.²⁰ The Sixth Ward, adjacent to the central business district's north and west edges, seemed even less desirable. Once considered part of "Kilbourntown," the name given to the half of the city that sat west of the Milwaukee River, the Sixth Ward had originally served as an entry point for Milwaukee's vast German population and since 1890 increasingly housed Southern and Eastern European immigrants, especially Greeks and Jews.²¹ Milwaukee's small but expanding African American community lived in the Sixth Ward as well, which earned parts of the area derisive nicknames such as "Nigger Alley" and "Black Bottom."²² After a tour of the neighborhood, Milwaukee's Health Commissioner reported that in the Sixth Ward "approximately 20% of the sleeping rooms are overcrowded...Bad housekeeping is quite general among all foreign people throughout this area."²³

While urban immigrant "slums" had long been a target of multiple generations of reformers, the onset of World War I apparently made their existence more acute and thus a greater threat to the city's middle and upper classes. Like most cities, Milwaukee's manufacturing sector expanded greatly during World War I; accordingly, the city's population

¹⁹ The best ethnography of the Polish South Side is Judith T. Kenny, "Polish Routes to Americanization: House Form and Landscape on Milwaukee's South Side," T. Vale, R. Ostergen, eds. *Wisconsin Land and Life*, (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996).

²⁰ *Milwaukee Sentinel*, January 26, 1916, Housing Clipping File, Legislative Reference Bureau, Milwaukee, WI.

²¹ For a colorful and irreverent folk history of the neighborhood, see Robert Wells, *This is Kilbourntown* (Milwaukee: Times Holding Inc., 1971)

²² *Once a Year*, Milwaukee Press Club, Vol. 13, p. 37

²³ *Milwaukee Sentinel*, January 26, 1916, Housing Clipping File, Legislative Reference Bureau, Milwaukee, WI.

continued to grow. With most capital diverted toward the war effort, real estate activity ground to a virtual standstill. Within Milwaukee's city limits, only an estimated five percent of the total amount of land remained undeveloped.²⁴ The city had managed to annex precious little land during the war, which meant that the population density that reformers were seeking to avoid was instead rising to alarming levels. By the close of 1915, the Milwaukee Sewage Commission counted 75,492 housing units in the city for 379,213 people, an average of 5.023 persons per unit for the city as a whole. The Fourteenth Ward, which encompassed most of the Polish South Side, housed on average over eight people per unit and other wards near the central business district had densities of six to seven people per unit.²⁵ More ominously, Milwaukee's "slum" districts seemed to be expanding into previously desirable neighborhoods in the wake of World War I. The *Milwaukee Journal* warned in 1919: "The housing problem is not confined to one district, thirteen out of the 25 wards in the city have poor housing... It is pointed out that since one-half of this area lies in districts of high land value, the economic loss to the community through non-improvement of the property and the consequent inadequate taxation, is considerable."²⁶ Not only did local media perceive slums as a social problem best dealt with by settlement house workers, housing reformers, and religious charities, slums seemed to be becoming an economic problem that threatened the vitality and wealth of the entire city. Non-socialist newspapers shared similar concerns over the congested nature of the city's slums, but more frequently tended to place behavior over environment as the central problem. In 1916, the

²⁴ The actual number varies. Milwaukee city officials and reformers used the lack of vacant land to justify both annexation and, later, city-county consolidation. See "Annexation Since January 1, 1922 to November 1, 1926," by Arthur Werba, Folder 1, Box 6, City Club of Milwaukee Records, Area Research Center, Golda Meier Library, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and "History of Consolidation in Milwaukee County," a speech by Leo Tiefenthaler before the Joint Committee on Consolidation in Milwaukee County, March 15, 1934, Folder 1, Box 15, City Club of Milwaukee Records, Area Research Center, Golda Meier Library, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

²⁵ *Milwaukee Sewage Commission, Annual Report*, Housing Clipping File, Legislative Reference Bureau.

²⁶ *Milwaukee Journal*, August 2, 1917, Housing Clipping File, Legislative Reference Bureau, Milwaukee, WI.

Milwaukee Daily News editorialized that not all slum dwellers were “lazy, shiftless, or improvident, but a goodly portion of them can live better if they make the effort.”²⁷ The Hearst-owned *Milwaukee Sentinel* made a similar observation of Milwaukee’s tiny but growing African American population, warning readers; “the fact that a Negro moves from Georgia to Milwaukee does not change his habits or his social life.”²⁸ The Socialist *Leader*, in contrast, acknowledged “the great need for education of cleanliness and sanitation” of newcomers to Milwaukee, but focused much more of its attention on the slumlords and “rent profiteers” who benefited from overcrowding.²⁹

Milwaukee’s nascent Socialist Party also identified slums and urban congestion as the city’s most pressing concern at the close of World War I. In fact, socialists had originally swept into City Hall in 1910 under currents of reform that were changing municipal government on a national level. The previous mayor, David Rose, oversaw an “open city” where vice and corruption were implicitly tolerated. Rose was briefly voted out of office in 1906 by reform Republican Sherburn Becker. Under Becker’s mayoralty, the Metropolitan Parks Commission, which later became the Board of Public Land Commissioners, was created but it exercised little power. Rose returned to office once more in 1908, but was finally unseated two years later. Voters, once again tired of municipal corruption, elected a socialist ticket. Emil Seidel became mayor and served from 1910 to 1912; fourteen socialist council members joined him with a clear mandate to reform both the operations of city government as well as to improve the urban environment of Milwaukee. Though Seidel failed to gain a second term, in 1916 another socialist, Daniel Hoan, won the mayoralty and vowed to continue to improve upon the form and

²⁷ *Milwaukee Daily News*, November 23, 1916, Housing Clipping File, Legislative Reference Bureau, Milwaukee, WI.

²⁸ *Milwaukee Sentinel*, March 2, 1929, Population Clipping File, Legislative Reference Bureau, Milwaukee, WI.

²⁹ *Milwaukee Leaders*, May 9, 1919, Housing Clipping File, Legislative Reference Bureau, Milwaukee WI.

function of Milwaukee.³⁰ Like other urban reformers, Hoan was especially alarmed by the city's overcrowded conditions. In 1919, Hoan directed the city's Health Department to study and report on housing conditions. The subsequent report estimated that the "poor housing districts" of Milwaukee housed only about 12% of the city's total population, but contained over one-fourth of all deaths from tuberculosis and over one-fifth of the city's infant mortality rate. In crowded housing, children were "anemic and puny as plants without the stimulating effect of sunlight."³¹ Immediately after World War I, Hoan was concerned enough about poor housing to appoint eleven city officials and civic leaders to a Housing Commission. The purpose of the commission—the first quasi-official agency in the city's history that was to specifically target housing—was to study how other cities in America and Europe had attacked the housing problem and to make specific recommendations to Hoan for a plan of action in Milwaukee.

³⁰ The best review of the rise of Socialism in Milwaukee remains Frederick Olson, *The Milwaukee Socialists, 1897-1941*, Doctoral Dissertation, Harvard University, 1952.

³¹ *Milwaukee Journal*, August 2, 1919, Housing Clipping File, Legislative Reference Bureau, Milwaukee, WI.

Figure 1-1: Population Densities, Twenty Largest American Cities, 1920*

City	Population	Size (sq. miles)	Pop. Per sq. mile
1. New York City	5,620,048	299.0	18,796
2. <i>Milwaukee</i>	457,147	25.3	18,069
3. Newark	414,524	23.3	17,791
4. Boston	748,060	43.5	17,197
5. Pittsburgh	588,343	39.9	14,745
6. Philadelphia	1,823,779	128.0	14,248
7. Cleveland	796,841	56.4	14,128
8. Chicago	2,701,705	192.8	14,013
9. Buffalo	506,775	38.9	13,028
10. Detroit	993,078	77.9	12,748
11. St. Louis	772,897	61.0	12,670
12. San Francisco	506,676	42.0	12,064
13. Baltimore	733,826	79.0	9,289
14. Minneapolis	380,582	49.7	7,658
15. Washington, DC	437,571	60.0	7,293
16. Cincinnati	401,247	71.1	5,643
17. Kansas City	324,410	58.4	5,555
18. Seattle	315,312	58.6	5,381
19. New Orleans	387,219	178.0	2,175
20. Los Angeles	576,673	365.7	1,577

US Bureau of the Census, Population Division Working Paper No. 27
<http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0027.html>

Of the eleven men appointed to the Housing Commission, perhaps no one so ardently opposed congestion in principle and had so well-developed a sense of how a city should function as Charles Whitnall, who was an original member of Milwaukee's planning arm, the Board of Public Land Commissioners, as well as Milwaukee's Park Commission. Whitnall became, for all practical purposes, Milwaukee's first official city planner and exerted tremendous influence over both the city and the region's future growth. The son of a prominent local florist, Whitnall was born in 1859 and raised at a home four miles north of downtown, along the banks of the

Milwaukee River in what was a decidedly rural environment through the 1870's and 1880's.³²

Whitnall eventually came by his anti-urban bias through political and environmental means.

Witnessing the forces of urbanization, industrialization, and immigration first-hand, he watched with growing alarm as Milwaukee's population grew more rapidly each passing decade.

Whitnall became a socialist in the 1900's and in 1910 was elected city treasurer in an election that swept Seidel and—for two years, at least—a majority of socialist aldermen into office.

Despite only holding on to his post as treasurer for two years, Whitnall came to exert far greater influence as a charter member of the Board of Public Commissioners (BPLC), Milwaukee's city planning arm that was initially formed in 1907 and strengthened into an official planning body by state legislation in 1915. Whitnall served on the BPLC from 1907 through 1945, on the City Parks Commission through the 1930's, then on the consolidated Milwaukee County Parks Commission until his death in 1948. He also was a member of Milwaukee County's Regional Planning Department during the 1920's. From these multiple positions—all of which were appointive—Whitnall could and did exert tremendous influence over the trajectory of Milwaukee's urban growth. Whitnall served as a crucial planning official at both the county and municipal levels for thirty-eight years. From these dual positions, he cultivated an intellectual luxury that few city administrators attained and practically no city mayors could afford, that of the politically detached but intensely principled government official. The *Leader* acknowledged Whitnall's unique influence on Milwaukee in 1927: "What C.B. Whitnall first visions for the city and county of Milwaukee somehow later becomes a reality. This has been so much a fact that no

³² Gurda, 268.

one any longer is so irreverent as to refer to Mr. Whitnall's peeps into the future as 'Whitnall Dreams.'"³³

At the heart of Whitnall's planning principles was his almost zealous hatred of congestion. The industrial city had produced an urban form that Whitnall abhorred as greatly as any planner in America. A florist by trade, Whitnall echoed many Progressive Era conservationists in his belief that urbanization was rearing a generation that threatened to miss out entirely on the advantages of exposure to the natural environment. In 1906, Whitnall voluntarily issued an eight-page report calling for a comprehensive program of parks in Milwaukee. In it, he argued that cities had undermined the health of their citizens by ignoring nature almost entirely during their growth. Whitnall lamented, "Why do we spend so much in destroying the nature which should be assimilated during our development and attempt to retrieve it only in spots, for what is a park but an island of normal atmosphere surrounded by physical disintegration?"³⁴ To Whitnall, conservation of nature was as much an urban problem as it was rural; as he wrote, "The destruction of our forests by lumbermen is no more serious than the robbing of our soil by municipalities." Whitnall's report was fundamental to the formation in 1907 of the Metropolitan Parks Commission, which became by state enabling legislation in 1915 the Board of Public Land Commissioners, Milwaukee's official planning body.³⁵

An ardent naturalist, Whitnall saw crowded cities as environmental problems. By 1910, Whitnall had also become a socialist and his political sensibilities viewed crowded cities as

³³ *Milwaukee Leader*, November 18, 1927, City Planning Clipping File, Legislative Reference Bureau, Milwaukee, WI.

³⁴ Untitled Report by Charles Whitnall, 1936 Folder, Charles Whitnall Papers, MCHS.

³⁵ *Ibid.* On the first page, the Milwaukee County Park Commission explained that they had reissued the report "because of its value in explaining the underlying principles which led to the establishment of the County Parks Commission."

places that did more than merely divorce humans from nature. Congestion, Whitnall believed, was also fostering gross disparities in wealth. An admirer of Henry George's *Progress and Poverty*, Whitnall echoed George in noting that real estate values were the highest in the most crowded places in cities. Because of this, the owners of land in these congested urban spaces relied not on the land itself for their wealth but on the high volume of people that occupied or passed their property and made these places so congested—and accordingly so valuable—in the first place. Therefore, the recipients of this wealth had not come by it honestly. This “unearned increment,” the term that George had used to describe inflated real estate values and one that Whitnall made liberal use of as well, encouraged congestion as a way to maximize land values. Unregulated capitalism had created congestion; it was up to municipal socialism to reverse the trend and spur decentralization.³⁶

Much of Whitnall's vehemence toward the process of city shaping focused on the grid system, which many prominent city planners in America had come to abhor by the early twentieth century. In Werner Hegeman's 1915 report advocating city planning for Milwaukee, the grid system of city streets was dismissed as a relic of pre-industrial times: “There is primarily the thoughtless routine in which in which the continuous extension of the city follows an old program laid down long before the advent of modern conditions.”³⁷ The original layout of Milwaukee's streets in 1835 had precipitated and then imposed congestion on the city's urban landscape. Like Hegeman, Whitnall saw the grid pattern as a certain type of original sin that made cities both unequal and inefficient. In his landmark report on parks, Whitnall claimed, “In

³⁶ “Five Lectures on City Planning: Given by C.B. Whitnall at the Ninth Annual Session of the Institute of Government, University of Southern California, June 14-18, 1937” 1927-1928 Folder, Charles Whitnall Papers, MCHS.

³⁷ Hegeman, “City Planning for Milwaukee: What It is and why It Needs to be Secured,” 8.

Milwaukee, there are over 300,000 people who travel a zigzag course against their very nature and better sense of direction. To ignore those instincts is dangerous.”³⁸

Since he deemed overcrowding to be the source of practically every urban problem, Whitnall had a special dislike for anyone or anything that enhanced it. In the 1920’s, he castigated New York City for building a subway that he saw did nothing more than “maintain the inflated values of the skyscraper area.”³⁹ Since congestion was embedded in the physical structure of cities, Whitnall hated tall buildings of any kind—commercial or residential, luxury high-rise or tenement. In an annual report of the Board of Public Land Commissioners, Whitnall charged, “Urban dwellers often succumb to the vicious influence of apartment house living, which is so insidious that it is not appreciated until the damage is done.”⁴⁰

Even Whitnall’s most famous contribution to Milwaukee, its system of parkways, was born from his desires to reduce congestion and decentralize the urban population. Whitnall had long called for an increase in parklands to bring city residences closer to nature. Using his twin positions on both the city BPLC and the Milwaukee County Parks and Regional Planning Commissions, Whitnall pushed for a system of parkways for Milwaukee throughout the 1910’s. After World War I, with a sympathetic mayor Hoan in office and widespread civic concern over Milwaukee’s crowded conditions, the parkways gained greater political attention. In 1923, Albert Woller and Herman Tucker, two socialist state assemblymen representing districts in Milwaukee, introduced in the Wisconsin legislature bills enabling both the city and county to acquire lands along the county’s waterways for a comprehensive system of parks.⁴¹

³⁸ Untitled Report by Charles Whitnall, 1936 Folder, Charles Whitnall Papers, MCHS.

³⁹ “Criticisms of Chapter Twenty Two of the Report on Transportation based on the finding of facts by McClellan and Junkerfield of New York City,” 1927 Correspondence Folder, Charles Whitnall Papers, MCHS.

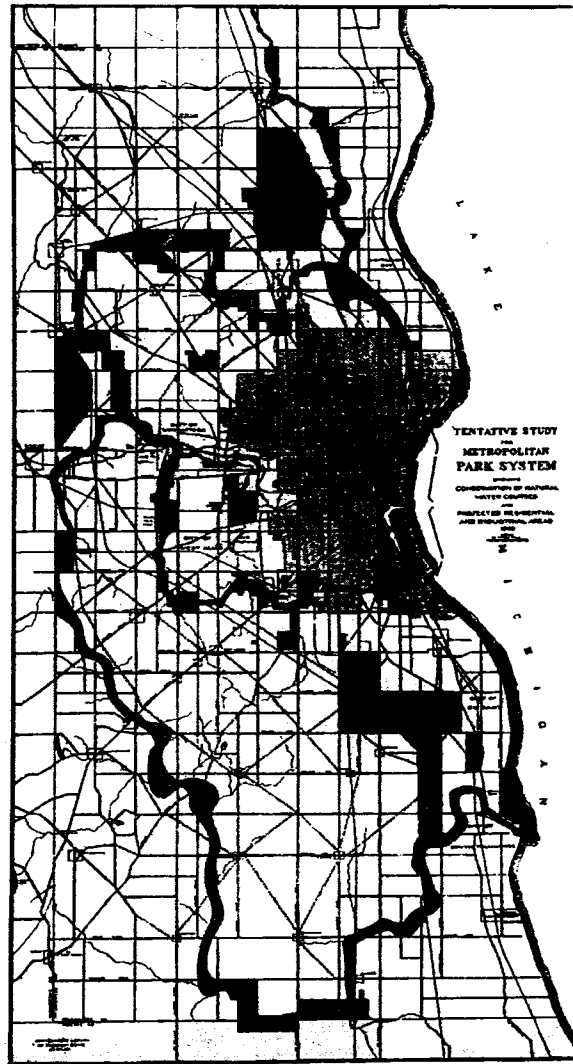
⁴⁰ *Board of Public Land Commissioners 1928 Annual Report*, Milwaukee Public Library (MPL).

⁴¹ *Milwaukee Leader*, May 7, 1923, Parkway Clipping File, Legislative Reference Bureau, Milwaukee, WI.

From the parkways' inception, Whitnall perceived their development as a key qualitative salvo against the evils of congestion. In 1923, trying to drum up state support for the parkway legislation, Whitnall reminded the legislature; "Milwaukee is one of the most congested cities in the country. The parkways will provide nature's own beauty spots and will help conserve the natural beauty of the county."⁴² That same year, Whitnall released his plan for Milwaukee County's parkways. Eighty-four miles of "parked driveways" would follow the natural contours of the county's lakeshore, rivers, and creeks.⁴³

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ *The First Plans for a Parkway System for Milwaukee County*, 1924, MPL.



TENTATIVE STUDY FOR A COUNTY PARK SYSTEM
Made in 1923 by C. B. Whitall

Milwaukee County Parkway Plans
The First Plans for a Parkway System for Milwaukee County, 1924, MPL

Stream banks would be reforested, certain wetlands preserved, and large parks would be constructed at varying ends along the parkways. According to Milwaukee historian John Gurda, “Whitnall’s highway and park maps became, with very little revision, the official guides for all local land use planning.”⁴⁴ By 1925, all three governmental units had enthusiastically signed off

⁴⁴ Gurda, 270.

on the parkway plans, and city and county officials spent much of the 1920's slowly acquiring the land necessary to their development.

While the conservationist features of Whitnall's plans are obvious, Milwaukee's parkways were also intended to be a catalyst for decentralization. Whitnall himself repeated this theme countless times in 1923 and 1924 when he was trying to drum up support in Milwaukee's Common Council, County Board, and in the state legislature to adopt his plans. Parks and parkways would not only provide natural "breathing space" to city residents; they were to be the spine of a decentralized metropolis. Land surrounded the parkways would transform into "residential suburbs," housing people who escaped the grime of the inner city.⁴⁵ A strong believer in the future predominance of the automobile, Whitnall also envisioned his parkway system as a keystone in the city's transportation future. The automobile, Whitnall frequently proclaimed, was one of the greatest innovations in American history and could become a great catalyst to decentralization. At a lecture in Los Angeles, Whitnall expounded on the auto's ability to reduce congestion: "The automobile has taught people that they can live beyond the city's confines with all the coveted city conveniences and do so with less cost and greater benefit to themselves and their children. The auto has done for decentralization in a short period of time what many decades of teaching could not have done."⁴⁶ Milwaukee's parkways, as principle auto thoroughfares in addition to being pleasant spaces, would thus have multiple positive uses.

Whitnall's parkway system was broadly popular; both Socialists and their opponents in the Common Council supported them, as did all of Milwaukee's major newspapers, the Association of Commerce, and the Milwaukee Real Estate Board. It soon became apparent that

⁴⁵ "Why a County Parkway System? An Explanation of the Plan, the Purpose, the Method of Land Acquisition, and the Benefits" authored by the Milwaukee County Park Commission, 1929-1930 Folder, Charles Whitnall Papers, MCHS.

⁴⁶ "The Planner-What About Him?" part of Five Lectures on City Planning, 1937 correspondence folder, Charles Whitnall Papers, MCHS.

Milwaukee's parkways meant different things to different groups of people. Socialists viewed parkways as a public equalizer. The *Milwaukee Leader* mused; "the parkway will bring the people, without distinction of class or station, closer to nature."⁴⁷ Emil Seidel, Milwaukee's first Socialist mayor and longtime parks supporter, returned to local government as an alderman in 1932 and envisioned the Lincoln Creek Park area that ran through his district to become "the best working class section in the city."⁴⁸ Other local newspapers seized on the parkways' promotional capabilities; the *Milwaukee Journal* compared them to J.C. Nichol's Country Club Plaza in Kansas City as a signifier of civic greatness.⁴⁹ For realtors, parkways meant economic opportunity. Speculators bought up land, not only in the path of the parkways themselves, but near the county's creeks and rivers, in anticipation of their potential desirability as residential communities. In suburban Wauwatosa, an upper middle class bedroom community west of Milwaukee, locals predicted that when the Honey Creek Parkway was completed, "an increase in valuation is certain to come."⁵⁰ In fact, the parkways promised to be such a boon to Milwaukee's real estate community that sub-dividers even occasionally donated land—free of charge—located in the path of parkways.⁵¹ The expected increase in the property values of the nearby land apparently drove this benevolence.

In hindsight, the hopes of Whitnall and other Socialists that the parkways would become the spine of a working class suburban utopia appear naïve. Communities that grew near the parkways in later decades, especially the 1950's, were middle class in character and housing was not within the economic reach of lower income families. Parkways also often acted as

⁴⁷ *Milwaukee Leader*, November 18, 1929, Parkway Clipping File, Legislative Reference Bureau, Milwaukee, WI.

⁴⁸ *Milwaukee Leader*, December 13, 1935, Parkway Clipping File, Legislative Reference Bureau, Milwaukee, WI.

⁴⁹ *Milwaukee Journal*, May 27, 1923, Parkway Clipping File, Legislative Reference Bureau, Milwaukee, WI.

⁵⁰ *Wauwatosa News*, July 26, 1928, Parkway Clipping File, Legislative Reference Bureau, Milwaukee, WI.

⁵¹ For example, see *Milwaukee Sentinel*, December 4, 1936, Parkway Clipping File, Legislative Reference Bureau, Milwaukee, WI, and *Milwaukee Sentinel*, September 8, 1928, Land Clipping File, Legislative Reference Bureau, Milwaukee, WI.

geographical barriers, with poorer neighborhoods on one side and wealthier suburbs on the other. Furthermore, as the Milwaukee region became politically fragmented and suburbanized, city and county officials found themselves limited in how they could regulate land use decisions and thus the character of the communities that were to grow. None of this was apparent when Whitnall's parkways were nascent. Milwaukee was busy finding solutions to urban congestion and the postwar housing shortage, and parkways seemed promising in their ability to achieve decentralization. Furthermore, Hoan, Whitnall, and other reformers were hopeful that other initiatives befitting a vigorous local government would provide more immediate relief.

Institutionalized city planning took hold in Milwaukee during the immediate aftermath of World War I. Late in 1918, Mayor Hoan's Housing Commission released its report and recommendations on housing conditions in Milwaukee. The Commission's report bluntly stated that American government was incumbent upon itself "to put the welfare of the whole above the welfare of groups or individuals. Without the acceptance of this newer view of government, housing reform is not possible of accomplishment." The report made five recommendations toward the "solution of the housing problem." The first recommendation revealed the hopes of Hoan, Whitnall, and other Milwaukee Socialists' to use the housing crisis as the foundation to encourage a new method of housing production and consumption, as the report recommended "a complete elimination of speculative land values."⁵² The remaining four recommendations called for improved transportation and infrastructure development, more economical construction of homes, the attainment of home ownership for wage earners, and legislation "aiming to stimulate the erection of wage earners homes." The Housing Commission also gave great deference to the

⁵² Report of the Housing Commission to Mayor Daniel Hoan, Folder 455, Box 10, Daniel Hoan Papers, MCHS.

Garden City ideas of Ebenezer Howard. Chairman William Schuchardt, a local architect who later served on the Board of Public Land Commissioners (BPLC), wrote: “the Garden Cities of Europe put our industrial home districts to shame.” Most of the other members agreed, as the commission’s final recommendations combined Garden City sensibilities with Socialist political principles, calling for Milwaukee to bypass “the burden of speculative land values” by encouraging municipal ownership of large tracts of land for cooperative housing.⁵³

City planners from outside Milwaukee enthusiastically greeted the Housing Commission’s report. Charles Harris Whitaker, editor of *The Octagon House*, the official journal of the American Institute of Architects, enthusiastically told a commission member, “God be praised! A housing commission has at last written a human report. This is the first one I ever saw that squarely and fairly attacked the problem at its roots.”⁵⁴ In 1919, Clarence Stein, who was then serving as secretary of the Reconstruction Commission of the state of New York and would later become a founding member of the Regional Planning Association of America, asked Milwaukee’s Housing Commission for suggestions to deal with New York’s housing crisis.⁵⁵ John Nolen also asked to see the Commission’s plans.

The Housing Commission’s report became the blueprint for the Garden Homes, one of the first municipally funded housing developments in American history. Socialists in Milwaukee had long encouraged the city to build cooperative housing as ways to help working families afford single-family homes in healthier environments. The postwar housing crisis had given a sense of urgency to the need for affordable dwellings. Mayor Hoan and other city officials

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Letter from Charles Whitaker to William Schuchardt, January 16, 1919, Folder 453, Box 19, Daniel Hoan Papers, Milwaukee County Historical Society.

⁵⁵ Letter from Clarence Stein to William Schuchardt, March 20, 1919, Folder 449, Box 18, Daniel Hoan Papers, Milwaukee County Historical Society.

understood this and initiated efforts at cooperative housing almost immediately after receiving the Housing Commission's recommendations.⁵⁶

The initial plan called for both the city of Milwaukee and Milwaukee County to invest in the cooperative housing scheme, which first required state enabling legislation to be legal. Eager to stimulate the economy in the midst of the postwar recession, the Wisconsin State legislature came through in the summer of 1919, authorizing the creation of a nonprofit, municipally funded housing corporation to purchase and then plat land strictly for residential purposes. To guarantee that public money would be invested in affordable housing, a clause inserted into the bill capped the cost of any homes to be built at \$5,000. The entire project, dubbed the "Garden Homes," was to cost \$500,000, with half of that number raised by selling preferred stock. Both the city and the county appropriated \$50,000 and hoped to raise an additional \$100,000 through private subscriptions.⁵⁷

Initially, these efforts met with difficulty. The city's local business community, reticent about the cooperative principles behind both the Housing Commission and the Garden Homes, proved slow to invest in the project. The Milwaukee Association of Commerce announced its own plans for a large-scale housing development. The urgency of the housing shortage, however, transcended politics in this case. In 1920, the Association of Commerce agreed to abandon its construction program and relinquish to Hoan's Housing Commission the responsibility for addressing the housing shortage. A year later, the Garden Homes Company was incorporated and capitalized at \$500,000. The company found twenty-nine acres of land just

⁵⁶ The most complete overview of the Garden Homes appears in chapter four of David Barry Cady, "The Influence of the Garden City Ideal on American Housing and Planning Reform, 1900-1940" Ph.D. Diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1970. Also see Wayne Attoe and Mark Latus, "The First Public Housing: Sewer Socialism's Garden City for Milwaukee," *The Journal of Popular Culture* X, 1 (Summer 1976): 142-149 and Gail Radford, *Modern Housing for America: Policy Struggles in the New Deal Era*, 49-51.

⁵⁷ Cady, "The Influence of the Garden City Ideal on American Housing and Planning Reform, 1900-1940" 100; "Garden Homes Housing Project: A Summary," 1934, Legislative Reference Bureau, Milwaukee, WI.

outside of Milwaukee's northern boundary and broke ground on the Garden Homes in September of 1921. By 1922, the first family moved into the project and, a year later, 105 single-family homes, ten duplexes, and one apartment house were completed for a total construction cost of only \$50,000.⁵⁸

To its architects, the Garden Homes project represented far more than relief from the postwar housing shortage. William Schuchardt, a member of both the BPLC and the Housing Commission and one of the project's chief architects, had spent six months in Europe in 1911 studying model Garden Cities such as Letchworth and had ever since been a committed advocate of the concept. Hoan and Whitnall had been charter board members of the Commonwealth Mutual Savings Bank of Milwaukee, a cooperative bank aimed specifically at helping working class residents of Milwaukee. In 1923, Hoan served as chairman of the Cooperative League of America's Committee on Co-operative Housing. In short, men who were committed to restructuring the America's urban form and economic structure created the Garden Homes. In this context, the project's cooperative structure was indispensable. Each prospective tenant signed a lease and agreed to subscribe to common stock in the Garden Homes Corporation equal to the value of the home. Tenants could pay a fraction of the cost up front and slowly amortize the lease by monthly rent payments. Full title of all properties remained in the hands of the Garden Homes Corporation. The lots on which the new homes were constructed were 60 x 100, considerably larger than most of the thirty to forty foot-wide lots which dominated Milwaukee's landscape. Curvilinear streets with names such as Letchworth and Port Sunlight Way further

⁵⁸ Cady, "The Influence of the Garden City Ideal on American Housing and Planning Reform, 1900-1940"101.

identified the project with Garden City principles. In the center of the project, a 200 x 500 foot lot was reserved for a park. By any measure, the Garden Homes was a pleasant community.⁵⁹

Despite the efforts of planners to link the project to Ebenezer Howard and Raymond Unwin's renowned communities, the Garden Homes was neither a Garden City nor a cooperative enclave for long. Howard and Unwin called for planned industrial districts to be included in their communities, with residents' homes in clusters near where they worked.⁶⁰ The Garden Homes was about ten blocks east of the north-south Milwaukee Road railway corridor, which rapidly filled up with manufacturing plants in the 1920's. However, planned districts of the kind Howard deemed central to the Garden City ideal proved to be beyond the scope of the project, as was a town center or retail district of any kind. Lacking these crucial elements, the Garden Homes instead grew into another of Milwaukee's increasingly numerous bedroom communities.

The project did not remain a cooperative venture for long either. As the 1920's progressed and a real estate boom continued, residents began to agitate for the right to buy out the Garden Homes Corporation to gain individual title to their properties. Under pressure from the vast majority of tenants, the Garden Homes Boards of directors eventually acquiesced. In 1925, the board persuaded the state legislature to amend the original cooperative bill to allow tenants to own their homes. Once the bill passed and the land was assessed, residents quickly cashed in. By 1927, all of the Garden Homes property had been sold off. Whitnall lamented that residents never realized the project's "true purpose of cooperative action," but the project proved successful in other ways.⁶¹ It demonstrated the willingness, albeit halting at first, by private builders to work with municipal government in planning communities on the fringes of

⁵⁹ Ibid., 99-107, also see Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee*, 264-265, and Stachowski, "The Political Career of Daniel Webster Hoan," 117-130.

⁶⁰ Ebenezer Howard, *Garden Cities of Tomorrow* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1965), edited by F.J Osborne.

⁶¹ As quoted in Cady, "The Influence of the Garden City Ideal on American Housing and Planning Reform, 1900-1940," 106.

Milwaukee. The Garden Homes also confirmed public appetites for carefully planned communities, especially those that were away from the urban core. Milwaukee's public and private officials, in turn, continued in other ways to accommodate those appetites.

During Mayor Hoan's early terms in office, zoning became an even more important long-term attempt to decentralize the Milwaukee metropolis. When the Wisconsin state legislature legally sanctioned city planning in Milwaukee in 1915, it also entrusted the newly reorganized Board of Public Land Commissioners to make a comprehensive land use survey of Milwaukee and to adopt a zoning ordinance. R.E. Stoelting, the BPLC's City Planning Engineer, drafted the ordinance in 1919, with consulting help from Edward Bassett, the primary author of New York City's zoning ordinance of 1916. Bassett also helped promote zoning in Milwaukee, speaking on behalf of this initiative before the City Club and twice to the Common Council. With Bassett's help, the BPLC finished Milwaukee's comprehensive zoning ordinance in 1920.⁶² Mayor Hoan and the Common Council approved it with little revision; in fact, the Common Council suspended its rules on the hearing of bills to rush the measure through. Zoning was voted into law the following year.⁶³

Milwaukee's first zoning ordinance was especially notable because of its extremely stringent controls on land use in the name of reducing congestion. The authors of the zoning ordinance defined congestion as debilitating in two important ways. First, congestion in terms of overcrowded neighborhoods facilitated the spread of diseases which were "most prevalent in congested localities and people living in congested districts most always show diminished power

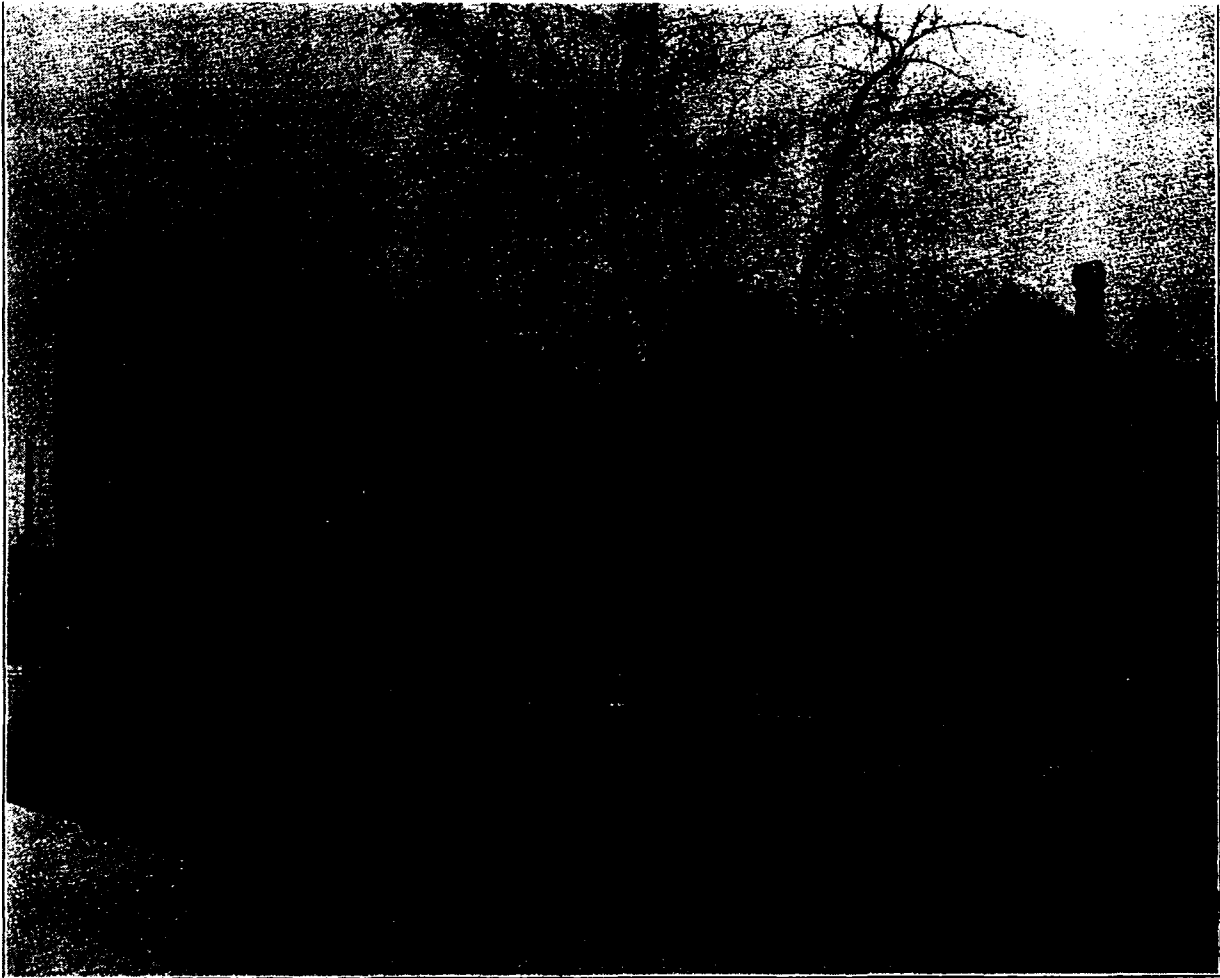
⁶² Letter from Civic Secretary of the City Club of Milwaukee to Russell Griffen, Secretary of the Grand Rapids Citizen's League, December 14, 1922, Folder 9, Box 10, City Club of Milwaukee Records, Area Research Center, Golda Meier Library, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

⁶³ *Milwaukee Sentinel*, November 16, 1920, Zoning Clipping File, Legislative Reference Bureau, Milwaukee, WI.

of resistance to disease.”⁶⁴ With the Spanish influenza having recently racked American cities during the war, zoning as a way to limit overcrowding gained even greater urgency. As Arthur Comey observed in the BPLC’s report to the Common Council: “Zoning makes for an orderly city and it can be shown that this will have a marked effect on the physical fitness of the city’s inhabitants.”⁶⁵ The second way congestion could be reduced lie in the type of future economic growth that could occur in Milwaukee. Before zoning, “the hap-hazard development of our city was ruinous” as land uses overlapped, factories stood on residential streets, apartment buildings crowded next to single-family homes, all of which made the city—in the eyes of planners, at least—a most dysfunctional place. Zoning could arrange land uses into a functional harmony that would provide for a more efficient metropolis. If factories represented “blight within the residential section,” zoning them into specific districts would “make it possible for industrial property to develop unhampered.”

⁶⁴ “Zoning for Milwaukee: Tentative Report of the Board of Public Land Commissioners,” 1920, Legislative Reference Bureau, Milwaukee, WI.

⁶⁵ Ibid.



A HIGH BUILDING IN A DISTRICT OF LOW BUILDINGS

Objectionable location of building, the recurrence of which is to be avoided by zoning.

Planners frowned on diversity within the built environment, regulating even the mildest differences in the heights of buildings.

“Zoning for Milwaukee: Tentative Report of the Board of Public Land Commissioners,” 1920, Legislative Reference Bureau, Milwaukee, WI.

In the same way, strictly residential districts could make these neighborhoods more peaceful and quiet and, as a caveat to landowners, “increase property values on such streets.” To that end, three types of districts—use, area, and height—regulated land uses in Milwaukee. Use districts regulated types of uses to which buildings were put; height districts dictated the height of buildings in identified parts of the city; and area districts were “designed to establish and

perpetuate conditions of adequate light and air, avoid congestion wherever possible, and prevent an undue decrease in light and air, and an increase in congestion in those sections where intensive building has already become general.”⁶⁶

Four different types of “use districts” were identified and organized: residence, local business, commercial and light manufacturing, and industrial. As in other cities, residential districts were segregated from industry to end the days when, as Milwaukee historian John Gurda has written, “A tannery was located next to a house.”⁶⁷ Beyond that functional logic, use districts promised to contain the growth of slums as well. Future residence districts were to be subdivided into lots with minimum sizes 40 feet wide and 120 feet deep for single-family homes, to further ensure that congestion would not continue on the city’s periphery.⁶⁸

“Height” and “area” districts were even more stringently regulated. Downtown was to have no building erected at a height greater than 125 feet. “High-rise” apartment areas were limited to two places: Milwaukee’s main thoroughfare, Grand Avenue, and parts of the city’s East Side near Lake Michigan. No residential building in these areas was to exceed 85 feet. The vast majority of residential districts were limited to buildings no taller than 40 feet.⁶⁹ Area districts regulated the amount of a lot that a building could take up. Here, planners placed the most obvious restriction against overcrowding, as the ordinance required that in areas where apartments were legal to build “not more than 50 families may be housed per acre, thus preventing serious congestion.”⁷⁰ Another main goal of residential districts was to deter the creation of tenement apartments and to promote Garden City living as endemic of the highest

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee*, 265.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid. See also “Restricted Heights of Buildings,” Milwaukee Board of Public Land Commissioners, 1920, MPL.

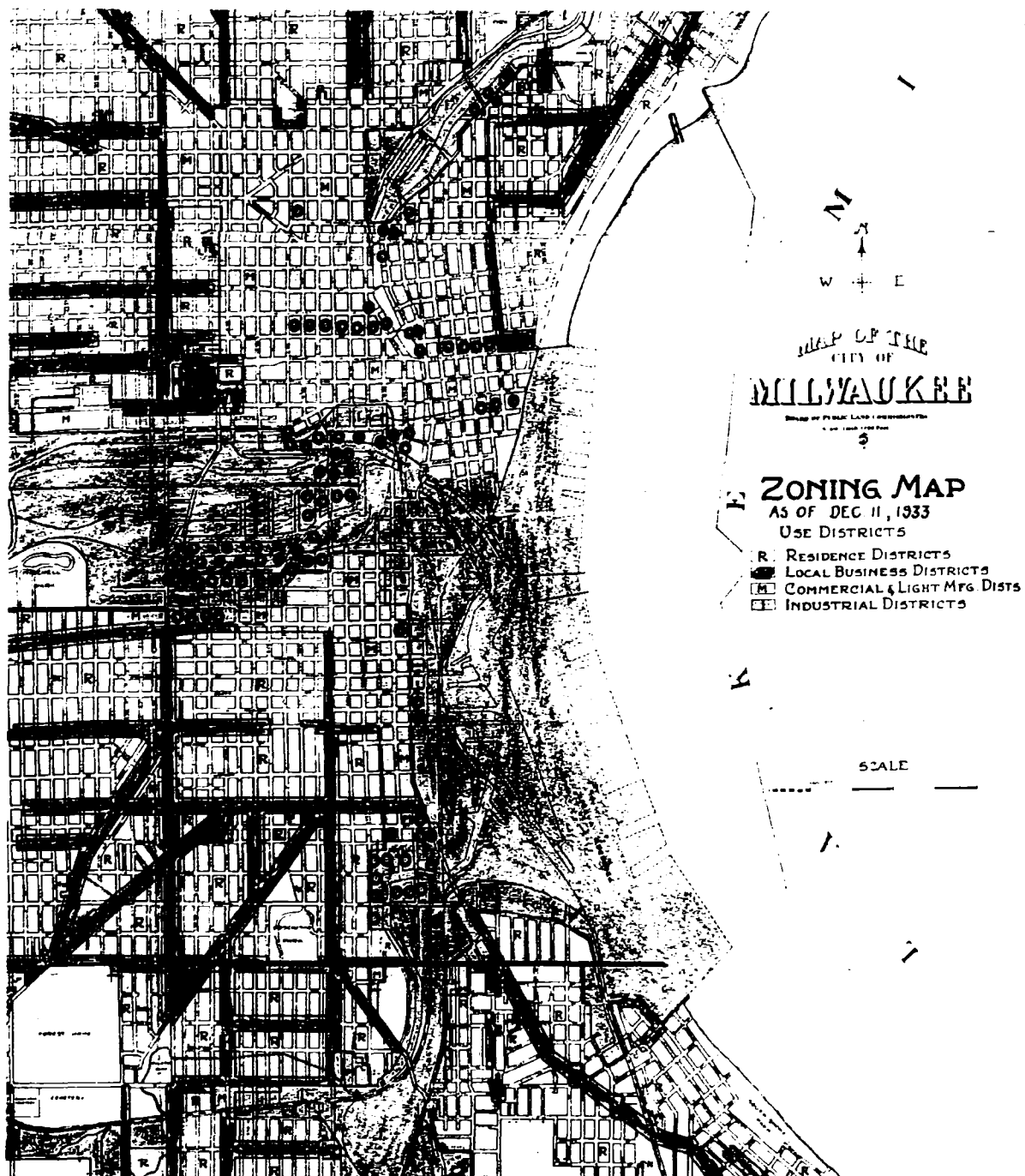
⁷⁰ “Zoning for Milwaukee: Tentative Report of the Board of Public Land Commissioners,” 1920, Legislative Reference Bureau, Milwaukee, WI.

quality of community life. The authors of Milwaukee's zoning ordinance hoped that residence districts "will be in effect garden suburbs, in which it will be a lasting satisfaction to own a home or own an interest in a co-operative group, an ideal generally acknowledged as fundamental to the highest type of citizenship."⁷¹ While the city's ultimate control over the nature of community development on the fringe was, of course, limited outside the constraints of its land use authority, local planners like Whitnall could still hope that projects like the Garden Homes might influence developers toward more judicious platting.

However, while architects of Milwaukee's zoning ordinance had paid careful attention to growth on the periphery, the inner city was largely written off as a place of residence. Virtually every low-income neighborhood surrounding downtown had been zoned "yellow" for commercial and light industrial use. Furthermore, Milwaukee planners used class, not distance from the central core, as the main criteria in the creation of use districts. The wealthy "Yankee Hill" neighborhood, just east of downtown on high ground between the Milwaukee River and Lake Michigan, remained a "residential" use district, as did the wealthier sections of the city's East Side. Poorer neighborhoods located near the tanneries that lined the Milwaukee River north of downtown had their "residential" status stripped. The justification for this dramatic change in future use clearly departed from socialist principles. Arthur Comey, one of the authors of the zoning ordinance, attributed these discriminatory land use restrictions to market logic, arguing that light manufacturing could move out of downtown where real estate values were inflated and "utilize that very considerable area which is becoming less and less desirable for residential purposes."⁷²

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Quoted in Steven Reisser, "Immigrants and House Form in Northeast Milwaukee, 1885-1916," M.A. Thesis, Department of Geography, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 1977, 31.



The vast majority of yellow areas of this zoning map were not “commercial or light industrial,” in 1933 or 1920, when the zoning ordinance was written, but instead encompassed most of Milwaukee’s poorest residents and oldest housing stock. Planners hoped that zoning would push the urban core’s poorest residents—mostly Southern and Eastern European immigrants and African Americans—out of central business district.

Building Inspector Files, 1933 Folder, MPL.

This type of restriction did not prove to be benign. For example, the Sixth Ward was one of Milwaukee's most notorious and—by its location adjacent to the central business district's northwest—conspicuous slums. The 1920 ordinance transformed much of the lower half of the Sixth Ward into a commercial and light industrial “use district.” Historian Joe Trotter noted that this part of the Sixth Ward contained the vast majority of Milwaukee's small but growing African American population.⁷³ Homes located in this part of the Sixth Ward now consisted of a “non-conforming use,” making it more difficult to rehabilitate residences in a section of the city that most needed these types of improvements. Meanwhile, the private sector was working in others ways to segregate the city. In 1924, the Milwaukee Real Estate Board hinted at its intent to racialize the city's geography when it announced intentions to create a “Black Belt” in an unidentified part of the Near Northwest Side (the Sixth Ward) as a way of containing the city's African American population. Milwaukee's African American residents numbered only 1,200 in 1920 and the vast majority already clustered in the Sixth Ward. While the city's black population did not grow substantially until the decades after World War Two, the private real estate community was on guard. Furthermore, the rehabilitation of inner city neighborhoods was ignored in favor of cultivating growth on the urban fringe.

As yet another way of ensuring orderly residential growth on the periphery, the BPLC ordered that new subdivisions on the city's edges (including those located within one and a half miles from the city limit) could only be platted with its prior approval. New subdivisions that failed to meet their standards were summarily rejected. In 1924, the BPLC released a platting guide to more effectively communicate its community ideals with Milwaukee's builders and speculators. The platting guide required uniform set-backs of homes, encouraged curvilinear

⁷³ Joe William Trotter, *Black Milwaukee: The Making of an Industrial Proletariat, 1915-1945* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985)

streets, and justified placing small parks within larger subdivisions as not only a way to ensure higher-quality neighborhoods but to allow realtors and homeowners a greater appreciation on the value of their communities.⁷⁴ In a sense, the BPLC's platting guide represented a continued convergence of the interests of city planners and the local real estate industry. The Milwaukee Real Estate Board, the city's largest organization of homebuilders, had strongly endorsed the zoning ordinance, hoping it would raise property values throughout the region.⁷⁵ Now, as Milwaukee's planners looked outside of Milwaukee's urban spaces for room to grow, planners consulted the Real Estate Board before releasing the platting guide and most builders had little trouble in meeting platting requirements. As Gardner Rogers, a member of the BPLC, enthusiastically stated: "Cooperation between the engineers, realtors, and public land commission is becoming so complete that an approved subdivision is an assurance to the prospective purchaser that the lots are adequate for property development."⁷⁶ Charles Whitnall was also encouraged by the quality of peripheral growth in Milwaukee. In the BPLC's annual report of 1926, he wrote; "There is no doubt but what the outlying districts, with their convenient and practical platting layouts hold a far better future for the prosperity for those who engage in business than the older and more congested areas of the city."⁷⁷ In effect, public regulations of vacant land provided private speculators with a "seal of approval." Builders gained assurance of the legality of plats registered with the BPLC. Homebuyers could take comfort knowing that they were moving into neighborhoods that technical experts in both private and public spheres had approved. This cooperation with the BPLC helped make the city's realtors vocal supporters of annexation as well.

⁷⁴ "Platting Guide, City of Milwaukee" issued by the Board of Public Land Commissioners, 1924, MPL.

⁷⁵ *Milwaukee Journal*, May 7, 1923, City Planning Clipping File, Legislative Reference Bureau, Milwaukee, WI.

⁷⁶ *Milwaukee Journal*, September 16, 1923, Land Clipping File, Legislative Reference Bureau, Milwaukee, WI.

⁷⁷ *Board of Public Land Commissioners Annual Report, 1926*, MPL.

Hoping to continue the synergy between private real estate and public regulators over an even greater area, Whitnall in 1924 helped the Milwaukee County Regional Planning Department establish one of America's first countywide zoning ordinances.⁷⁸ The ordinance was applicable only to all unincorporated townships in Milwaukee County, but in the 1920's that constituted over 70% of the county's total land area. County zoning reflected the same principles of decentralization as those of Milwaukee, even stipulating minimum lot sizes of 60 feet in width—some 50% wider than in the city—by the 1930's. The only material difference in countywide zoning was the inclusion of agricultural land as a "use district." Every affected township in Milwaukee county approved the county zoning ordinance, save for Oak Creek and Franklin, two largely rural communities well to the south of Milwaukee's urban growth in the 1920's.⁷⁹

The mechanics of exercising land use controls and the platting of subdivisions at or beyond the edges of Milwaukee were relatively easy to execute. As Whitnall enthusiastically told the *Leader* in 1926, "in practically every instance sub-dividers have given this board (BPLC) their hearty cooperation."⁸⁰ Within the city, however, regulating land use proved to be far more controversial. Developers of individual lots held for "in-fill" development often planned structures that were in conflict with the city's zoning ordinance. Milwaukee's land use regulations became controversial. Further complicating matters was the highly contested nature of local politics within Milwaukee. A socialist (Hoan) controlled the office of mayor, but the Common Council remained largely in the hands of the so-called "Nonpartisans" between 1920

⁷⁸ Eugene A. Howard, "Twenty Three Years of Planning for Milwaukee County," Park Commission Folder, Box 1, Milwaukee County Regional Planning Department Files, MCHS.

⁷⁹ Florence Schulson, "A History of Planning Activity in Milwaukee, 1892-1952" MPL, *Milwaukee Sentinel*, August 3, 1927, *Milwaukee Journal* October 26, 1927, in Zoning Clipping File, Legislative Reference Bureau, Milwaukee, WI.

⁸⁰ *Milwaukee Leader*, December 31, 1926, City Planning Clipping File, Legislative Reference Bureau, Milwaukee, WI.

and 1940. An election law passed in 1912 designed to lessen partisan politics had made it illegal for any candidate for municipal office to run under an official party banner.⁸¹ “Nonpartisans” were in fact primarily Democrats who kept politics in Milwaukee as fiercely partisan as they had been before the election reforms. Determined to undermine Hoan’s administration—including the BPLC, whose members Hoan could appoint—the Nonpartisans made the strict regulations of the zoning ordinance a major point of contention almost from the moment they approved it. In 1921, group of Nonpartisan council members tried to insert an amendment permitting the construction of residences in use districts zoned for industry. The *Milwaukee Journal* ridiculed the amendment: “Are the nonpartisan aldermen looking to tear down one of the few constructive achievements of recent years and hand the Socialists just the kind of political thunder they are looking for?”⁸² While this initial foray failed, Nonpartisans vigorously opposed other stipulations in the zoning ordinance throughout the 1920’s.

A key Nonpartisan ally was William Harper, Milwaukee’s building inspector from 1915 to 1928 and a leftover appointee of Gerhard Bading, the last Nonpartisan mayor of Milwaukee. Harper’s office was officially charged with enforcing the zoning ordinance and he quickly became a thorn in the side of Hoan and Whitnall. Milwaukee’s city charter allowed Hoan to replace the building inspector only with the majority vote of the Common Council. In 1919 and 1923, when Harper’s position came up for reappointment, Hoan reluctantly extended Harper’s term. Hoan knew that the Nonpartisan-dominated Common Council would reject any replacement and he especially came to regret Harper’s appointment after the zoning ordinance

⁸¹ For example, see Tim Casey, “The 1912 Non-Partisan Election Law: Reform, Social Democrats, and Reaction,” M.A. Thesis, Marquette University, 2000.

⁸² *Milwaukee Journal*, September 7, 1921, Zoning Clipping File, Legislative Reference Bureau, Milwaukee, WI.

was enacted.⁸³ Harper frequently sided with the Non-Partisan majority of the Common Council in arguing that the zoning ordinance was stifling economic development in Milwaukee because its building requirements were so strict.

Foremost among these regulations were two stipulations on area usage. First, sections of the city where apartments could legally be constructed could house no more than fifty families per acre. Secondly, in districts zoned for local businesses, storefront apartments could house no more than twenty families per acre. In effect, this made the building of large apartment buildings illegal in most sections of the city and greatly restricted the ability of developers to construct apartments above storefronts. Throughout most of the 1920's, the Common Council attempted to remove the family-per-acre restriction from the zoning ordinance. In 1926, Harper claimed that during the previous year builders in the city had over \$18 million worth of projects that were on permanent hold because their plans did not fit the requirements of the zoning ordinance. To prove to any cynic who claimed he may have been "bluffing," Harper listed the property owner and address in the *Milwaukee News* to further embarrass the Hoan administration and to call attention to the allegedly draconian conditions of the zoning ordinance.⁸⁴ Many of the construction projects on hold were "storefront apartments" that exceeded the family-per-acre restrictions. Harper claimed that these restrictions on apartments were making rents in Milwaukee \$10 to \$15 per month higher because they created an artificial demand on housing within the city. "Zoning must be reasonable, not radical," Harper told the Common Council in his 1926 annual report.⁸⁵ Builders whose plans were restricted by the ordinance also came to

⁸³ For example, in 1927, Hoan wrote to a Milwaukee resident: "I fear the Common Council will not replace Mr. Harper regardless of the seriousness of the charges for reasons which you may be able to understand. Only the Socialist aldermen have been willing to stand with me in the past on the policy of naming a new man."—Letter from Daniel Hoan to Charles L. Lesser, April 28, 1927, File 72, Box 2, Daniel Hoan Papers, MCHS.

⁸⁴ *Milwaukee News*, January 9, 1926, *Milwaukee Sentinel*, May 11, 1926, Zoning Clipping File, Legislative Reference Bureau, Milwaukee, WI.

⁸⁵ "Annual Report, Inspector of Buildings," 1926, Legislative Reference Bureau, Milwaukee, WI.

Harper's and the Common Council's side. In 1925, G.E. Bernecker, a local developer who wanted to build a six-story apartment with fifty-eight units in a district where only twenty were legal, circulated a petition to the Common Council to remove the family-per-acre restrictions, calling them obsolete. Bernecker told the *Milwaukee Journal* that he wanted to bypass the BPLC and deal directly with the Common Council because the former had ignored his complaints for several years.⁸⁶ Whitnall furiously responded that men like Bernecker did not understand the concept of zoning. Hoan even wrote a letter to Bernecker informing him that Harper, as building inspector, had no legal right to alter the zoning ordinance. Bernecker's recalcitrance, nevertheless, was not an isolated incident. The Milwaukee Real Estate Board, while sympathetic to the BPLC's zoning ordinance in principle, also began calling for the removal of the family-per-acre restrictions by 1926.⁸⁷

The BPLC ardently defended the family-per-acre restrictions of the zoning ordinance throughout the 1920's, often countering that zoning in Milwaukee was intended to prevent exploitative real estate practices. R.E. Stoelting, a board member of the planning commission, claimed that the intent of the family-per-acre restriction was to reduce congestion. The family-per-acre provisions, Stoelting claimed, eliminated the practice of speculators who sought to maximize profits by erecting large apartment buildings on property located in secondary business districts, thus creating overcrowding while diluting the ability of zoning to segregate the functions of the city. To Stoelting, "The general welfare of the community is of far more importance than the desire of a few individuals to obtain returns on artificial inflation of property

⁸⁶ *Milwaukee Journal*, November 4, 1925, Zoning Clipping File, Legislative Reference Bureau, Milwaukee, WI.

⁸⁷ "Report of the City Planning Committee of the Milwaukee Real Estate Board in Re-Amending the Zoning Ordinance of the City of Milwaukee," February 15, 1926, Folder 11, Box 9, City Club of Milwaukee Records, Area Research Center, Golda Meier Library, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

values.”⁸⁸ Whitnall also vigorously safeguarded the family-per-acre restriction throughout the 1920’s, claiming that it was the intention of the zoning ordinance to eliminate apartments over storefronts except in cases where the owner resided.⁸⁹ To Whitnall, the principles of decentralization dictated the opposite; “If any change is made, we want to lessen the number of families to the acre.”⁹⁰

In fact, Whitnall’s vigor in regulating city building in Milwaukee turned the matter of zoning enforcement into a personal crusade. He frequently traveled the city in search of buildings in varying states of non-compliance with the zoning ordinance, snapping photographs and sending them directly to the Common Council (see figure 1-4). The photographs revealed widespread evasion of the ordinance. Some buildings contained 30 apartments where only six were allowed, others covered 70% of the total area of a lot where only 60% was allowed, still others were used as places of business in areas zoned strictly for residences.⁹¹ Whitnall placed the blame for these types of violations squarely on the lap of Harper, the building inspector, who was increasingly perceived as a pawn of the Common Council in their efforts to undermine Hoan’s vision of city planning for Milwaukee. Hoan shared these frustrations as well, telling those angry with Harper; “Only the Socialists have been willing to stand with me in the past in naming a new man.”⁹²

⁸⁸ *Milwaukee Journal*, November 23, 1925, Zoning Clipping File, Legislative Reference Bureau, Milwaukee, WI.

⁸⁹ Letter from Charles Whitnall to Alderman Albert Janicki, January 29, 1926, Folder 11, Box 9, City Club of Milwaukee Records, Area Research Center, Golda Meier Library, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

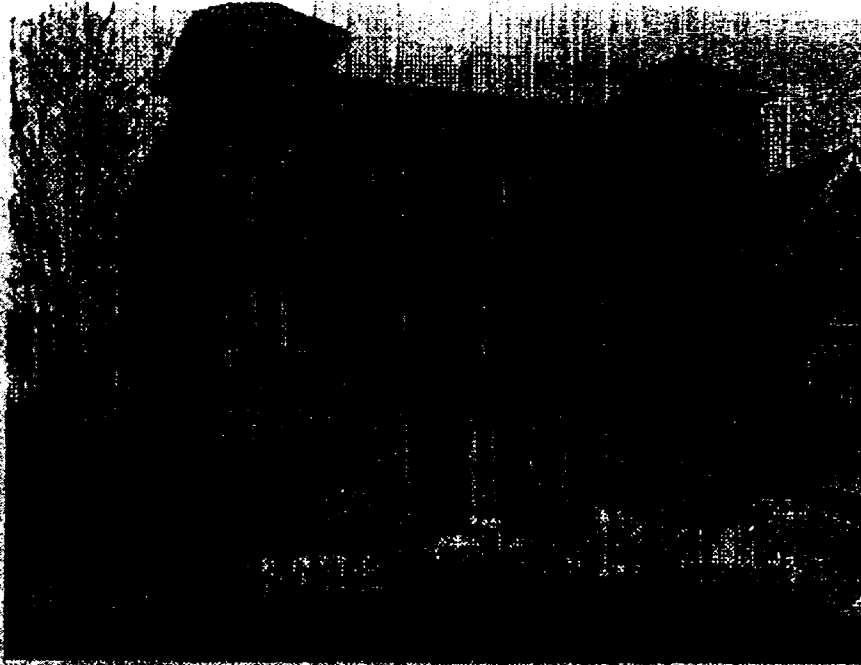
⁹⁰ *Milwaukee Journal*, November 5, 1925, Zoning Clipping File, Legislative Reference Bureau, Milwaukee, WI.

⁹¹ Letter from Charles Whitnall to Mayor Daniel Hoan and the Milwaukee Common Council, January 29, 1926, File 518, Box 21, Daniel Hoan Papers, MCHS.

⁹² Letter from Mayor Daniel Hoan to Charles L. Lesser, April 28, 1927, File 72, Box 2, Daniel Hoan Papers, MCHS.

ZONING VIOLATION

Apartment house at 750 Oakland Avenue*



Families per acre restriction violated:
Building contains 11 apartments
Ordinance permits only 3 families

* Zoning restrictions on this lot:
Use: Local Business
Height: 40 feet
Area: "C" - 60% corner, 50% interior lot.

Evading the Zoning Ordinance

Letter from Charles Whitnall to Mayor Daniel Hoan and the Milwaukee Common Council, January
29, 1926, File 518, Box 21, Daniel Hoan Papers, MCHS

In a December 1926 submission to Hoan and the city attorney, the BPLC charged that Harper had neglected his official duty to enforce the zoning ordinance and had knowingly violated the family per acre restrictions on several occasions.⁹³ With public pressure against Harper increasing, Hoan was finally able to appoint his own building inspector a year later. As a compromise, he chose Leon Gurda, a Nonpartisan who as a resident of the Polish South Side was popular with a crucial constituency of the Hoan administration.⁹⁴ Equally important for Hoan, Gurda supported strict enforcement of both the zoning ordinance and the city's building code, and quickly became one of the most zealous and committed public servants in the city. In 1928, the re-energized building inspector's department enacted a new building code enforcement program.⁹⁵ Ultimately designed to demolish every structure in the city deemed "unfit for habitation," the city demolished thousands of buildings in the late 1920's and early 1930's. Gurda later became nationally renowned and, like other public officials from the Hoan era, remained at his post well past World War Two.

Harper had been forced out, much to the Socialists' delight. However, in the short term, Nonpartisan opponents of the family-per-acre restriction also won the day. In 1927, under pressure from local builders and the Common Council, the BPLC voted, over Whitnall's objections, to eliminate the family-per-acre restrictions of the zoning ordinance. In effect, this allowed larger apartments to be constructed in local business districts. The Common Council also enacted its own revenge in 1929 and 1931. During these two years, the council amended the zoning ordinance yet again, first converting ten blocks of Milwaukee's principal thoroughfare, Wisconsin (formerly Grand) Avenue, and then eight blocks of Kilbourn Avenue (both west of downtown), from residential districts (in which apartments of any type were illegal to construct)

⁹³ *Milwaukee Journal*, December 19, 1926, Zoning Clipping File, Legislative Reference Bureau, Milwaukee, WI.

⁹⁴ Stachowski, *The Political Career of Daniel Webster Hoan*, 149.

⁹⁵ *Inspector of Buildings Annual Report, 1928* Legislative Reference Bureau, Milwaukee, WI.

to local business districts.⁹⁶ With the family-per-acre restriction rendered null and void, larger apartments could be legally constructed on eighteen key blocks of Milwaukee's West Side. The six remaining socialists in the Common Council opposed both amendments and Hoan vetoed them as well, but Nonpartisans in the Common Council—having won a number of seats in the 1928 aldermanic elections—overrode Hoan's veto each time.⁹⁷

In the late nineteenth century, West Wisconsin (then Grand) Avenue was one of Milwaukee's premiere residential areas, home to Captain Frederick Pabst, John Plankinton, Robert Johnston, and Henry Harnischfeger, among other local elites. In the early twentieth century, wealthier families had begun to move east to Prospect Avenue or further west to upscale neighborhoods like Washington Highlands and Washington Heights. Property owners on Wisconsin Avenue thus began to subdivide the larger homes into apartments and rooming houses, finally calling for the area to be rezoned to allow for the construction of larger apartment buildings. With rezoning in effect, the Near West Side of Milwaukee was in danger of becoming a neighborhood of apartments, which Whitnall equated as a "slum district" due to the very type of the structures. In this case, Milwaukee was in the ironic situation in which a socialist administration was seeking to maintain the somewhat wealthy character of an elite residential neighborhood while local property owners were calling for rezoning to make—in effect—the housing in the Near West Side more affordable. As Whitnall lamented, "Grand Avenue has been needlessly ruined as an avenue of homes."⁹⁸ Zoning (and rezoning) had quickly emerged as a potent political issue in Milwaukee.

⁹⁶ *Milwaukee Sentinel*, October 13, 1929, Zoning Clipping File, Legislative Reference Bureau, Milwaukee, WI.

⁹⁷ Stachowski, *The Political Career of Daniel Webster Hoan*, 149, 154.

⁹⁸ Letter from Charles Whitnall to Milwaukee Common Council, July 19, 1926, Folder 2, Box 10, City Club of Milwaukee Records, Area Research Center, Golda Meier Library, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

Other cities witnessed similar neighborhood transformations during this time period. Historian Max Page discovered that Manhattan's Fifth Avenue—New York City's premiere address—also lost its residential character to the unrelenting demands of the market where the highest and best uses of land yielded a process of “creative destruction.”⁹⁹ Demolition, in turn, had emerged as a key part of urban history well before postwar urban renewal. Milwaukee's Wisconsin Avenue was thus not unique. After the amendment of the zoning ordinance, the transition of the street accelerated dramatically, as previously subdivided mansions were demolished and replaced by hotels, apartments, and filling stations.¹⁰⁰ However, the urban real estate market did not operate the same in every city. As Page points out, Fifth Avenue remained a “premiere address” even after most of its mansions were demolished.¹⁰¹ Milwaukee's Grand Avenue, however, lacked national identity, and was not a target for preservation. In this case, public officials like Whitnall actually battled private actors and “the market” in attempting to preserve a street's bucolic character. West Wisconsin Avenue did not remain a premiere residential street. As apartments replaced Victorians, the Near West Side neighborhood began a long, slow decline and lakefront neighborhoods on the East Side replaced West Wisconsin Avenue as Milwaukee's preeminent addresses. In this case, politics determined redevelopment just as strongly as the private market did. Most of Hoan's vetoes of zoning ordinance changes held up in the Common Council until 1928, when Non-Partisans won enough aldermanic seats to override Hoan's frequent vetoes.¹⁰²

While zoning ordinances grew in vogue in American cities during the 1920's, amendments to them quickly became common as individual developers sought to attain land uses

⁹⁹ Page, *The Creative Destruction of Manhattan*, 2-3.

¹⁰⁰ John Gurda, *The West End: Merrill Park, Pigsville, Concordia: Milwaukee*, (Milwaukee, WI: The Program, 1980).

¹⁰¹ Page, *The Creative Destruction of Manhattan*, 65-67.

¹⁰² Stachowski, “The Political Career of Daniel Webster Hoan,” 154-155.

that achieved maximum profitability. In Los Angeles, Marc Weiss notes, the City Planning Commission spent over 80% of its time reviewing applications for zoning changes from builders, with the great majority of them granted.¹⁰³ In Chicago, planning historian Mel Scott estimated that from 1923 to 1938, the city's zoning ordinance was amended over 13,000 times, prompting the President of the American Society of Planning Officials to scoff that the changes added up to "nothing more than 13,000 zoning violations."¹⁰⁴ With dogmatic planners like Whitnall on hand, these figures were far lower in Milwaukee, but nonetheless zoning took up much of the BPLC's time. In 1929, of the over 1,100 matters that were referred to Milwaukee's planning arm, 615 regarded zoning.¹⁰⁵ In addition, for all of its commitment to the universal application of land use controls, Milwaukee's Board of Public Land Commissioners was not at all immune to pressure from local builders. In 1927, for example, the BPLC approved 48 of the 56 proposed zoning amendments.¹⁰⁶ Other developers found more creative and illegal means to weaken zoning's power. Upon taking over as building inspector, Leon Gurda discovered that after purchasing and subdividing land into the required 40 by 120 foot lots, developers would sell only parts of each lot. The BPLC, having approved a plat with three 40-foot lots, would then be unaware that four homes on 30-foot lots had been constructed.¹⁰⁷ These sort of violations were exceptions, however. Larger lots had become more desirable in the 1920's. More importantly, local builders and land speculators shared a mostly amenable relationship with the city's planning officials, no doubt due to their active participation in implementing land use guidelines such as platting.

¹⁰³ Marc A. Weiss, *The Rise of the Community Builders: The American Real Estate Industry and Urban Land Planning*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 99.

¹⁰⁴ As quoted in Mel Scott, *American City Planning Since 1890*, 196.

¹⁰⁵ Milwaukee Board of Public Land Commissioners Annual Report, 1929, MPL.

¹⁰⁶ Milwaukee Board of Public Land Commissioners Annual Report, 1927, MPL.

¹⁰⁷ *Milwaukee Journal*, July 17, 1929.

Developers who evaded Milwaukee's land use regulations in effect broke the rules that the private sector had played a large role in creating.

Zoning battles were also matters of politics. Socialist defenders of the original zoning ordinance, led by Mayor Hoan, sought to decrease population densities and eliminate the "unearned increment" of inflated urban land values through stringent land use controls. Peripheral growth in the form of single-family homes was ingrained in socialist reform efforts. The fact that Milwaukee's real estate community benefited from decentralization was incidental to officials like Hoan and Whitnall, though support from developers was and would remain crucial. Ideally, land use regulations would curb the tendency of realtors to realize the "unearned increment" of higher land values by maximizing the number of tenants. In Milwaukee's older neighborhoods, zoning proved the most controversial. Non-Partisan opponents of Hoan in the Common Council, with the complicity of a building inspector of the same political stripe, whittled away at the zoning ordinance in the 1920's, seemingly limiting its ability to encourage decentralization within the inner city.

On Milwaukee's undeveloped edges, socialist officials also hoped to promote dispersion by encouraging the single-family home as the ideal environment for a healthier and more democratic city. Here, on the urban periphery, land use regulations proved—initially at least—easier to enact. Countywide zoning was approved, with little controversy. Developers on the outskirts were more willing to self-regulate, cooperating with the BPLC in enacting a platting guide that promoted orderly, homogenous neighborhoods. New communities were planned to be permanently free of the urban congestion that frightened not only elites and middle class progressives, but socialist reformers like Whitnall and Hoan as well. A genuine consensus had emerged that the type of city that industrialization had created was unlivable and decentralization

was necessary, although the exact form that decentralization would take was debatable. However, planning on the urban periphery—while embraced by land developers—proved to be controversial in another, more ominous way. If Milwaukee's future prosperity hinged on its ability to embrace planned decentralization, then the city itself had to grow in size. In 1920, Milwaukee was only 26 square miles. Planned decentralization under the control of the city would be impossible if Milwaukee failed to grow. Zoning was supposed to be a far more effective tool at shaping future urban growth rather than reshaping the inner city. Without the ability of a city to continuously take in new lands, planning for new communities would be useless.

For all these reasons, Milwaukee officials embarked on a vigorous annexation program in the 1920's, growing from twenty-six to forty-four square miles. As annexation gained momentum, public officials—gaining confidence—began to seek the complete political unification of the Milwaukee metropolitan area. Meanwhile, neighboring towns, villages, and cities in Milwaukee's path were forced to make important decisions about their own communities' futures. Annexation became the route to achieve planned decentralization, but new interest groups stood in the city's way. The Great Depression temporarily ended the annexation wars at a bitter stalemate and Milwaukee's metropolitan future remained unresolved. Annexation was intended to alleviate congestion and keep decent housing on the fringes within Milwaukee's borders. Instead a city-suburban divide emerged that never left the region. The vision of a decentralized metropolis extended over a regional terrain, but one that would prove to be just as contested as the city itself. Milwaukee encountered another urban crisis in the 1930's, this time self-inflicted.

Chapter 2: The Politics of Annexation and Demolition in the 1920's and 1930's

"I sleep in Fox Point, but most of my investments on which I pay taxes are in Milwaukee. That's the situation with most of the Fox Point residents, and we are more solicitous of Milwaukee's end of the deal than of the suburbs. If you can convince me that annexation of Whitefish Bay and Fox Point will benefit Milwaukee, I'll change my attitude and go out and boost for it." Frank Klode, Village President, Fox Point, 1931.

"We in Milwaukee have attempted to solve this problem of slum clearance by demolishing worthless buildings on a larger scale than any other city, and believe that slum reconstruction can wait until owners of properties in these areas realize that they must cooperate with the government in this matter." Leon Gurda, Milwaukee Building Inspector 1938.

In 1952, Charles Goff, an official of the Citizens Governmental Research Bureau, a local government watchdog group, recalled "the widespread feeling of civic shock" after the U.S. Census of 1920 found Milwaukee to be the second most densely populated city in the United States, after New York.¹ In reality, even before 1920, a variety of civic groups had expressed concerns about Milwaukee's congestion. The renowned German architect Werner Hegeman had warned the city that only vigorous planning and land use regulations could combat congestion. Public figures like Charles Whitnall pushed for a vast system of parkways to act as a catalyst for decentralization. State legislation gave the Board of Public Land Commissioners the task of creating a comprehensive zoning ordinance that would make Milwaukee more functional. Mayor Daniel Hoan had fully embraced city planning as consistent with the goals of Milwaukee's unique brand of municipal socialism.

Nonetheless, the numbers that the Census revealed took on ominous overtones for Milwaukee. Over 450,000 residents crowded into 26 square miles. In 1893, 57% of the land in Milwaukee remained undeveloped. By 1918, the amount of vacant land in the

¹ Charles Goff, "The Politics of Governmental Integration in Metropolitan Milwaukee," Doctoral Dissertation, Northwestern University, 1952, p. 87. The same concerns are cited in Arnold Fleischmann, "The Politics of Annexation and Urban Development: A Clash of Two Paradigms" Doctoral Dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 1984, pp. 88-92.

city had dropped to 5%, and four years later, *including* rivers, only 3% of land in the city remained vacant.² The BPLC's City Planning Engineer, R.E. Stoelting, estimated that Milwaukee's housing shortage had reached 7,000 dwellings. Moreover, Stoelting reported a "notorious shortage of sites for new industries."³ The lack of industrial space in Milwaukee had already caught the attention of Mayor Hoan during the war, when an alderman told him that at least sixteen industries had bypassed Milwaukee due to the spatial crunch.⁴ Hoan's socialist principles did not interfere with his conviction that "the progress of our nation depends upon the gradual development and expansion of our business and industrial areas" which by 1920 had virtually run out of space within Milwaukee's borders.⁵ Charles Goff's study of intergovernmental relations in Milwaukee, conducted in 1952, recalled that many city administrators had concluded after World War I that Milwaukee could do one of two things; it could annex new land or die.⁶

In this context, Milwaukee's leaders made an aggressive annexation program a central part of their urban policy. Annexation functioned as the main tool that would enable planning and zoning to better reduce urban congestion and address the postwar housing shortage. As with other aspects of urban policy, private actors supported or opposed annexation to the degree that their own interests were either furthered or hindered. In purely numerical terms, annexation proved successful in Milwaukee during the 1920's, as the city's size increased from twenty-six to forty-four square miles.

² "Zoning Use Figures" Folder 8, Box 5, City Club of Milwaukee. Records, 1909-1975. Milwaukee Manuscript Collection AS and Milwaukee Micro Collection 69. Wisconsin Historical Society. Milwaukee Area Research Center. Golda Meir Library. University of Wisconsin--Milwaukee. (WHS, MARC.)

³ Committee on Annexation, Notes 1921-1922, Folder 2, Box 5, City Club of Milwaukee, WHS, MARC.

⁴ Letter from Daniel Hoan to S.B. Way, December 30, 1927, File 32, Box 1, Hoan Papers, MCHS.

⁵ Letter from Daniel Hoan to Walt Clyde, June 25, 1925, File 26, Box 1, Hoan Papers, MCHS.

⁶ Goff, "The Politics of Governmental Integration in Metropolitan Milwaukee," p. 89.

However, in another important way, annexation became a victim of its own success. As the 1920's progressed and Milwaukee's size gradually increased, city policymakers began to call for a complete political unification of the Milwaukee metropolitan area. Neighboring communities, often formerly rural in character but at that time rapidly developing, strongly opposed Milwaukee's efforts to grow and soon became permanent actors on an increasingly divided metropolitan political landscape. "Runaway industries" that had located outside the city's borders were also put off by the tactics the city used, hinting at a growing distance between public and private interests regarding the economic growth of the city.

Further complicating Milwaukee's annexation policy was its abrupt termination owing to the Great Depression. As both the nation and the region's economy collapsed, the city suddenly abandoned annexation as it addressed the immediate concerns of economic relief. As revenues dropped and the costs of government remained high, civic leaders turned to city-county consolidation, which would have recast the metropolitan future of Milwaukee and largely mitigated city-suburban conflict. In 1934, a countywide referendum failed to achieve consolidation and the future growth of Milwaukee thus remained largely unresolved. Because Milwaukee's physical growth had been thwarted in mid-stride, a problem emerged that remained until well after World War II. Inner city neighborhoods remained "congested" and underwent further deterioration, but the decentralization of Milwaukee continued quietly. As the problem of inner city "blight" increasingly caught the eye of business interests downtown, urban policy in Milwaukee became curiously fragmented and contradictory, the result of both new federal policies regarding urban development and the older but still present municipal program of

planned decentralization. A demolition program enacted by the city building inspector removed thousands of blighted dwellings in central city neighborhoods. At the same time, Milwaukee leaders failed to build public housing in the same blighted neighborhoods. While inner city revitalization remained stagnant, planned decentralization never fully disappeared as urban policy in Milwaukee. By the end of World War II, the problems that confronted Milwaukee remained remarkably similar to those the city had faced after World War I and city leaders adopted a similar and equally controversial policy of annexation and planned decentralization to address them.

This chapter tells two intertwined stories. It introduces the deep conflicts between the city and its outlying communities that increasingly plagued virtually every large metropolis across the United States.⁷ However, the nature and degree of rancor varied greatly. The Milwaukee region's most bitter conflicts emerged in the context of the city's ambitious attempts to unify politically the entire metropolitan area. Because annexation ended before Milwaukee's policymakers saw as its logical conclusion, Milwaukee's metropolitan future remained deeply contested well after World War II. Secondly, the Great Depression not only ravaged the American economy, it reopened the intractable issue of housing as a pressing concern in central cities. While World War II reinvigorated the national economy, little capital outside of industrial investments flowed into central cities like Milwaukee. As a result, postwar prosperity threatened to bypass cities entirely. When city policymakers renewed revitalization efforts after the war, they found themselves in a race against time. Because Milwaukee's postwar political leaders

⁷ For example, see Jon C. Teaford, *City and Suburb: The Political Fragmentation of Metropolitan America, 1850-1970* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979).

adopted previous policies of planned decentralization, they found themselves embroiled in a familiar city-suburban conflict that took on portentous dimensions.

The “widespread feeling of civic shock” over the discovery in the early 1920’s that Milwaukee was one of America’s most densely populated cities reverberated through both public and private organizations. Charles Whitnall’s long-dreamed of parkway scheme gained greater urgency and was by 1925 approved by city, county, and state governments. The Garden Homes cooperative housing development was navigated to completion during the emergency of the postwar housing shortage. However, for planned decentralization to take place within and not outside of Milwaukee’s borders, annexation was undeniably necessary. Like other reforms of this era, it met with approval from some key private interests groups for reasons that were often at variance from city officials. The City Club of Milwaukee became an early advocate of annexation because “most of the land in the suburbs and townships is empty lots. If the city were allowed to expand, people would not have to crowd so closely together.” Annexation would also dramatically increase Milwaukee’s population, possibly making it “one of the great commercial cities in the world.”⁸ The Milwaukee Real Estate Board saw annexation as a good investment. If vacant land adjacent to the city were annexed, it would receive valuable and cost-efficient water and sewage installations. A city report investigating annexation’s feasibility noted with some astonishment that just beyond the “numerous rows of homes, typifying congestion of population” were miles of empty farmland that

⁸ Undated Memo, Folder 2, Box 5, City Club of Milwaukee, Records. 1909-1975, WHS, MARC.

could be transformed into better-planned city communities.⁹ Where city policymakers saw function, land developers saw dollars and remained crucial proponents of annexation for this primary reason.

While the need to annex became obvious, the legal means the city could use to achieve it were less apparent. Prior to 1893, acts of the state legislature brought in new territory to the city, but a Wisconsin Supreme Court ruling that year permitted cities to annex territory without state interference, but only at the request of property owners. In 1898, a new state law required a majority of property owners in a given area to sign a petition asking the city for permission to be annexed. This cumbersome procedure was difficult, according to a city report, because “private individuals cannot afford the time and expense involved in petitioning the city for annexation.”¹⁰ As a result, from 1893 to 1920, Milwaukee had virtually doubled its population, but had grown by only four square miles. To streamline the process in the future, in 1923 the BPLC recommended to Hoan and the Common Council the creation of a separate division of annexation staffed with a core of professional solicitors whose jobs would be to identify property owners outside of the city and circulate the proper petitions to legalize annexations.¹¹ The Common Council, eager to grow the city, agreed, and created the Department of Abstracting and Annexation that same year. For once, socialist and Non-Partisan aldermen alike agreed that the city desperately needed vacant land. The vast majority of annexation petitions sailed through the Common Council. In both postwar eras, annexation remained the one

⁹ “Annexation for Milwaukee: The Concern of the Entire State,” Report to Daniel Hoan, File 26, Box 1, Hoan Papers, MCHS.

¹⁰ Ibid. See also Fleischmann, “The Politics of Annexation and Urban Development: A Clash of Two Paradigms,” 88-95.

¹¹ Goff, “The Politics of Governmental Integration in Metropolitan Milwaukee,” 90-91.

issue that council members (and Hoan and later Mayor Frank Zeidler) almost uniformly supported.¹²

However, the land near Milwaukee's borders contained far more than empty lots and farms. A report issued in 1921 titled "Annexation—The Concern for the Entire State" contained a map of Milwaukee's boundaries. To the north, west, and south, on all three sides of the city (Lake Michigan lays to the east), dozens of manufacturers had located just across the city limits. The list of industries included some of Milwaukee's largest employers. The A.O. Smith Corporation sat alongside the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul Railroad (Milwaukee Road) railway corridor to the northwest. At the west end of the Menomonee River Valley, just along the river's northward bend and alongside the Milwaukee Road, sat Miller Brewing, Pawling & Harnischfeger, and the Falk Corporation. To the south lie Nash Motors and Nordberg Manufacturing, among others. All told, forty-one large plants surrounded the city. Convincing this ring of industry to join Milwaukee was the first priority for city policymakers.¹³

In 1921, Hoan wrote to each manufacturer, asking them "in view of the present congestion of the city of Milwaukee and its present smallness compared with other cities of the same population" of their interest in being annexed to Milwaukee.¹⁴ A few manufacturers welcomed annexation and the improved water installations it promised, but the vast majority objected. Of the twelve industries whose responses are included in Hoan's files, nine unequivocally opposed. The Evinrude Motor Company echoed the

¹² By the 1950's, some Milwaukee aldermen, especially those in the inner city, began complaining that too much public money was being poured into newly annexed areas at the expense of decaying inner city neighborhoods. However, this rarely stopped any alderman from supporting annexation.

¹³ "Annexation for Milwaukee: The Concern of the Entire State," Report to Daniel Hoan, File 26, Box 1, Hoan Papers, MCHS. "Industries Adjacent to City Limits," Folder 13, Box 5, City Club of Milwaukee, Records. 1909-1975, WHS, MARC.

¹⁴ Open Letter from Daniel Hoan to "Gentlemen," February 7, 1921, File 26, Box 1, Hoan Papers, MCHS.

majority opinion that annexation “would undoubtedly bring about higher taxes.”¹⁵

Hoan’s appeal to civic greatness also fell on deaf ears. The president of the South Side Malleable Casting Company initially wrote of his great excitement over the proposal to add manufacturers currently outside Milwaukee’s borders to the city because annexation would truly make Milwaukee an industrial powerhouse. South Side Malleable’s Board of Directors, however, wrote Hoan back explaining that their president did not have the authority to make corporate decisions. They opposed annexation.¹⁶

These initial rejections did not deter Milwaukee officials. Support for annexation was increasing as the housing shortage persisted and city officials hoped to use public opinion to their advantage. Since polite solicitations had fallen on deaf ears, the city next tried public embarrassment. A petition was circulated urging the Wisconsin state legislature to pass a law easing annexation procedures. Endorsed by the Wisconsin Federation of Labor, it represented the first frontal assault in Milwaukee’s annexation efforts. Located prominently on the front page of the petition was a large map showing Milwaukee’s borders and subsequent growth from 1846 through 1920. Forty-one black dots, one for each large manufacturer just outside Milwaukee, demonstrated local industry’s rejections. The petition reminded voters that wherever they saw black dots “you will observe that the advance of the city has halted to that point.”¹⁷

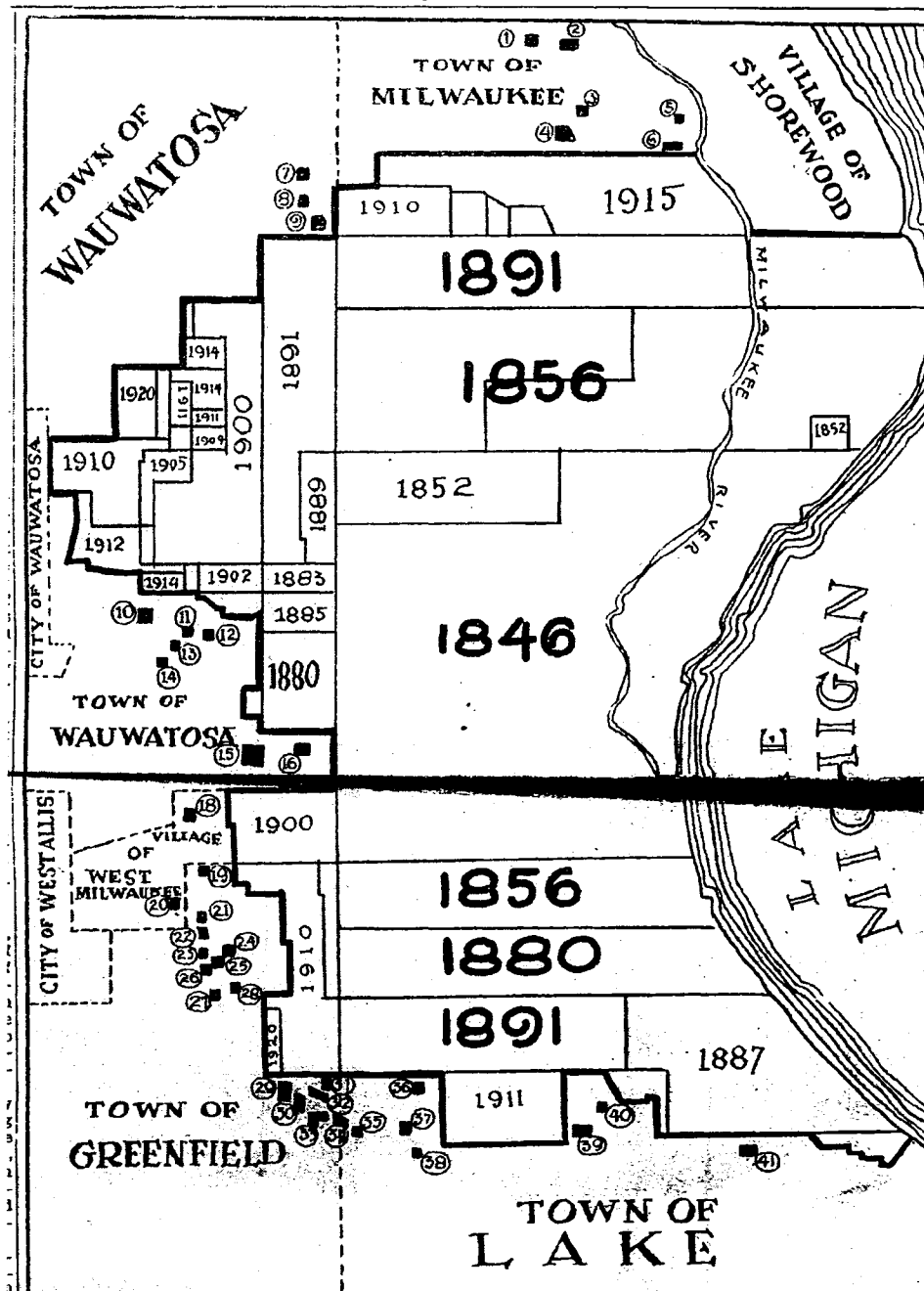
¹⁵ Letter from Evinrude Motor Company to Daniel Hoan, February 11, 1921, File 26, Box 1, Hoan Papers, MCHS.

¹⁶ Letter from South Side Malleable Casting Company to Daniel Hoan, February 9, 16, 1921, File 26, Box 1, Hoan Papers, MCHS.

¹⁷ “The Blockade of Milwaukee,” Folder 2, Box 5, City Club of Milwaukee, Records. 1909-1975, WHS, MARC

The Blockade of Milwaukee

This Map pictures the City's Struggle for Expansion Against the Standpat Policy of Corporations Just Outside the limits.



"The Blockade of Milwaukee," Folder 2, Box 5, City Club of Milwaukee, Records. 1909-1975, WHS, MARC.

Since property owners' permission was needed to annex, "the corporate property interests that dominate these sparsely settled industrial districts can hold the fort as long as they will."¹⁸ The petition also appealed to Milwaukee citizens' wallets, reminding them of the valuable tax revenue that was lost as long as "the blockade of Milwaukee" continued. "Big corporate property owners" were to blame: they were "largely responsible for the stagnation and lack of uniformity of the City's recent growth."¹⁹ Big business had not only hampered the city's growth; it had compromised the public welfare. The petition was also misleading in its implication that Milwaukee only sought to annex adjacent industries. It promised: "This is no radical proposal to annex the cities and residential suburbs of Milwaukee County that have civic reasons for wishing to prolong their independence."²⁰ In just a few years, anxious annexation leaders would call for complete governmental unification and came to ridicule the "civic reasons" for suburban independence. In the meantime, the "machine shop of the world's" first opponents were many of its own shops.

While industry was being shamed in the public eye, city annexation solicitors quietly sought to capture runaway plants by any means necessary. George Altpeter, Milwaukee's first annexation director, hatched a plan to annex several plants north of the city near Green Bay Road. Several industries nearby, most prominently Nordberg Manufacturing, had rejected Milwaukee's overtures. Just slightly to the east, the city had acquired land that was being developed as Lincoln Park to be included in the growing system of parkways. Altpeter drew up a petition that included the recalcitrant plants, but also included enough city-owned parkland to allow Milwaukee to be the majority

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

property holder.²¹ The petition thus signed by the city itself, the Common Council voted in the annexation and Nordberg Manufacturing had been trapped; now apparently it was part of the city. Nordberg, however, legally contested the annexation on a different technicality: that the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad Company, along whose tracks the plants sat, had improperly claimed to represent Nordberg in annexation discussions with Milwaukee without approval. The case eventually went to the Wisconsin Supreme Court which ruled in favor of Nordberg, knocking out the annexation.²²

The Nordberg lawsuit yielded several patterns that became familiar throughout the 1920's and again in the late 1940's and 1950's when the city resumed annexation. First, most large manufacturers opposed Milwaukee's expansion, believing they could exert greater control over their affairs through smaller village and township governments. This particular type of conflict rarely made large headlines; the petition campaign that decried the "Blockade of Milwaukee" was never repeated. Annexation lawsuits like the Nordberg case were complex and usually resolved by minor legal technicalities that did not make for good press. Furthermore, Milwaukee's top public officials, especially Mayor Hoan and later Frank Zeidler, gained virtually nothing by publicly belittling the city's industrial leaders who spent much of their own time in the public eye by complaining of high local taxes. As a result, city leaders turned their invective toward their residential neighbors, especially unincorporated towns whose own governments struggled to handle the functional demands of urbanization.

²¹ Untitled Annexation Memo, February 11, 1924, Folder 1, Box 9, City Club of Milwaukee, Records. 1909-1975, WHS, MARC.

²² The case is briefly summarized in Arthur Werba, "Annexation Activities of the City of Milwaukee," 1927, Folder 1, Box 9, City Club of Milwaukee, Records. 1909-1975, WHS, MARC.

A second pattern that became apparent was the litigious nature of annexations. In the 1920's alone, twelve lawsuits were filed against the city of Milwaukee. Most of the lawsuits contested not the annexations themselves, but various interpretations of existing state laws. In the 1920's and especially during the post-World War II era state courts constantly debated the legalities of annexation and added another layer of state involvement in the city-suburban conflicts that plagued the region. Just as important, the attorneys who fought Milwaukee in the courts emerged as familiar foes to city officials. They came to personify the anti-city bias that Hoan and later Zeidler believed was endemic in both regional and state politics. Equally significant, lawyers who represented the outlying towns began informally sharing information of their numerous legal battles with the city. Out of these gatherings emerged the Milwaukee County League of Suburban Municipalities (LSM), a group that sought to "fight the central city" and to provide suburban governments a voice in legislative affairs.²³ The League exercised little power in the 1920's and 1930's, essentially remaining an informal club of lawyers.²⁴ It nevertheless had vast symbolic importance. For the first time "suburban interests" coalesced strictly around the crucible of anti-urban politics. Annexation Director Arthur Werba, who replaced Altpeter in 1925, began calling the LSM the "The Iron Ring" (a name he probably borrowed from Public Works Commissioner R.E. Stoelting, who used it to describe manufacturers that refused annexation).²⁵ The term came to exemplify not the attorneys themselves but the suburbs they represented. The LSM remained organized

²³ As quoted in Henry J. Schmandt and William H. Standing, *The Milwaukee Metropolitan Study Commission*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1965) p. 39.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Anthony Orum, *City Building in America* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995), 79-80.

throughout the interwar period and kept up its assault on Milwaukee's expansion well into the 1950's.

City officials quickly learned that in order to break down opposition to annexation, they needed to tout its positive benefits to fringe communities. More specifically, because property owners had a voice in the annexation process, it had to be clear that Milwaukee's growth benefited this constituency. Since realtors had the greatest stake in seeing vacant land beyond the city developed, it was paramount for the city to work with the real estate community in seeing annexation through. During the 1920's, planners from the BPLC sought technical advice from developers in establishing minimum platting guidelines. Many developers, in turn, strongly supported Whitnall's system of parkways as a crucial way to increase property values. Confident that a program of annexation would yield similar benefits, developers in large part came to favor annexation. As one real estate official proclaimed after touring a vast expanse of farm lands just outside of city borders on the northwest: "This is a fine illustration of the reason why I have faith in the future of Milwaukee."²⁶

Milwaukee realtors signed off on annexation for one reason above all others: the promise of municipal service to newly annexed areas. Foremost among these public works investments was the increasing availability of city water and sewage extensions. Prior to 1910, water and sewer lines had been installed unevenly across the city with poorer inner city districts consistently ignored. Historian Kate Foss-Mollan has noted that before 1910, inner city wards lacked political influence and as a result were chronically underserved by public works commissioners who, under Mayor David Rose,

²⁶ "Annexation for Milwaukee: The Concern of the Entire State," Report to Daniel Hoan, File 26, Box 1, Hoan Papers, MCHS.

maintained a “proprietary attitude” toward service provisions such as water.²⁷ Rose preferred to use water extensions as a revenue stream to cultivate an ever-expanding network of political patronage. As a result, city commissioners were more willing to sell water to bedroom communities like East Milwaukee (which became the Village of Shorewood in 1917) while ignoring inner city neighborhoods like the Polish South Side. When the reform-minded socialists swept into city hall in 1910, they did so in part on the promise of providing water to all city residents and set about the task of reorganizing Milwaukee’s inefficient infrastructure. When Hoan assumed office in 1916, he carried on these efforts. Professional staffs of chemists, engineers, and other technical experts helped make Milwaukee’s public works a model of good government and made “sewer socialism” a lasting legacy of the city’s efficient government.²⁸ They also made annexation far more promising to developers who had invested in land surrounding the city. For this reason, the Milwaukee Real Estate Board supported the city annexation efforts throughout the 1920’s, again for very different reasons than Hoan and other policymakers had in mind.

Service provision across the board was a democratic idea, but it also meshed with the increasingly frantic need to reduce Milwaukee’s population density and facilitate planned decentralization. As with other elements of this policy, local developers accepted annexation not in the spirit it was intended, but because property values would be increased. Milwaukee’s annexation officials understood this dilemma. Whitnall’s frequent polemics against urban congestion and the “unearned increment” of inflated land

²⁷ Kate Foss-Mollan, *Hard Water: Politics and Water Supply in Milwaukee, 1870-1995* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2001), pp. 63-66.

²⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 80-87. Also see John Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee* (Milwaukee, WI: Milwaukee County Historical Society, 1999) pp. 261-263.

values increasingly took on a detached tone after the BPLC gave up its annexation duties in 1923. Hoan's vigorous support of annexation never waned, but the machinations of expansion were obviously out of his hands as well. The task of annexing fell to a separate department and the city's army of annexation solicitors had to convince property owners of the concrete benefits in joining Milwaukee. For annexation to work, officials had to promote its monetary benefits. Accordingly, George Altpeter and Arthur Werba, the city's two annexation directors during the 1920's, became the public mouthpieces of Milwaukee's physical growth. Werba, who took over for Altpeter in 1925, especially made annexation a municipal crusade, but one that relied on acerbic public rhetoric backed quietly by millions of dollars in public subsidies to finance growth on the periphery.

From 1919 to 1932, Milwaukee grew from twenty six to forty four square miles. During that time, the city laid 296 miles of water mains at a cost of \$13 million and spent \$14 million to lay 393 miles of sewer lines.²⁹ These figures were points of pride to annexation officials such as Werba, who noted at the end of the decade that the city's total valuation had increased by \$325 million during the 1920's and half of that increase came from construction in newly annexed territory. Reflecting the socialists' desire to attain complete fiscal solvency, the city paid for over half of the cost of all public improvements in cash. An amortization fund was set up to wipe out all bonded indebtedness. This accomplishment moved Werba to boast; "No other city in Wisconsin

²⁹ "Milwaukee's Growth and Expenditures for Public Improvements in the last Ten Years" File 28, Box 1, Hoan Papers, MCHS.

and perhaps no other city in the United States can show, dollar for dollar, as high a return of municipal services for the taxes collected.”³⁰

Ironically, this same record of municipal achievement made annexation extremely controversial during the 1920’s. The quality of Milwaukee’s service provision stood as the city’s trump card in facilitating annexation petitions. The most obvious measure to demonstrate the city’s efficient public works was to compare them with the neighboring towns of Milwaukee County where annexations had occurred. Werba’s characterizations of town government were—partially by necessity—not kind. He frequently pointed out that public works projects, especially the paving and grading of streets and provision of water and sewer extensions, were slow to develop in towns, but in areas annexed by Milwaukee, improvements came quickly. Annexation’s “magic wand” corrected this: city government had ready means to pave streets, collect garbage, and create efficient and pleasant communities. Furthermore, Werba constantly asserted that only Milwaukee was capable of bringing these services to the towns.³¹ Meanwhile, developers, caught up in the national real estate boom of the 1920’s, claimed that annexation wrought property value increases in excess of 100%.³²

For the communities that bordered or were located near Milwaukee, annexation raised difficult questions as to the future shape of urban growth. Further complicating both the city and its surrounding communities’ destinies were the geographic dimensions

³⁰ Arthur Werba, “Annexation Activities of the City of Milwaukee,” 1927, Folder 1, Box 9, City Club of Milwaukee, Records. 1909-1975, WHS, MARC.

³¹ *Milwaukee Journal*, April 11, 1929, May 30, 1929, Annexation Clipping File, Legislative Reference Bureau, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

³² For example, see *The North Milwaukee Annexationist*, March 10, 1928. Chas. Davis, a realtor in North Milwaukee promised in an advertisement that “annexation of North Milwaukee to the city of Milwaukee means 100% increase in value” of all property. Folder 1, Box 9, City Club of Milwaukee, Records. 1909-1975, WHS, MARC.

that Milwaukee County had already taken on prior to 1920. Stretching north and east along the coast of Lake Michigan were the region's wealthiest communities. In the late nineteenth century, Milwaukee's most prominent families had started to congregate on the high ground east of the central business district on the Milwaukee River and, as the city grew more crowded, slowly moved north along Prospect Avenue up the lake. Here, land owners platted large lots to maintain the bucolic character of the "Gold Coast," often leaving the land completely vacant until it was assured that the proper residences were built.³³ As wealthier neighborhoods filled in, they extended beyond the city's northern border at Edgewood Avenue. Between 1890 and 1900, two villages incorporated north of Milwaukee and along Lake Michigan. In 1892, the village of Whitefish Bay was born. It was actually over two miles beyond the city limits, at least in part because Whitefish Bay's initial 316 residents desired to establish a separate school district. In 1900, the village of East Milwaukee (which became Shorewood in 1917) incorporated between Whitefish Bay and Milwaukee. Both communities benefited from their location along Lake Michigan. Frederick Pabst, the owner of Pabst Brewery, Milwaukee's largest producer of beer, built a large estate in Whitefish Bay that became the premier summer resort for Milwaukee's upper crust in the 1890's and 1900's. Pabst and other elites were the primary landholders in Shorewood and Whitefish Bay and they collectively helped to develop the villages into wealthy bedroom communities that remained lightly populated until after World War I.³⁴

³³ See Roger Simon, *The City-Building Process: Housing and Services in Milwaukee Neighborhoods, 1880-1910*, (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1996) Chapter 5 especially deals with the East Side of Milwaukee.

³⁴ Metropolitan Milwaukee Fact Book: c1970, Milwaukee Urban Observatory, p. 455. Also see Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee*, pp. 186-188.

During the postwar decade, as middle class residents increasingly left the city, a third North Shore village, Fox Point, incorporated in 1926. Five years later, the region's most exclusive community came into existence. Elite North Shore residents had begun to purchase large estates on gently rolling hills west of the Milwaukee River, near but not adjacent to the North Shore suburbs. The largest estate was that of Milwaukee Country Club whose members, seeking to preserve the community's prestigious status, voted in 1930 to incorporate into the Village of River Hills. Ironically, the initial move for incorporation occurred at the country club's annual meeting in the posh Pfister Hotel in downtown Milwaukee. River Hills's residents quickly adopted the most stringent zoning ordinance in the region, permitting minimum no less than five acres in 85% of the village, and one and two acre lots in the remaining territory.³⁵

Any effort by Milwaukee to convince these North Shore suburbs to consolidate was complicated by public works contracts that had been made by the less-reform-minded Rose administration in the 1900's. Shorewood received Milwaukee water at inflated costs and even agreed to pay for the laying of water mains through the village. By the 1920's, Shorewood had also started to sell Whitefish Bay water it purchased from Milwaukee.³⁶ Thus both villages already received city water and were extremely doubtful that they would benefit from consolidation with the city. Furthermore, the North Shore suburbs had already begun to zone their own land to prevent low-income groups from joining them; Shorewood—the wealthiest village in the state by assessed

³⁵ Metropolitan Milwaukee Fact Book: c1970, Milwaukee Urban Observatory, p. 367.

³⁶ Kate Foss-Mollan, *Hard Water: Politics and Water Supply in Milwaukee, 1870-1995* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2001).

valuation—even banned all apartment buildings for a time in the early 1920’s.³⁷ North Shore residents were primarily commuters as well, since virtually no industry existed in the North Shore. In addition to working in the city, North Shore suburbanites frequently owned property in Milwaukee, giving them a stake in urban policies initiated in the city. Nevertheless, annexation did not interest most North Shore residents. The village president of Fox Point, Frank Klode, admitted during a public debate on annexation; “I sleep in Fox Point, but most of my investments on which I pay taxes are in Milwaukee. That’s the situation with most of the Fox Point residents, and we are more solicitous of Milwaukee’s end of the deal than of the suburbs. If you can convince me that annexation of Whitefish Bay and Fox Point will benefit Milwaukee, I’ll change my attitude and go out and boost for it.”³⁸ Werba’s frequent public promises of the improved public works annexation or consolidation with Milwaukee yielded scant interest in the North Shore.

Located west of the city, along the Menomonee River, was Wauwatosa, Milwaukee’s oldest residential suburb. Originally settled by Yankee New Englanders in 1833, Wauwatosa had, as early as 1866, proclaimed itself as “the most attractive suburb of Milwaukee.”³⁹ The original village was the site of a commuter railroad stop and residents officially incorporated in 1892 to break free from the Town of Wauwatosa. Though collectively less wealthy than Shorewood and Whitefish Bay, Wauwatosa’s population grew more quickly thanks to its location near both the industries of the Menomonee Valley and the Milwaukee Road, which branched north from the river and

³⁷ *Milwaukee Sentinel*, January 8, 1921, Zoning Clipping File, Legislative Reference Bureau, Milwaukee, WI. *Milwaukee Leader*, May 13, 1922, Suburbs Clipping File, Legislative Reference Bureau, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

³⁸ *Milwaukee Sentinel*, January 8, 1931, Annexation Clipping File, Legislative Reference Bureau, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

³⁹ Metropolitan Milwaukee Fact Book: c1970, Milwaukee Urban Observatory; p. 399, Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee*, 186-187;

ran along 31st Street, only two miles from the village's eastern border. By 1920, Wauwatosa's population reached 5,818 residents and this number more than doubled by 1926, surpassing 13,500.⁴⁰

Five industrial suburbs surrounded Milwaukee to the north, west, and south, each with separate and distinct histories, each long in existence by the 1920's. North Milwaukee grew alongside a stop on the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul Railroad in the 1880's and incorporated as a village in 1897. Several industries located in North Milwaukee, most prominently the American Bicycle Company, which in the early twentieth century employed over 1,000 workers. South and west of the city were two industrial satellites, West Milwaukee and West Allis, both created in part as tax havens for industries. West Milwaukee, incorporated in 1906, had attracted so many industries that it levied no property taxes at all throughout the first half of the twentieth century. West Allis, previously an unincorporated village, grew alongside the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad tracks and became a fourth-class city in 1906, shortly after Edward Allis decided to move his massive machine manufacturing plant there. By the 1920's, the Allis plant was the largest in the region, employing over 5,500 workers and propelling West Allis's population past 23,000 by the middle of the 1920's. Finally, well to the south of Milwaukee were two more industrial communities, Cudahy and South Milwaukee. Like West Allis, both were dominated by one primary industry, Cudahy becoming a village in 1906 after Patrick Cudahy located his meatpacking plant there and South Milwaukee in 1892 after Bucyrus-Erie, a maker of steam shovels, built a large plant. Because Milwaukee's South Side had developed more slowly, both communities

⁴⁰ Milwaukee Transportation Survey, McClellan and Junkersfeld, Inc. 1926, 175, MPL

remained well beyond the city's urban expansion and were therefore not prominently involved in the annexation controversies of the decade.

In many important ways, these eight communities differed greatly from each other. Whitefish Bay, Shorewood, and Wauwatosa were white-collar suburbs, residential in character. By intent, none of these three communities had industries of any note. With the 1920's real estate boom, all became appealing locations for white-collar commuters who worked in the city. A local newspaper dubbed Wauwatosa "Milwaukee's Bedroom," noting that Wauwatosa officials did not at all mind the designation "for it gives them a chance to brag about the furnishings of the bedroom."⁴¹ By 1926, Shorewood and Wauwatosa led all Milwaukee County suburbs in the percentage of residents who commuted to Milwaukee each day (see figure 2-2).⁴² In contrast, industrial communities like Cudahy and South Milwaukee, well to the south of the city, functioned as more self-contained places where residents worked in factories located in the communities where they lived. In 1926, only 162 residents of South Milwaukee and 413 from Cudahy commuted each day to Milwaukee. West Allis, home to the giant Edward Allis plant, the region's largest employer by the 1920's, actually employed a large share of Milwaukee residents who commuted from city to this suburb each day.⁴³ The suburbs also differed politically from each other, with North Shore suburbs overwhelmingly Republican or Progressive and industrial villages and cities to the south and west equally Democratic in voting habits. Predominantly working class West Allis

⁴¹ *Milwaukee Journal*, August 1, 1920, Suburbs Clipping File, Legislative Reference Bureau, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

⁴² Milwaukee Transportation Survey, McClellan and Junkersfeld, Inc. 1926, p. 175, MPL

⁴³ *Milwaukee Journal*, December 31, 1921, Suburbs Clipping File, Legislative Reference Bureau, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

even flirted with socialism during the Depression, electing Marvin V. Baxter as Mayor in 1932.⁴⁴

Figure 2-1: Population of Incorporated Cities, and Villages in Milwaukee County, 1920 and 1927

	<u>Population, 1920</u>	<u>Population, 1927</u>
City of Milwaukee	457,147	536,400
City of West Allis	13,765	28,102
City of Wauwatosa	5,818	18,000
City of Cudahy	6,725	11,000
City of South Milwaukee	7,598	10,000
Village of Shorewood	2,650	9,239
Village of North Milwaukee	3,047	6,500
Village of West Milwaukee	2,101	3,500
Village of Whitefish Bay	882	3,500

“Annexation Activities of the City of Milwaukee,” Arthur Werba, Supervisor of Annexation, Legislative Reference Bureau, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Figure 2-2: Suburban Employment in Milwaukee, Incorporated Villages and Cities, 1926

	<u>Population, 1926</u>	<u>Persons Employed in Milwaukee</u>	<u>% Employed</u>
Shorewood	9,000	1,970	22%
Wauwatosa	13,500	2,075	15%
West Allis	23,150	2,860	12%
Whitefish Bay	3,500	271	8%
North Milwaukee	5,500	394	7%
Cudahy	10,441	413	2%

Milwaukee Transportation Survey, McClellan and Junkersfeld, Inc. 1926, MPL.

Despite the very real differences that existed between the early incorporated suburbs of Milwaukee County, they shared one important characteristic. With the exception of Fox Point, each incorporated municipality in Milwaukee County had existed as a separate political entity before 1920 and in most cases since the nineteenth century.

⁴⁴ "City Expansion and Suburban Spread: Settlements and Governments in Milwaukee County" by Frederick I. Olson in *Trading Post to Metropolis: Milwaukee County's First 150 Years* edited by Ralph M. Aderman, (Milwaukee, WI: Milwaukee County Historical Society, 1987) 50.

With long-established separate identities, they saw little reason to allow Milwaukee to swallow them up. The city's aggressive annexation campaign, along with the increased calls for some form of metropolitan government, threatened each suburb, regardless of type, in the same way. Faced with what many perceived to be a threat to their very existence, the suburbs fought back. Wauwatosa, watching as Milwaukee's solicitors slowly pushed the city's boundaries westward, began to annex some land on their own, especially along Blue Mound Road, located to Wauwatosa's south. Shorewood's village trustees acted with less rational means. In 1921, the village's official bulletin instructed residents to notify local police if they heard of any annexation petitions being floated.⁴⁵ Milwaukee could not legally annex any land in incorporated communities, but the threat seemed too great for the suburbs to ignore.

By the late 1920's, Milwaukee's borders touched Whitefish Bay and Shorewood, and Werba, Hoan, and other annexation officials began trying to persuade the North Shore suburbs to consolidate their governments with the city. Consolidation was only possible if a referendum was held in the village or city in question and a majority of residents voted in favor of it. In Whitefish Bay, Werba managed to organize enough initial support for consolidation that, in 1928, residents sympathetic with consolidation formed the Whitefish Bay Annexation Association (WBAA). The WBAA tried to appeal to residents' sense of regionalism. In their pamphlets, they asserted that residents were not villagers, but citizens of a metropolis and that most people of the village had business contacts throughout the region and especially in Milwaukee. "We are all Milwaukeeans," the WBAA argued in 1928. "We need suburbs, but only in the sense that we need home

⁴⁵ *Milwaukee Journal*, June 6, 1921, Folder 13, Box 5, City Club of Milwaukee. Records, 1909-1975. Milwaukee Manuscript Collection AS and Milwaukee Micro Collection 69. WHS, MARC.

sites beyond the present boundaries. The goal is to get them to extend the boundaries, not migrate over them.”⁴⁶ Foes of consolidation, however, vastly outnumbered the WBAA. Represented by the Whitefish Bay Citizens’ Committee, they turned Milwaukee’s well-known problems of congestion against the city. A pamphlet that circulated late in 1928 highlighted the Citizens Committee’s scare tactics. It strongly implied that consolidation with Milwaukee meant pleasant residential neighborhoods would devolve into tenement slums and schools would quickly become overcrowded. Other residents echoed these concerns. A recently arrived homeowner scoffed at the WBAA, claiming that if Whitefish Bay became a part of the city it would become “a place of apartment houses and cheap tenements.”⁴⁷ In fact, policymakers specifically designed Milwaukee’s annexation to reduce the congestion that suburbanites so greatly feared, a point city officials repeatedly made throughout the 1920’s. The WBAA also tried to address these fears, assuring residents that the village would remain zoned single-family residential, but to no avail.

⁴⁶ “Annexation: Shall Our City and Village Combine? An Argument by the Whitefish Bay Annexation Association,” Folder 1, Box 9, City Club of Milwaukee. Records, 1909-1975. Milwaukee Manuscript Collection AS and Milwaukee Micro Collection 69. WHS, MARC.

⁴⁷ Pamphlet authored by Whitefish Bay resident Walter S. Smith, File 32, Box 1, Hoan Papers, MCHS.

HERE'S WHAT THE OPPOSITION HAS TO SAY

The following is a reprint of an anonymous circular issued by anti-annexationists of Whitefish Bay.

Read it carefully; analyze its tone, the logic of its arguments, the fabric of its "facts." Do you seriously believe that your governmental interests, and the welfare of your homes, will be wisely protected by minds that reason, think and write as these have done? Do you think that consolidation with Milwaukee can possibly be as dangerous as a village government if it should be influenced or controlled by such reasoning as this?

DO YOU LOVE YOUR WHITEFISH BAY? DO YOU LOVE YOUR HOME?

If you do — then read this:

Milwaukee wants to annex Whitefish Bay — Milwaukee with its terrific tax burden now wants to shift the load to the suburbs — wants you to carry the tremendous load.

Milwaukee, with its 100 school barracks, with 3,500 school children attending school in them, wants you to be annexed. Do you want barracks?

Milwaukee, with its chlorinated drinking water, that contains all the same sewage of Manitowoc, Shauoygan, Port Washington and many other lake cities, wants you — your children and their children to drink that unhealthy mess the rest of their lives. No matter how much chlorine is put into the water it is still sewage!

There are a number of big selfish interests, that want to control Whitefish Bay. They work sometimes openly — but mostly under cover. It is your duty — your interest to stop them in their tracks — NOW!

Half the illness in Whitefish Bay is caused by drinking chlorine. Next time you don't feel well drink some more chlorinated water and call the doctor.

Let's preserve the reputation our splendid village has, as a place of peaceful and quiet residence. Let's not be disturbed over the "Big city" idea.

Remember, the selfish interests work night and day — for their interest — not yours.

MEET TONIGHT — BASEMENT WHITEFISH BAY
SCHOOL.

BE THERE EARLY — BUT BE THERE!

CITIZENS' COMMITTEE.

"Annexation: Shall Our City and Village Combine? An Argument by the Whitefish Bay Annexation Association," Folder 1, Box 9, City Club of Milwaukee. Records, 1909-1975. Milwaukee Manuscript Collection AS and Milwaukee Micro Collection 69. WHS, MARC.

“Milwaukee zoning turmoil is quite convincing,” an opponent of annexation pointed out, apparently referring to Hoan’s increasingly difficult attempts to thwart zoning amendments.⁴⁸ At a series of mass meetings held to discuss consolidation in 1928 and 1929, hundreds of village residents voiced their overwhelming opposition to the city and no consolidation referendum was ever held.⁴⁹

Only one incorporated community, North Milwaukee, consolidated with the city in the 1920’s, but not before encountering significant opposition. The economically modest industrial village, lacking the wealth of the North Shore suburbs, struggled to provide residents with adequate public works. In 1922, Milwaukee annexation solicitors persuaded the village to hold a consolidation referendum, which passed by a wide margin. Nevertheless village trustees, charged with officially voting consolidation into effect, balked for a time, ignoring the results of the referendum. For six years, residents repeatedly voted in trustees who promised to join with the city, only to see those promises ignored by men “who had no desire to lose that office by consolidation.” The *North Milwaukee Post*, the local newspaper, also repeatedly fought consolidation, presumably afraid their own existence would be usurped once the village became another city neighborhood. Infuriated, local residents published their own newspaper, the *North Milwaukee Annexationist*, which listed a long line of grievances residents held against their local government. The village had reached its bonded debt capacity (which the city of Milwaukee promised to assume), residents frequently were overcharged with water services, and property was taxed at 99% of its full value, a far higher rate than even in

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid, “Do You Love Whitefish Bay? Do You Love Your Home?” Pamphlet, File 32, Box 1, Hoan Papers, MCHS. *Milwaukee Journal*, January 17, 1928, *Milwaukee Leader*, January 11, 1928, Annexation Clipping File, Legislative Reference Bureau, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Milwaukee.⁵⁰ The paper made class differences explicit as well, castigating the North Shore suburbs as “Gold Coast” elites whose snobbery was evident by their desire to “remain aloof from the big city.”⁵¹ Finally, in 1928, residents succeeded in sweeping into office a group of trustees who swore *in writing* to legislate themselves out of existence by passing an ordinance calling for yet another referendum.⁵² North Milwaukee residents ratified the measure by a two to one margin. City of Milwaukee residents concurrently voted for consolidation by a ten to one majority.⁵³ In early 1929, after six torturous years, North Milwaukee finally consolidated with the city.

Milwaukee’s expansion was easier to achieve but no less controversial in the more rural towns that ringed the city. In Wisconsin, “towns” are unincorporated communities, (referred to as “townships” in most of the Midwest) often laid out by the original territorial surveyors. Towns were large in land size, usually thirty-six square miles, and were agricultural in nature for most of their histories. Five towns—Milwaukee, Granville, Wauwatosa, Greenfield, and Lake—bordered the city of Milwaukee to the north, west, and south. Each town had existed since before the Civil War. While none had absorbed a great share of the region’s middle and upper classes, in varying degrees they all grew substantially in population in the early twentieth century as city residents spilled across political boundaries. The expanding South Side Polish and German enclaves moved south into the neighboring Town of Lake. The sturdy bungalows that dominated the northern half of the Town of Lake were very different

⁵⁰ *North Milwaukee Annexationist*, March 10, 1928, Folder 1, Box 9, City Club of Milwaukee. Records, 1909-1975. Milwaukee Manuscript Collection AS and Milwaukee Micro Collection 69. WHS, MARC.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² “Metropolitan Milwaukee: One Trade Area Burdened with 93 Local Governments,” from the Joint Committee on City-County Consolidation in Milwaukee County, MPL.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

from the palatial luxury of the North Shore and the solid prosperity of Wauwatosa, but were a definite step up for the working class Polish Americans who sought escape from the crowded South Side wards.⁵⁴ A similar pattern of growth took hold in the Northwest Side, where the Towns of Granville and Wauwatosa began filling up with German Americans who worked in nearby industries on the Milwaukee Road railway corridor along 31st Street. Meanwhile city annexation officials scrambled to keep up with urban growth on the periphery. There, unincorporated towns did not require a community-wide referendum to be dissolved into Milwaukee, as did the incorporated villages and cities. Instead, provided the town land bordered Milwaukee, city annexation officials could pick and choose neighborhoods, carving out pieces of land where a majority of property owners gave sanction for annexation.

Milwaukee's annexation policies threatened these towns' existence in more immediate ways than the incorporated suburbs. Any parcel of land that Werba's army of solicitors carved from the towns was merely subject to a majority vote of the landholders within it. After the Common Council's vote whether to accept or reject the parcel—a virtual rubber stamp in favor of expansion—annexation became complete. Therefore, as Milwaukee's land size gradually rose in the 1920's, each town encountered a curious problem: as towns attracted more residents, their physical size, and in some cases, populations, began to shrink (see figure 2-3). Since city annexation solicitors first went after the ring of factories that surrounded Milwaukee and were mostly located in the unincorporated towns, valuable tax revenue also disappeared. Because of the modest housing values in most of the towns, any loss of industry gravely threatened public

⁵⁴ For life in the Polish South Side, see Judith Kenny, "Polish Routes to Americanization: House Form and Landscape on Milwaukee's Polish South Side" in Robert C. Ostergren and Thomas R. Vale, ed., *Wisconsin Land and Life*, (Madison; University of Wisconsin Press, 1997).

revenues. “If our manufacturers are left with us,” an anti-Milwaukee pamphlet warned Lake residents, the town could survive, but “the city of Milwaukee WANTS THEM.”⁵⁵

Figure 2-3: Population of Unincorporated Towns Bordering Milwaukee, 1920 and 1927

	<u>Population, 1920</u>	<u>Population, 1927</u>
Town of Wauwatosa	15,082	10,500
Town of Lake	8,876	7,500
Town of Greenfield	6,293	7,500
Town of Milwaukee	2,606	3,800
Town of Granville	2,875	3,300

“Annexation Activities of the City of Milwaukee,” Arthur Werba, Supervisor of Annexation, Legislative Reference Bureau, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

As separate but unincorporated political entities, town governments only rarely benefited from Milwaukee policy. Instead the county serviced the towns, regulating land uses and providing police protection. Water service was uneven as well. Most town residents made use of wells; Milwaukee remained loath to provide city water and sewage prior to annexation since these provisions remained the primary motivation for land speculators and residents to join the city.

Furthermore, large amounts of land in each town remained dedicated to agricultural use, giving town governments more decidedly rural characteristics that remained at odds with urbanization. Yet farmers often financially benefited from urban expansion. In a report to the Common Council in 1926, Werba observed that many

⁵⁵ “Don’t Pay for Your Neighbor’s House,” Town of Lake Booster Club, Folder 1, Box 9, City Club of Milwaukee. Records, 1909-1975. Milwaukee Manuscript Collection AS and Milwaukee Micro Collection 69. WHS, MARC.

farmers saw their property values rise dramatically as residential decentralization progressed, but they often resisted annexation out of fear of paying city taxes on their farmland.⁵⁶

Urbanization had created rapid growth across the county, but economic development within the region remained irregular. Each town's residents generally were far less wealthy than the white-collar bedroom suburbs of the North Shore. Furthermore, town government was far less sophisticated; town boards "governed" loosely, meeting only once a year to approve budgets and discuss matters facing the community. This informal manner of governance increasingly drew the scorn of metropolitan advocates. Werba reserved his most venomous attacks for the town governments. Of the Town of Granville, which bordered Milwaukee on the north and west, Werba proclaimed; "Their streets are mudholes and ruts; pools of stagnant water befoul the air and breed insects; refuse is dumped wherever convenient; the whole district seems completely neglected and sadly in need of attention."⁵⁷ According to Werba, town board members clumsily thwarted the city's progress, seemingly oblivious to the benefits of political unification. Occasionally, towns proved Werba correct in resorting to raffish obstruction. In 1931, a truck driver from the Town of Lake drunkenly interrupted a public meeting regarding annexation, taking the stage and haranguing Werba, who was in the middle of a speech. After being thrown out, the man confessed that town officials fed him whiskey at a Lake establishment and then encouraged him to break up the meeting.⁵⁸ Episodes such as this

⁵⁶ "Annexation Since January 1, 1922, to November 1, 1926," Folder 1, Box 9, City Club of Milwaukee. Records, 1909-1975. Milwaukee Manuscript Collection AS and Milwaukee Micro Collection 69. WHS, MARC.

⁵⁷ *Milwaukee Journal*, May 30, 1929, Annexation Clipping File, Legislative Reference Bureau, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

⁵⁸ *Milwaukee Journal*, February 6, 1931, in Folder 1, Box 15, City Club of Milwaukee. Records, 1909-1975. Milwaukee Manuscript Collection AS and Milwaukee Micro Collection 69. WHS, MARC.

were rare, but they fed into an increasing impulse that town government was nothing more than a relic of the past.

Nationally, realtors often shared the belief that town government had to go. In 1930, Judge Arthur Lacy, chairman of the Property Owners' Division of the National Association of Real Estate Boards (NAREB), characterized town governments as "obsolete," offering a needless duplication of services that did nothing more than raise the cost of government.⁵⁹ Local real estate officials who remained key allies in annexation efforts shared these opinions. The Milwaukee Real Estate Board, NAREB's local branch, deemed town governments to be a "barrier to obtaining the maximum development of this area as one municipality, which it is in fact."⁶⁰ The onset of the Great Depression escalated the outcry against the structure of town government, as public resources evaporated and multiple levels of government suddenly became more costly. Local newspapers in Milwaukee ridiculed the "ox-cart governments" of the towns that stood in the way of metropolitan expansion.⁶¹

Many of these attacks ignored some basic precepts that complicated both the existence of towns and the ability of the city to absorb them. Werba's cantankerous remarks as to the poor quality of town roads and other infrastructure belied the fact that these public improvements were unimportant to many of the town's rural residents. "Suburban residents are in reality Milwaukeeans. They depend on Milwaukee for their

⁵⁹ *Milwaukee Journal*, November 16, 1930, City Club of Milwaukee. Records, 1909-1975. Milwaukee Manuscript Collection AS and Milwaukee Micro Collection 69. WHS, MARC.

⁶⁰ Statement of Milwaukee Real Estate Board, October 30, 1934, Folder 3, Box 9, City Club of Milwaukee. Records, 1909-1975. Milwaukee Manuscript Collection AS and Milwaukee Micro Collection 69. WHS, MARC.

⁶¹ For example, see *Milwaukee Journal*, February 6, 1931, December 12, 1932, and December 26, 1933.

livelihood,” Werba told a local newspaper in 1929.⁶² However, defining “suburban residents” was far more complicated than city officials believed. Farmers in Milwaukee County may well have benefited from urban expansion in terms of land appreciation, but they did not consider themselves “Milwaukeeans” in any meaningful sense. A popular anti-annexation pamphlet in the Town of Lake urged residents; “Don’t pay for your neighbor’s house,” implying that Milwaukee sought to swallow up Lake and milk the town’s revenues.⁶³ “Real estate agents in the Town of Lake,” the pamphlet charged, “know that if Lake is annexed to Milwaukee the assessed valuation of the town’s property will be increased without improvements.”⁶⁴

Urbanization had trapped towns between a rural past and an uncertain suburban or urban future. Annexation impelled town residents to make important decisions about the future shape of their communities. Some sought greater municipal autonomy. In 1926, the two towns located most directly in the path of the city’s annexation efforts—the Town of Lake and the Town of Milwaukee—both attempted to incorporate into independent municipalities. Both movements for incorporation into independent cities were purely defensive, designed as ways to protect the towns’ tax bases from Milwaukee’s annexationists. The Town of Lake’s referendum, set for a vote on September 18, would have created a city about half the size of Milwaukee.⁶⁵ The Town of Milwaukee, north of the city, had already seen the births of Shorewood and Whitefish Bay eat away large chunks of land. In the 1920’s, as Milwaukee’s annexation program

⁶² *Milwaukee Journal*, April 11, 1929, Annexation Clipping File, Legislative Reference Bureau, Milwaukee Wisconsin.

⁶³ “Don’t Pay for Your Neighbor’s House,” Town of Lake Booster Club, Folder 1, Box 9, City Club of Milwaukee. Records, 1909-1975. Milwaukee Manuscript Collection AS and Milwaukee Micro Collection 69. WHS, MARC.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Milwaukee Journal*, September 16, 1926.

commenced, the rapidly developing Chicago and Northwestern Rail corridor, which ran north along the Milwaukee River, became a primary city target. Determined to protect this valuable tax revenue, a group of town residents attempted to incorporate the Town of Milwaukee into a fourth class city, with a referendum for incorporation into a city scheduled for October 15.⁶⁶

The incorporation efforts of both towns alarmed Milwaukee officials. The city's entire expansion program was in danger of derailment. "If they win, we're through," warned a city official after hearing of Lake's referendum.⁶⁷ Milwaukee officials planned to "influence the vote" through a counteroffensive of propaganda in the weeks leading up to the Lake referendum. Within both towns, a "Voters and Taxpayers League" was hastily organized to combat the two town's transformation into cities. The main targets were Lake's farmers, most of who lived in the town's still rural southern sections. "Please remember," the league reminded them, "you are not voting for annexation to the city of Milwaukee."⁶⁸ Lake simply could not develop as a city as quickly as Milwaukee; consequently, farmers' property values would plunge. If Lake remained a town instead, land would only "be gradually sub-divided into the city of Milwaukee."⁶⁹ Aldermen Paul Gauer, a socialist whose South Side district bordered Lake, warned Lake's farmers of impending bankruptcy if they had to pay for the public improvement the new city installed.⁷⁰ Many Lake residents agreed. A few weeks before the referendum, Agnes

⁶⁶ *Milwaukee Journal*, October 11, 1926.

⁶⁷ "Incorporation of Town of Lake into a Village, Memo, September 1, 1926, Folder 1, Box 9, City Club of Milwaukee. Records, 1909-1975. Milwaukee Manuscript Collection AS and Milwaukee Micro Collection 69. WHS, MARC.

⁶⁸ "To the Farmers Living in the Town of Lake" by the Taxpayers and Voters League of the Town of Lake, Folder 1, Box 9, "City Club of Milwaukee. Records, 1909-1975. Milwaukee Manuscript Collection AS and Milwaukee Micro Collection 69. WHS, MARC.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Milwaukee Sentinel*, September 17, 1926.

Tomkiewicz, a property owner in Lake, sought a court-ordered injunction to prevent the vote, arguing that over 9,000 acres of Lake's total 10,500 acres of territory constituted farm land and hardly fit the definition of a "city."⁷¹ For their part, advocates of incorporation painted opponents of the proposed City of Lake as pawns of both Milwaukee and the real estate interests that city officials seemed beholden to. The "Voters and Taxpayers League" drew the most heat when it was discovered that an employee of a real estate firm on Milwaukee's South Side actually headed the league.⁷² Lake's attorney cited this evidence to halt the injunction and the referendum remained scheduled for September 18.

Milwaukee's newspapers joined in the fight against incorporation. A *Milwaukee Journal* editorial asked how a community with one-eightieth the property valuation of Milwaukee but one half the amount of land could build "city necessities" for itself.⁷³ The editorial also questioned the motives of the opponents of annexation. Echoing Werba, the *Journal* hinted that town government officials merely sought to hold onto their jobs, which would presumably be lost if the towns continued to shrink in size or disappear entirely. "This much seems certain," stated an editorial shortly before the Town of Milwaukee referendum, "city government is designed for real cities, places densely populated with many people living closely together. It is not designed for agricultural communities of thinly settled areas."⁷⁴ Both referendums failed by wide margins. On September 18, Lake's incorporation was defeated by a vote of 1,417 to 733. A month

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷²"Don't Pay for Your Neighbor's House," Town of Lake Booster Club, Folder 1, Box 9, City Club of Milwaukee. Records, 1909-1975. Milwaukee Manuscript Collection AS and Milwaukee Micro Collection 69. WHS, MARC.

⁷³ *Milwaukee Journal*, September 17, 1926.

⁷⁴ *Milwaukee Journal*, October 11, 1926.

later, Town of Milwaukee residents voted down incorporation by a similar margin. The city's annexation program was again safe, but defeat of this effort required unprecedented intervention into the affairs of its neighbors. Several aldermen had spoken at public meetings, occasionally accompanied by Werba and even Mayor Hoan. The "Voters and Taxpayers League" pamphlets that had surfaced in the Town of Lake curiously emerged in the Town of Milwaukee as well, again alarming farmers of the economic peril that was certain to ensue once the town became a city.⁷⁵

Milwaukee's annexation efforts had gradually altered the rhetoric of metro-politics within the region. Werba interpreted the failed referenda as evidence of the popularity of annexation in the outlying towns. In reality, the political shape of communities within the region often hinged simply on money. Political war with Lake's officials only increased when a new revenue source fell into the town's lap. In the late 1920's, the Wisconsin Electric Company constructed a power plant on the town's eastern edge along Lake Michigan. A progressive state reform law dictated the return of two-thirds of all tax revenue generated by utilities to the community where it was located. By the early 1930's—even in the middle of the Depression—the Lakeside Power Plant was generating over \$300,000 per year into town coffers. In 1933, at the height of the Depression, Lake residents paid no local property taxes; in fact the town returned its massive surplus to residents in the form of \$50 "bonuses."⁷⁶ Graft in Lake government was also evident; a sand and gravel company admitted under indictment to providing kickbacks to town officials and to using inferior materials to pave town roads. In 1934, several town officials—including the chairman of the Town Board and the highway

⁷⁵ *Milwaukee Journal*, October 13, 1926.

⁷⁶ *Milwaukee Sentinel*, February 5, 1931.

supervisor—were convicted of graft and sent to prison.⁷⁷ Milwaukee newspapers, by now firmly in favor of folding all town governments into the city, resumed their attacks on Lake’s woebegone “ox-cart” government.

Lake officials were not the only public servants who were tempted by the power plant’s revenues. Werba and the annexation department vigorously tried to annex the plant into Milwaukee, but company officials preferred to remain outside of the city limits. The plant’s location next to the Archdiocese of Milwaukee’s headquarters complicated the matter; church officials were reluctant to draw themselves into political battles and rebuffed Werba’s efforts to sign the annexation petition that would have brought them—along with the Lakeside plant—into the city.⁷⁸ Thus annexation was thwarted, though city officials continued to search for ways to gerrymander property in such a way that the plant would be “trapped” in a pro-annexation parcel. For their part, residents of St. Francis, a small, unincorporated settlement within Lake’s eastern edges but near the Lakeside plant, began efforts to capture the windfall by creating their own separate village, thus keeping revenue from the plant entirely out of Milwaukee—and the majority of the Town of Lake’s hands. Wary of higher taxes, electric company officials supported efforts to make St. Francis a village, even “donating” \$550 toward the legal costs of incorporation.⁷⁹ Efforts to form the village ended only because of another legal technicality; lawyers representing the proposed village lost a lawsuit that would have wrested away some village land that Milwaukee had annexed. The circuit court ruled that since the only motivations in forming St. Francis lie in the power plant revenues, the

⁷⁷ *Milwaukee Journal*, February 21, 1934.

⁷⁸ Letter from Arthur Werba to Frank Zeidler, October 3, 1950, Folder 4, Box 124, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

⁷⁹ *Milwaukee Sentinel*, May 13, 1931.

incorporation was null and void.⁸⁰ The Lakeside power plant was still in the Town of Lake but it remained vulnerable to annexation. City and town officials remained hostile toward each other for decades.

By 1929, Milwaukee had grown in size by over 40% since the end of World War I. With the exception of the North Milwaukee consolidation, this growth came exclusively at the expense of the five neighboring towns, one parcel at a time. Annexation was growing the city, but Milwaukee policymakers were not yet satisfied. Also in 1929, Werba, released a report titled “Making Milwaukee Mightier,” detailing the city’s progress and future prospects for expansion as well as comparing Milwaukee’s experience with other American cities. Nearly a decade of battles with town and suburban governments had sharpened Werba’s tone. The future consolidation of all governments in Milwaukee County, he predicted, was inevitable, only blocked by selfish suburbs; “Milwaukee cannot continue to enjoy the prosperity made possible by its marvelous expansion in recent years if its growth is to be hampered by its suburban satellites.”⁸¹

Werba’s boundless energy in promoting annexation created many public enemies for the city. In 1927, he bitterly wrote Hoan that town officials considered annexation nothing less than “modern warfare.”⁸² Nevertheless, Werba’s tactlessness came with a willingness to take on any annexation project no matter how inconceivable. Any community near Milwaukee—village or town, incorporated or not—was welcome to join the city, even if not adjacent to it. In 1930, residents of Butler, an incorporated village in

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Arthur Werba, “Making Milwaukee Mightier,” MPL.

⁸² “Annexation Activities of the City of Milwaukee,” Report from Arthur Werba to Daniel Hoan, 1927, File 30, Box 1, Hoan Papers, MCHS.

Waukesha County, which bordered Milwaukee County to the west, appeared before the BPLC, stressing their need for improved water and sewer lines. Ben Fortin, a village trustee spoke for the residents, stating that Butler was “extremely eager to obtain Milwaukee’s conveniences.”⁸³ The BPLC referred the matter to Werba, who faced the daunting task of connecting Milwaukee’s western boundary to Butler, which was two and a half miles to the west. Werba immediately began planning to annex a strip of land along Hampton Avenue to physically connect the city to Butler.

Werba may well have succeeded if the Great Depression did not halt the city’s expansion. As the Depression deepened in the early 1930’s and public expenditures constricted, Hoan and the Common Council reluctantly disbanded the city’s annexation department. Milwaukee’s boundaries froze at 44 square miles, as the economic alarms of the Depression replaced the rhetoric of growth. The real estate boom of the 1920’s ended emphatically. On and just beyond the city’s edges, thousands of lots that speculators had eagerly platted during the 1920’s sat idle. Unable to pay property taxes, many bankrupt speculators turned their deeds over to the city. In a clear sign of the times, employees of the annexation department, including Werba, transferred to the city’s real estate office, where they compiled lists of tax delinquent properties.⁸⁴ With annexation cut off by the Depression, attention turned instead to city-county consolidation. Early in 1934, desperate for ways to cut the costs of government, the city and county of Milwaukee separately formed fifteen member committees to study the feasibility of consolidating certain functions of city and county governments that duplicated one another. To save

⁸³ *Milwaukee Sentinel*, February 22, 1930, Annexation Clipping File, Legislative Reference Bureau, Milwaukee, WI.

⁸⁴ Charles Goff, “The Politics of Governmental Integration in Metropolitan Milwaukee,” 89; *Milwaukee Board of Public Land Commissioners Annual Review, 1932*, MPL.

cost and propel government consolidation further along, the city and county agreed to merge their two committees into the Joint Committee on Consolidation in Milwaukee County (JCCMC). The joint committee undertook a series of investigations into the feasibility of merging city and county governmental functions with an eye toward complete political unification.

The idea of consolidation was by no means a new one. In 1870, a bill introduced in the Wisconsin state legislature would have merged the city and county of Milwaukee into a single government, but was voted down.⁸⁵ State legislators renewed their interest in consolidation after World War One. In 1925, they formed an interim committee to study the viability of consolidation. While agreeing that some form of consolidation was desirable, the committee nonetheless conceded that political will was lacking and advised against complete city-county consolidation.⁸⁶ Werba's 1929 report on the progress of annexation also reluctantly concluded that suburban governments were far too hostile, even though he also confidently predicted the inevitability of metropolitan unification.

The fiscal urgencies of the Depression, however, began to change that perception. In February, 1934, the JCCMC presented its findings to the county and city governments in a report titled "Milwaukee County: One Trade Area, Burdened with 93 Local Governments." The report observed what many different groups had believed for a long time, that the present organization of government in the region was illogical and in need of reform. The city directory included suburban addresses. Private charities operated on a regional basis. Patrons from across the region visited city museums and other cultural

⁸⁵ Schmandt and Standing, *The Milwaukee Metropolitan Study Commission*, 39.

⁸⁶ "Report of the Interim Committee on City-County Consolidation in Milwaukee County," Folder 1, Box 9, City Club of Milwaukee. Records, 1909-1975. Milwaukee Manuscript Collection AS and Milwaukee Micro Collection 69. WHS, MARC.

attractions. Milwaukee department stores like Schuster's and Gimbel's delivered goods to residents across the county. Over 1,300 suburban children attended city schools. Labor unions organized across political boundaries. The Milwaukee Fire Department serviced several outlying towns and villages. It followed, the JCCMC observed, that political units should operate on this same regional basis. The city's effort to unify the metropolis through annexation had been limited through "obstruction" of suburban officials. With the Depression threatening the economic health of the region, now was the time to "wipe out the political boundaries of governments within Milwaukee County."⁸⁷ Upon receipt of the JCCMC's findings, both the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors and the Milwaukee Common Council agreed to hold an advisory referendum on Election Day to ascertain the interests of county residents in political unification.

For the next nine months, a well-organized coalition of local groups pushed hard for residents to vote for unification. In the summer of 1934, an eclectic variety of organizations formed the Citizens' Association on Consolidation in Milwaukee County (CACMC). The CACMC encompassed twenty-three civic groups, including the City Club, the Milwaukee Real Estate Board, the Association of Commerce, the Milwaukee County League of Women Voters, the Wisconsin Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, the Lawyers Club, and a variety of neighborhood business organizations.⁸⁸ The city's newspapers also supported the JCCMC in a series of editorials urging citizens of the region to consider the city-county merger as a logical step in enhancing fiscal viability. "Milwaukee county's people ought not wait until their various and needless

⁸⁷ "Metropolitan Milwaukee: One Trade Area Burdened with 93 Local Governments," from the Joint Committee on City-County Consolidation in Milwaukee County, MPL.

⁸⁸ Meeting of Citizens' Association on Consolidation in Milwaukee County, August 9, 1934, Folder 3, Box 9, City Club of Milwaukee. Records, 1909-1975. Milwaukee Manuscript Collection AS and Milwaukee Micro Collection 69. WHS, MARC.

local units of government break down,” the *Milwaukee Journal* warned in 1934; “they ought to use common sense, cut costs by consolidation before the collapse comes, and save themselves a lot of money.”⁸⁹ The Milwaukee Real Estate Board had for a long time supported consolidation, characterizing the region’s present setup as “a barrier to the maximum development” of the county.⁹⁰ The Socialist Party of Milwaukee County, observing that complete consolidation “has been repeatedly urged as a part of our local platforms,” also strongly favored political unification.⁹¹

On November 6, 1934, 104,708 Milwaukee County residents voted in favor of consolidation with only 40,319 opposed.⁹² Local newspapers trumpeted the results as a complete victory for consolidation forces, but the total returns were illusionary. Of the seventeen towns, villages, and cities in the county, in only three—Milwaukee and the working class suburbs of West Allis and Cudahy—had a majority of residents voted in favor of consolidation. Of the 109,770 votes counted in the city of Milwaukee, 90,022 favored consolidation and only 19,748 opposed. The vast majority of residents in the outlying suburbs and rural towns had voted to oppose consolidation (see **figure 2-4**). West Allis officials, embarrassed by their residents’ apparent enthusiasm for consolidation, resubmitted the referendum to their residents, changing the question to read: “Do you believe that the City of West Allis should by consolidation (annexation)

⁸⁹ *Milwaukee Journal*, December 19, 1931, Folder 1, Box 9, City Club of Milwaukee. Records, 1909-1975. Milwaukee Manuscript Collection AS and Milwaukee Micro Collection 69. WHS, MARC.

⁹⁰ Statement of Milwaukee Real Estate Board, October 30, 1934, Folder 3, Box 9, City Club of Milwaukee. Records, 1909-1975. Milwaukee Manuscript Collection AS and Milwaukee Micro Collection 69. WHS, MARC.

⁹¹ Statement of Socialist Party, Milwaukee County, adopted by the County Central Committee of the Socialist Party, December 26, 1934, File 28, Box 1, Hoan Papers, MCHS.

⁹² Referendum Results, City of Milwaukee, November 6, 1934, Folder 3, Box 9, City Club of Milwaukee. Records, 1909-1975. Milwaukee Manuscript Collection AS and Milwaukee Micro Collection 69. WHS, MARC.

join the city of Milwaukee and thus become a ward or part of a ward of the City of Milwaukee?” With consolidation now presented as another arm of the larger city’s annexation efforts, West Allis residents overwhelmingly voted against the second referendum.

Figure 2-4: 1934 Consolidation Referendum Results by Municipality, Milwaukee County*

Question: “Do you favor affecting, by such county board or legislative action or amendment to the state constitution as may be necessary, consolidation of municipal services and governments in Milwaukee County?”

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Total</u>
City of Milwaukee	90,022	19,748	109,770
City of Wauwatosa	2,769	3,947	6,716
City of West Allis	4,211	2,500	6,711
Village of Shorewood	1,146	3,185	4,331
City of South Milwaukee	727	2,306	3,033
Village of Whitefish Bay	1,108	1,273	2,381
Town of Lake	750	1,482	2,232
Village of Cudahy	1,041	989	2,030
Town of Greenfield	710	816	1,526
Town of Wauwatosa	680	729	1,413
Village of West Milwaukee	652	691	1,343
Town of Granville	506	825	1,331
Town of Milwaukee	149	513	662
Town of Franklin	83	461	579
Town of Oak Creek	83	461	544
Village of Fox Point	42	224	266
Village of River Hills	29	134	163

Referendum Results, City of Milwaukee, November 6, 1934, Folder 3, Box 9, City Club of Milwaukee. Records, 1909-1975. Milwaukee Manuscript Collection AS and Milwaukee Micro Collection 69. WHS, MARC.

The state legislature retained the legal right to consolidate Milwaukee County. However, the voting results had revealed that complete city-county consolidation was far too politically divisive to risk, and the state legislature never brought the matter to vote. Instead, the city and county achieved some functional consolidation. In 1936, Milwaukee city and county governments agreed to merge their parks commissions, bringing uniformity to Whitnall's parkways.⁹³ Ironically, construction on the parkways accelerated during the Depression, greatly helped by an infusion of New Deal money that allowed thousands of Works Progress Administration workers to continue its development.⁹⁴ In contrast, political unification, equally important to many of Milwaukee's reformers, waned in the wake of the consolidation referendum.

At the very time when the region's political unity eclipsed, the city faced yet another housing crisis. As agonizing as the Depression had been to virtually all the economic sectors in America, perhaps nowhere was the pain felt so strongly as in real estate. The construction industry, which had boomed like no other in the 1920's, collapsed after the market shocks of 1929. As the Depression deepened and real estate values kept plummeting, housing construction in Milwaukee ground to a near complete halt. By 1933, total construction output across the city plummeted to 57 units; this number remained stagnant throughout the 1930's. From 1929 to 1938, the total number of housing units constructed in the city failed to surpass the number of homes built in the single year before the stock market collapse (1928).⁹⁵ Because the city's population rate

⁹³ Henry J. Schmandt and William H. Standing, *The Milwaukee Metropolitan Study Commission*, pp 57-58.

⁹⁴ John Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee*, pp. 283-288.

⁹⁵ Report on Housing to the Milwaukee Common Council, by Leon Gurda, Milwaukee Building Inspector, May 9, 1938, File 72, Box 2, Hoan Papers, MCHS.

slowed but still grew, families again resorted to the expediency of doubling up. By 1936, housing inspector Leon Gurda estimated that the city's housing shortage had reached over 5,700 units.⁹⁶

Gurda and other city leaders were painfully aware of the city's newest housing crisis for another reason. Upon taking over the building inspector's office in 1928, Gurda dramatically stepped up the city's efforts to remove all dilapidated residential structures from Milwaukee's built landscape. In the early 1920's, the city had made plans to widen Kilbourn Avenue in the downtown area and clear buildings along it to construct a new civic center. Kilbourn Avenue was at the time the heart of an impoverished neighborhood consisting of Eastern Europeans and African Americans, all of whom would be displaced by the civic center. Land acquisition for the center had moved at a snail's pace during most of the 1920's; city administrators were reluctant to pay inflated prices for the site. Gurda's demolition program at the time commanded scant attention when it commenced in 1928, at the height of the real estate boom. But city officials had accelerated it with the bust of the early 1930's, with ironic success. Gurda utilized the state of Wisconsin's liberal condemnation law to impel property owners to raze hundreds of buildings. Under these laws any structure that deteriorated to the point where renovations surpassed half of the property's assessed could be officially condemned. Property owners were thus forced by law to raze the building themselves. If they resisted, the building inspector's office forcibly demolished the condemned structure. Gurda's knowledge of the building code was so deep that as of 1932, the city had not rescinded a single condemnation and had only lost one case in the courts. Thus from

⁹⁶ *Milwaukee Journal*, February 2, 1936, Housing Clipping File, Legislative Reference Bureau, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

1928 through 1934, a staggering total of 2,570 buildings in Milwaukee were condemned and razed by either the city or coerced property owners.⁹⁷

City officials were extremely proud of Gurda's efforts. On the one hand, the demolition of structures along Kilbourn Avenue had speeded up, making way for the new boulevard and progress toward the new civic center. More broadly, this demolition was connected to urban expansion; as annexation progressed and vacant land opened up, residents of the crowded inner core could find "elbow room" on the urban fringe. These theories and policies—particularly Gurda's demolition plan—garnered national attention. In a 1930 issue of *American City*, Hoan pointed to Milwaukee's sixteen square miles of annexed land as a safety valve for city residents who sought to move from the "crowded tenements" of the urban core. Gurda's demolition program was also remaking the inner city. In sum, Hoan proclaimed, "by financing a cooperative housing project, by developing newly annexed districts, and by systematically razing old and unsanitary buildings, Milwaukee is in large measure coping with the housing problem."⁹⁸ In the June 1931 edition of *Housing*, a periodical dedicated to tenement reform, Lawrence Veiller, the renowned housing reformer, issued a national call for cities to engage in progressive slum clearance activities. Charles Bennett, Milwaukee chief planning engineer, wrote Veiller calling attention to Gurda, "a crusader if there ever was one," noting that largely through his efforts the city had razed hundreds of dilapidated structures.⁹⁹ Veiller was impressed, but insisted that Milwaukee's program did not

⁹⁷ Report on Housing to the Milwaukee Common Council, by Leon Gurda, Milwaukee Building Inspector, May 9, 1938, File 72, Box 2, Hoan Papers, MCHS.

⁹⁸ Daniel Hoan, "How Milwaukee is Solving the Housing Problem," *American City*, July 1934; *Milwaukee Leader*, July 12, 1930, Housing Clipping File, Legislative Reference Bureau, Milwaukee Wisconsin.

⁹⁹ Letter from Charles Bennett to Lawrence Veiller, October 20, 1931, File 458, Box 19, Hoan Papers, MCHS.

constitute “slum clearance.”¹⁰⁰ An adamant Gurda responded that while Milwaukee lacked multi-story tenements, it had no shortage of slum-like blocks, and it was his duty to remove all unfit structures from the city’s landscape. While neither party could agree on a working definition of slum clearance, Veiller praised Gurda’s efforts as another example of how the “best governed city in the United States” sought housing reform.¹⁰¹

As the Depression deepened, Milwaukee’s demolition program gained further national attention. In March, 1934, President Franklin Roosevelt’s administration, increasingly concerned with housing reform, held a conference of federal and city officials and national labor leaders to address demolition efforts. The Work Division of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), a New Deal agency that sought to create national standards for demolition, sponsored the Conference of the Demolition of Worthless Buildings. Federal officials hoped demolition efforts would compliment the Public Works Administration’s (PWA) national plan to build public housing in cities across America. Jacob Baker, an Assistant Administrator of FERA, opened the conference by stating that its goal was to create a specific plan for demolition work that could create temporary work for thousands who were unemployed.¹⁰² Because Milwaukee had already undertaken aggressive demolition, Gurda’s efforts were a highlighted at the conference and he was selected to chair a FERA committee on surveys planning and preliminary work. From the efforts of the conference, the National Association of Housing Officials (NAHO) published “Demolition of Unsafe and

¹⁰⁰ Letter form Lawrence Veiller to Charles Bennett, October 23, 1931, File 458, Box 19, Hoan Papers, MCHS.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

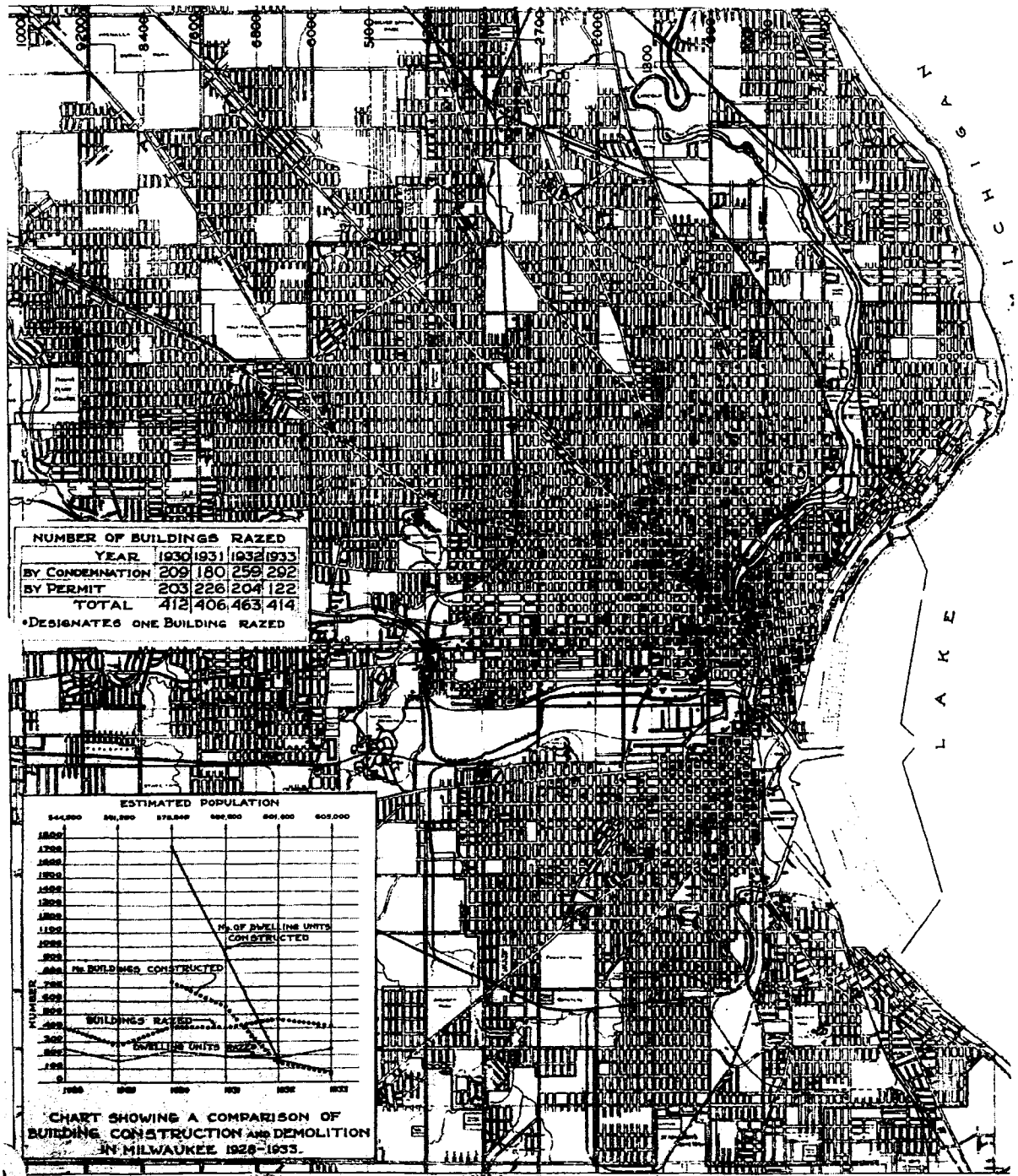
¹⁰² “Conference on the Demolition of Worthless Buildings-Held In Washington DC, March 23-24, 1934,” Report by Leon Gurda, Folder 2, Box 1, Series 25, City of Milwaukee Department of Building Inspection Records, MPL.

Insanitary (*sic*) Housing: An Outline of Procedure for a Comprehensive Program.” The manual’s chief purpose was to “inform city officials, civic organizations, and interested citizens briefly and quickly of what is being done to advance this program.”

Milwaukee’s demolition efforts received a lion’s share of the report’s attention; the conference had made Gurda a nationally known crusader in the demolition of unsafe buildings.¹⁰³

While the Depression may have renewed Milwaukee’s long-standing reputation for efficient city government, the city’s demolition efforts were ill timed at best and at worst perpetuated and even exacerbated the housing crisis. A map of Milwaukee on the second page of the NAHO demolition manual revealed the vast majority of razed buildings to be the wards surrounding downtown. The city’s zoning ordinance had already rezoned much of the inner city for commercial and light industrial use, making it clear that Milwaukee’s planners preferred demolition to rehabilitation. Consequently, of the more than 1,600 structures demolished between 1928 and 1932, only 151 were repaired in lieu of condemnation.

¹⁰³ “Demolition of Unsafe and Insanitary Housing: An Outline for a Comprehensive Procedure,” National Association of Housing Officials, Folder 2, Box 1, Series 25, City of Milwaukee Department of Building Inspection Records, MPL.



**DEPARTMENT OF BUILDING INSPECTION
MILWAUKEE, WIS.**

BUILDINGS RAZED BY CONDEMNATION AND BY PERMIT DURING 1930 - 1933.

Location of Demolished Homes in Milwaukee, 1930-1933
Folder 2, Box 1, Series 25, City of Milwaukee Department of Building Inspection Records, MPL.

With the supply of new housing constricted by the Depression, demolition unintentionally acted as an inflationary device on the price of shelter. As unsafe as the dilapidated structures were, they usually offered cheap rents. One of the first questions residents often asked the building inspector upon demolition was where else they could find shelter for under \$10 per month. “We can’t tell them,” admitted Gurda in 1937.¹⁰⁴ Most affected were Milwaukee’s African Americans, the vast majority of who lived in the Sixth Ward, where a large share of demolitions took place. Gurda remained hopeful that public housing and enlightened racial attitudes would open up decent housing blacks, but both solutions were well beyond his grasp. “The Negro housing problem is urgent,” Gurda warned in a 1936 report on housing, “We cannot any longer permit the shunting of families from one dilapidated shack to another, only to move out again because of the numerous condemnations of buildings in the section of the city they occupy.”¹⁰⁵ Local African American leaders also began to resist demolition. In 1938, NAACP representatives William Kelly and James Dorsey testified to the Common Council that demolition was exacerbating an already problematic housing shortage in the Sixth Ward.¹⁰⁶ Literally uprooted, Milwaukee’s poorest residents again began to double up in nearby duplexes or rooming houses, further straining the inner city housing supply. Just fifteen years after the end of World War One, Milwaukee encountered yet another housing crisis.

¹⁰⁴ *Milwaukee Sentinel*, October 4, 1937, Housing Clipping File, Legislative Reference Bureau, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

¹⁰⁵ “Statistical Report on Housing,” Folder 2, Box 1, Series 25, City of Milwaukee Department of Building Inspection Records, MPL.

¹⁰⁶ Schmitz, Kenneth Robert, “Milwaukee and its Black Community: 1930-1942,” Master’s Thesis, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 1979, p. 13, MPL.

In reality, decent housing was in short supply had remained throughout the 1920's; the Depression thus only politically resurfaced this problem. Despite the efforts of city officials like Hoan and Whitnall, very little had been done to alleviate the housing problem. Public housing had been virtually non-existent in America prior to World War I. Even after the war, projects like the Garden Homes were rare. It appeared beyond the capacity (and the will) of city government to provide low-cost housing on a large scale; even the most liberal city leaders in Milwaukee understood that. Instead, projects like the Garden Homes were intended to be an example for builders and consumers that given the proper attention and financial investment, alternative communities could thrive in the private market. However, real estate interests in the city were utterly unresponsive to cooperative housing. Equally problematic, city planners strongly believed in cooperative housing, but their anti-urban bias also provoked them to sign off on anything that reduced congestion and spurred decentralization. Local real estate officials had responded far more enthusiastically to this type of thinking, working closely with the BPLC on platting standards and the parkways. Rather than *adopt* the zoning ordinance for the spirit it was intended—to condition the market to develop better communities for the expanding city—the private market had *adapted* to the zoning ordinance to fit its own needs. The result was a housing market chronically short on low-cost housing. In a twelve-year period after World War I, Gurda observed that only 15% of the newly-built housing was in a rent bracket for “low-wage” earners, a group that by the Depression made up 66% of the population.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ *Milwaukee Journal*, February 2, 1936, Housing Clipping File, Legislative Reference Bureau, Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Schmitz “Milwaukee and its Black Community: 1930-1942,” p. 13.

No one was more aware of demolition's affect on the inner city than Gurda, the man most responsible. Gurda realized that without a concerted effort to provide low income housing, the city's demolition program threatened to make the housing crunch far worse for Milwaukee's low-income residents, who often simply could not afford the spacious new single-family bungalows that had sprouted up in row after row on the urban fringe. Already by 1935, city officials estimated that over 23,000 city residents were without decent housing. The Depression had constricted new building so much that razing had *exceeded* construction within the city from 1932 through 1934.¹⁰⁸

Mayor Hoan responded to the housing crisis of the early 1930's the same way he had fifteen years earlier: by appointing a housing commission. In 1933, he chose fifteen civic leaders to conduct a survey of housing conditions in the city and recommend solutions. Like Hoan's previous commission, the group consisted mainly of individuals who were at least sympathetic to municipal socialism. Gurda sat on the commission, as did Charles Bennett of the BPLC, who had assumed many of Charles Whitnall's duties (though the 74-year old Whitnall still retained his seat on the BPLC) and had become a respected city planner.¹⁰⁹ The housing commission quickly concluded that Milwaukee confronted a "serious housing shortage." It recommended that the city take advantage of federally sponsored public housing the Roosevelt administration had promised through the PWA.¹¹⁰ The commission chose the long-beleaguered Sixth Ward, where a high number of demolitions had taken place, as the initial site for the housing project, to be

¹⁰⁸ "Statistical Report on Housing," Folder 2, Box 1, Series 25, City of Milwaukee Department of Building Inspection Records, MPL; *Milwaukee Leader*, October 11, 1937, Housing Clipping File, Legislative Reference Bureau, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

¹⁰⁹ "Mayor's Housing Commission" Folder 1, Box 1, Series 25, City of Milwaukee Department of Building Inspection Records, MPL.

¹¹⁰ Report of Committee Numbers 1-3 of the Mayors Housing Commission, Folder 1, Box 1, Series 25, City of Milwaukee Department of Building Inspection Records, MPL; *Milwaukee Sentinel*, September 5, 1933, Housing Clipping File, Legislative Reference Bureau, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

dubbed Parklawn. Resistance from a variety of Nonpartisan aldermen and real estate groups over both the cost and location forced the project out of the racially mixed Sixth Ward and onto vacant land on Milwaukee's Northwest Side, five miles from downtown. When Parklawn opened in 1937, officials received over 5,000 applications for the project's 518 units.¹¹¹ City officials also decided to admit black families only at rates that reflected Milwaukee's racial demographics as a whole. Since African Americans remained a tiny minority, constituting 1.3% of Milwaukee's population, only six African American families received the opportunity to live in the controversial new development.¹¹² Like the Garden Homes, Parklawn was only a temporary solution to the housing problem, funded and operated out of the PWA as an emergency work relief project. Historian Gail Radford has noted that the PWA's planners frowned on public housing sites for the inner core of cities because they, too, envisioned cluster developments on the urban fringe as preferable to replacing the older low-income slums with new low-income housing that would keep poor residents locked up in the inner city.¹¹³ Well-intended though this goal may have been, it also meant that the small but growing population of African Americans in Milwaukee were not helped by the city's first low-income housing project and yet were the among the most hurt by the city's demolition program.

City officials remained aware that Parklawn would not dent the city's still massive housing shortage. A year after the project opened, the building inspector's

¹¹¹ "Parklawn: Modern Low Rent Homes for Residents of Milwaukee, Wisconsin," Folder 1, Box 1, Parklawn Collection, MCHS.

¹¹² Eric Fure-Slocum, *Challenge of the Working-Class City: Recasting Growth Politics and Liberalism, 1937-1952*, Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Iowa, 2001; see also *Milwaukee Journal*, September 21, 1937, Housing Clipping File, Legislative Reference Bureau, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

¹¹³ Gail Radford, *Modern Housing for America: Policy Struggles in the New Deal Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.)

department released the city's most comprehensive survey of its demolition program to date. Authored by Gurda, this report laid out in stark detail the damage wrought by the Depression. From 1910 through 1929, builders constructed an average of 2,664 housing units per year. That rate collapsed to 647 per year from 1930 through 1937, which included the Parklawn's 518 units. Demolition had displaced 1,377 families during the 1930's, dwarfing Parklawn's ability to absorb the city's ill-housed.¹¹⁴ Worse, the private market was in no condition to address the lack of decent housing. Milwaukee County's tax delinquency rate had skyrocketed as well; 23,517 properties had foreclosed from 1930 to 1937, a higher rate than many metropolitan regions in the United States (see **figure 2-5**). Gurda remained unwavering in his faith that demolition still exerted "a positive influence on the problem of housing," but he also recognized that it had exacerbated overcrowding in the city's poorest neighborhoods. Landlords gained from the housing crunch, further subdividing existing buildings. A total of 1,761 "new" units had been carved out of existing structures.¹¹⁵ Since the zoning ordinance stipulations drastically limited the amount of families per unit, new violators had multiplied. The city could easily have found these people out, but as Gurda put it "I do not believe in spying" during such dark economic times.

¹¹⁴ Report on Housing to the Milwaukee Common Council, by Leon Gurda, Milwaukee Building Inspector, May 9, 1938, File 72, Box 2, Hoan Papers, MCHS.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

Figure 2-5: Foreclosure Rates, Selected Counties in United States, 1932-1937

	<u>Foreclosures</u>	<u>Population</u>	<u>Foreclosures per 1,000 Persons</u>
Milwaukee County, WI.	23,517	725,263	32.4
Shelby County (Memphis), TN.	9,033	306,482	29.5
Wayne County (Detroit), MI.	53,504	1,888,946	28.3
Los Angeles County, CA.	53,761	2,208,492	24.3
Dade County (Miami), FL.	3,121	142,955	21.8
Hennepin County (Minneapolis), MN.	10,504	517,785	20.3
Cuyahoga County (Cleveland), OH.	20,396	1,201,455	17.0
Cook County (Chicago), IL.	66,689	3,982,123	16.7
Jefferson County (Louisville), KY.	5,873	355,350	16.5
Erie County (Buffalo), NY.	11,619	762,408	15.2
Polk County (Des Moines), IA.	2,557	172,837	14.8
King County (Seattle), WA.	6,760	463,394	14.6
Allegheny County (Pittsburgh), PA.	15,710	1,374,410	11.4
Orleans Parish (New Orleans), LA.	4,787	458,762	10.4
Marion County (Indianapolis), IN.	3,564	422,666	8.4
Providence County, RI.	2,911	540,016	5.4

“Report on Housing to the Milwaukee Common Council,” by Leon Gurda, Milwaukee Building Inspector, May 9, 1938, File 72, Box 2, Hoan Papers, MCHS.

Gurda displayed remarkable alacrity in his role as chief enforcer of Milwaukee’s building code, but he also understood that without a large-scale program of affordable housing, initiated by either public or private means, conditions in many city neighborhoods would not improve. Like many other city officials during Hoan’s tenure, Gurda envisioned the building inspector’s role as part of larger city planning efforts from both public and private sectors. In his massive report to the Common Council on housing conditions in the city, Gurda observed; “We in Milwaukee have attempted to solve this problem of slum clearance by demolishing worthless buildings on a larger scale than any other city, and believe that slum reconstruction can wait until owners of properties in

these areas realize that they must cooperate with the government in this matter.”¹¹⁶

Private real estate interests, however, displayed scant interest in following suit. The Milwaukee Real Estate Board firmly opposed public housing, and helped by Nonpartisan aldermen in the Common Council prevented the city from forming a Housing Authority that federal guidelines now stipulated was necessary to gain further public housing funds.¹¹⁷

An increasingly embattled Daniel Hoan watched as the last remaining socialist aldermen were slowly voted out of office in the 1930's, limiting his ability to enact new policies. In 1940, Hoan encountered the most serious mayoral challenge of his career. Carl Zeidler, a handsome, outgoing young politician, ran against Hoan on a platform of little substance. Zeidler's political experience consisted of a stint as assistant city attorney under Hoan, but he won popularity as Milwaukee's "No. 1 Extrovert." The handsome Zeidler, famous more for his singing voice than his policies, made vague promises to achieve a "clean sweep" of city government, but offered no concrete policy initiatives.¹¹⁸ Nevertheless, the ebullient Zeidler cast a stark contrast to an aging Daniel Hoan. Milwaukee voters took note, delivering Zeidler a stunning victory in 1940. Twenty-four years of socialist governance had ended.

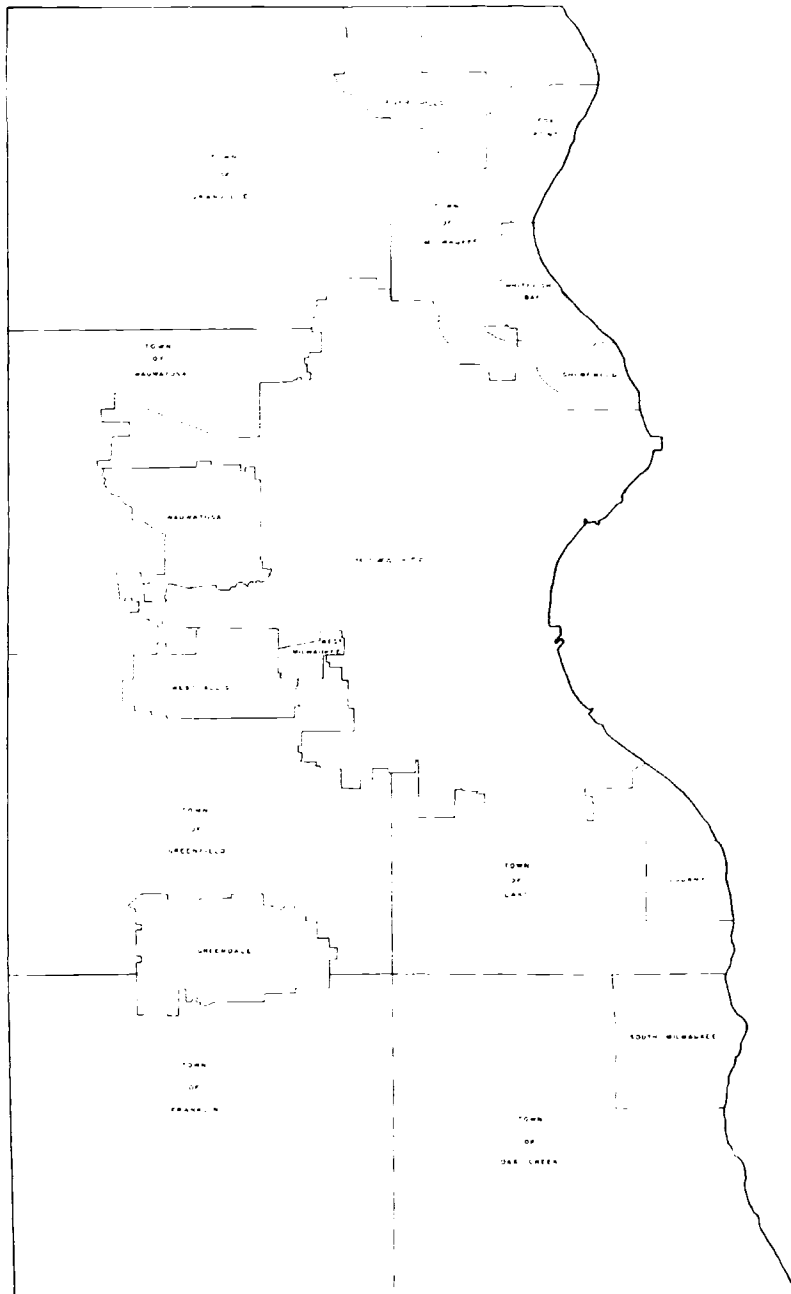
Hoan left office with an impressive record of municipal governance. City planning had firmly embedded itself in the bureaucratic fabric. Charles Whitnall had become the city's most vocal opponent of urban congestion and proponent of planned decentralization to alleviate overcrowding. His system of parkways gained near universal

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Eric Fure-Slocum, *Challenge of the Working-Class City: Recasting Growth Politics and Liberalism, 1937-1952*, Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Iowa, 2001.

¹¹⁸ John Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee*, pp. 303-305.

popularity and, due in large part to his efforts, the BPLC impelled local realtors to work with the city in its physical expansion. Under Hoan's aegis, city reformers attacked the housing shortage with creativity, building the first municipally funded cooperative housing project in any large American city. Committed public servants like Arthur Werba and Leon Gurda carried out city policies with great energy, earning respect for "sewer socialism" across the country.



Milwaukee County Municipalities, 1940
Metropolitan Area Fact Book, 1940, 1950, 1960, MPL.

Nevertheless, most of the policies of the Hoan administration were long-term in design and controversial when implemented across a metropolitan terrain. Annexation, so important to the city's future growth, became a hotly contested exercise in the politics of urban expansion. A city-suburban rift emerged with no resolution in sight; even as the Depression thwarted annexation, the attempted city-county consolidation divided the region on municipal boundary lines. More ominously, the web of independent towns, villages, and cities that surrounded Milwaukee had found common ground in confronting annexation. A "suburban" consciousness, exemplified by new organizations like the League of Suburban Municipalities, would only grow stronger in the following decades. As Milwaukee emerged from World War II, the region's political boundaries would change at ever-quicker rates and intersect more closely with uneven development that distanced the city and its multiplying suburbs along sociopolitical lines. Other elements of city reform designed to function cohesively further fragmented as well. The city's much-publicized slum clearance efforts removed thousands of dilapidated buildings from the inner city. Virtually nothing replaced them. Even as the city's population grew through physical expansion, the supply of decent housing stagnated to an alarming rate. Urban growth and decline were not linear phenomena; a new generation of policymakers and private actors inherited and reassessed their forms across a metropolitan landscape whose future remained very much in doubt.

Chapter 3: Planning a Mightier Milwaukee in the 1940's

In February 1940, the *Milwaukee Journal* ran an article reviewing the region's annexation battles of the previous two decades. The *Journal* took dramatic license in its characterization of the conflict:

"The ins and outs of the Milwaukee boundary line are like the maze of trenches in a war zone. In one spot the city won a victory and sent out a big 'salient' into 'enemy' territory. At another point the growing city bumped into a Maginot Line or Siegfried Wall. The growth of the city has literally been a 'war.' Instead of guns and bullets, the war in democratic America has been fought with petitions, lawsuits, injunctions, public meetings, referenda, and a whole bag of tricks by smart lawyers."¹

Interestingly, the city of Milwaukee had disbanded its Department of Annexation eight years before in 1932, meaning there had not been any real "battles" over growth between city and suburb in quite some time. Nevertheless, the *Journal* article reflected a sentiment that the matter had not been resolved. "When the time comes Milwaukee will be ready to expand again," it promised. Indeed, the Depression and World War II, while obviously important events in the city's history, merely served to delay the region's own local "war" over political control of its growth.

It has become common among American historians to portray the post-1945 era as a unique time period—separate and distinctive from the past—that brought sweeping changes to the United States. This periodization extends to urban history, where the postwar era has been described as one ushering in increased federal attention to the plight of American cities, insufficient public housing policy, racial strife, suburbanization, and ill-conceived urban renewal in rapid succession. Without question, these forces

¹ *Milwaukee Journal*, February 4, 1940

dramatically changed America's built landscape and altered millions of people's lives in metropolitan places. None, however, were unique to the post-1945 period.

Events in Milwaukee in the late 1940's further demonstrate that urban history after World War Two does not break nearly so cleanly with the past. Nearly every major issue faced by the city after 1945 had been discussed, debated, and even voted on in the 1920's and 1930's. Public housing had first taken shape with the Hoan administration's support of the Garden Homes cooperative and re-emerged on Milwaukee's political agenda during the Depression. Race had not been considered a central political issue by most city officials, yet many decisions city planners and policymakers made about central city land use—especially Milwaukee's demolition program—had racial consequences. Incorporated villages and cities surrounding the central city had rapidly grown in size during the 1920's, alarming city leaders and complicating their aggressive annexation program. The city had even undergone a form of "urban renewal," although this specific term was not used, by attempting to rezone the inner city for commercial and light industrial use. Thousands of blighted structures—mostly homes—had been eliminated from Milwaukee's built environment. City policymakers and building inspector Leon Gurda viewed demolition as a much-needed type of "slum clearance," albeit one that needed to be augmented by quality low-income housing.

Public policy theory bridged the world wars. The motivations that had inspired practitioners of municipal socialism survived Daniel Hoan's political demise in 1940. Whitnall's belief in planned decentralization had embedded itself in the metropolitan fabric with the development of Milwaukee County's parkway system. With Whitnall's support, a unique form of city planning that paid homage to a variety of innovative land

use principles had emerged in Milwaukee. These policies were continued by other actors, both within and outside of Milwaukee's planning community. Charles Bennett, who served as a planning engineer of the Board of Public Land Commissioners (BPLC) during the interwar period, often proposed that Milwaukee build a "model village," even larger than the Garden Homes.² Bennett publicly introduced this proposal in 1933, hoping to get the attention (and funds) of President Franklin Roosevelt's new administration, which also advocated—at least in rhetoric—planned decentralization. While Bennett's model village was never built, the federal government did not overlook Milwaukee. When the U.S. Resettlement Administration began its program of planned suburban "Greenbelt" communities, federal officials chose Milwaukee as one of only three regions in America to build a Greenbelt town. Design consultation came from Clarence Stein, an early admirer of Milwaukee's Garden Homes and founding member of the Regional Planning Association of America (RPAA). Like Whitnall, Stein sought to execute planned decentralization on the urban periphery. His suburban community, dubbed Greendale, was built ten miles southwest of the city. Upon its completion in 1938, Greendale contained 572 housing units, all of which were owned by the federal government and rented to middle and working class families of Milwaukee County.³ The homes in Greendale clustered on curvilinear streets around a town center and were separated from nearby communities by vast greenbelts. While Greendale was situated well outside of Milwaukee's city limits and barely put a dent in the region's affordable housing stock, it proved a success in other ways. A young socialist named Frank Zeidler

² *Milwaukee Journal*, February 4, 1933

³ Arnold Allanin and Joseph Eden, *Main Street Ready Made: The New Deal Community of Greendale* (Madison, WI: The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1987).

who worked as a surveyor on Greendale greatly admired the project and would later attempt to replicate it as mayor of Milwaukee.⁴

Charles Whitnall remained on Milwaukee's Board of Public Land Commissioners (BPLC) through 1945 and stayed on the Milwaukee County Parks Commission until his death in 1948. He continued to rail against the grid system of streets through the 1940's. Whitnall frequently expressed his desire to see expressways connect downtown to his beloved parkways, telling a local newspaper in 1940 that Milwaukee's workingmen could never thrive in the "debilitating" and congested environment of the inner city. He continued to call for cooperative housing projects although his rants increasingly fell on deaf ears during World War Two.⁵ Whitnall never stopped envisioning Milwaukee as a city whose residents would be diffused further into the countryside. These dreams for a decentralized metropolis had always been to Whitnall incompatible with the congested landscape of large cities on the East Coast. Instead, the rapidly growing city of Los Angeles served as a more applicable paradigm for Milwaukee. Familial connections cemented the relationship between Milwaukee and Los Angeles. Gordon Whitnall, Charles's son, had moved to Los Angeles years earlier and had by 1920 become Los Angeles's chief city planner. Father and son were kindred spirits in their advocacy of planned decentralization on a regional basis. The Whitnalls also embraced the automobile as key to their regions' metropolitan futures.⁶ Gordon Whitnall was one of the chief architects of the Arroyo Seco Freeway which connected Los Angeles to the city of Pasadena, one of the nation's first limited access freeways. Charles made several trips

⁴ Frank Zeidler, Interview with author, September 10, 2002

⁵ Milwaukee County Park Commission, Minutes, October 10, 1944, Box 1, File 36, Jerome Dretzka Papers, MCHS.

⁶ Charles Whitnall, *Milwaukee's Automobile Problems*, 1938, MPL—Gordon Whitnall wrote a section on divided highways in this report.

west to visit Gordon, even lecturing on city planning for a week at the University of Southern California in 1934.⁷ He often returned to the Midwest calling for Milwaukee to copy Los Angeles in embracing horizontal expansion.

The Whitnalls' relationship did not make Milwaukee another Los Angeles, but it did precede a veritable exodus of many of Milwaukee's chief city planners from the 1920's to the booming western city. Charles Bennett had assumed chief planning responsibilities in Milwaukee in 1926 (though Charles Whitnall remained quite influential on the BPLC) and served as the city's planning engineer for the next fourteen years. In 1941, Bennett moved to Los Angeles to become chief city planner there.⁸ To Bennett, the two cities were united by ideas, but separated by results. The innate caution of Milwaukeeans had worn on him. At his farewell dinner, Bennett expressed his frustration with the slow pace of change in Milwaukee, hoping that "someday Milwaukee would come out of its shell and do things."⁹ William Schuchardt, another early member of Milwaukee's BPLC, joined Bennett in Los Angeles in the 1940s. After attending a conference on city planning in Los Angeles in 1950, BPLC member Elmer Krieger reported to city officials that his visit to the West Coast was made more enjoyable since he could visit with six former Milwaukee BPLC planning officials who now worked in Los Angeles.¹⁰

⁷ "Five Lectures on City Planning: Given by C.B. Whitnall at the Ninth Annual Session of the Institute of Government, University of Southern California, June 14-18, 1937" 1927-1928 Folder, Charles Whitnall Papers, MCHS.

⁸ Gregg Wassmansdorf, "Public-Private Dialectics in the Planning and Development of Los Angeles, 1781-1993," M.A. Thesis, University of Southern California, 1994.

⁹ *Milwaukee Journal*, August 15, 1941.

¹⁰ Memo from Elmer Krieger to the Members and Employees of the Board of Public Land Commissioners regarding the National Planning Conference in Los Angeles, August 13-17, 1950, Folder 5, Box 190, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

While an older generation of Milwaukee's city planners may have moved west, other local officials, who had key roles in city planning after World War II, remained under Charles Whitnall's influence. Elmer Krieger's service on the BPLC began in the 1930s; he emerged as Milwaukee's chief city planner after World War II through the 1950s. A great admirer of Charles Whitnall, Krieger sought to continue Whitnall's plans for Milwaukee into the postwar era. In his memoirs, Mayor Zeidler observed that many city planners during his administration were "imbued" with Whitnall's planning principles.¹¹

While Milwaukee's community of city planners remained somewhat ideologically consistent through the 1940's, no public consensus existed as to the question of housing, which remained one of the city's most pressing concerns throughout the decade. The Depression had dramatically undercut the ability of Milwaukee builders' to construct new housing and only one public housing project, Parklawn, had picked up the slack within the confines of the city. Hoan had continually failed to establish a municipal housing authority whose charge would have been the redevelopment of blighted inner city neighborhoods and the construction of new housing projects. In 1938, an administrator of the United States Housing Authority questioned why Milwaukee was the only large city east of the Mississippi River without a housing authority.¹² Despite the national attention, common council members—wary of public housing—steadfastly opposed creating a housing authority during Hoan's last years in office, making the issue one of Hoan's biggest political defeats. Nonetheless, Mayor Hoan's departure from city hall in 1940 did not remove public housing from the municipal agenda.

¹¹ Frank Zeidler, *A Liberal in City Government: My Experiences as Mayor of Milwaukee*, Unpublished Manuscript, 1962, MPL.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 19.

After World War II began and industrial employment perked up, perceptions of public housing altered. The housing shortage deepened as the city's population grew more rapidly. Because the wartime shortage affected a greater number of middle and working families, the stigma of "public housing" temporarily subsided, having become associated with housing workers in defense industries as a way of contributing to the war effort. Eric Fure-Slocum has demonstrated that, both during and after the war, public housing became politically viable when it was successfully connected to good citizenship.¹³ This meant that many civic leaders were far more likely to support housing for war workers or, after the war, public housing for war veterans. Indeed, after World War Two, the city of Milwaukee built far more housing units for war veterans than it did for low-income families. In the short term, wartime urgencies won out. In 1944, the Common Council finally supported the creation of a housing authority. The existence of such a body did not exemplify local consensus as to the importance of decent housing for all. Federal funding for new housing projects was contingent upon the creation of such organizations, thus the city could now begin to tap into a new source for housing dollars. Nonetheless, the type, location, and volume of housing continued to divide city leaders well past the war.

World War II had conflicting effects on American cities. On the one hand, it virtually wiped away unemployment and industrial decline. Factories that lay idle or greatly reduced their production during the Depression years became reinvigorated with defense contracts. As employment increased, American cities regained their economic vitality. Milwaukee's industries increased hiring across the board and began to expand

¹³ Eric Fure-Slocum, "The Challenge of the Working Class City: Recasting Growth Politics and Liberalism in Milwaukee, 1937-1952," Ph.D. Diss., University of Iowa, 2001, 484-550.

production once again. From 1940 to 1943, industrial employment in Milwaukee County shot up from 110,000 to over 200,000 workers.¹⁴ However, the near-full employment of the war years masked a more deeply rooted economic problem that most American cities faced in the wake of the Depression. With construction limited in the 1930's, the physical condition of central business districts in most American cities had grown increasingly drab. Private real estate interests had grown so concerned over downtowns that their largest lobbying body, the National Association of Real Estate Boards (NAREB), created the Urban Land Institute to address these concerns. Across the country, private land interests in cities created affiliate organizations. In Milwaukee, business leaders formed the Downtown Association, made up of prominent inner city property owners and businesses, to draw attention to the urban core. One of the Association's first projects, sponsored jointly with the Milwaukee Real Estate Board, was to commission the Urban Land Institute's Chicago branch to study the conditions in downtown and recommend policy solutions. This study, titled "Proposals for Downtown Milwaukee," was released in 1941. It confirmed business leaders' fears that downtown Milwaukee was in trouble. New construction in the central business district had plummeted during the 1930's; the city had only issued 78 building permits over the whole decade. Even worse, land values had showed a precipitous decline as well, dropping from over \$279 million in 1930 to just over \$192 million by 1939.¹⁵

¹⁴ John Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee*, (Milwaukee, WI: Milwaukee County Historical Society, 1999), 310.

¹⁵ Howard Tobin, et al: "Proposals for Downtown Milwaukee," The Urban Land Institute, 1941, MPL

Figure 3-1: Assessed Valuations, Milwaukee Central Business District, 1930-1939

<u>Year</u>	<u>Assessed Values</u>	<u>% of 1930</u>
1930	\$279,140,040	100
1931	\$265,694,125	95
1932	\$243,046,530	87
1933	\$217,926,640	78
1934	\$221,875,850	79
1935	\$217,520,630	78
1936	\$213,797,410	77
1937	\$213,284,410	76
1938	\$205,532,590	74
1939	\$192,427,760	69

“Proposals for Downtown Milwaukee,” The Urban Land Institute, 1941, MPL, p.33

The report blamed downtown’s decline on numerous factors. Milwaukee’s “ineffective zoning” (established in 1920) had made all of downtown a “commercial and light manufacturing” district which belied the fact that over 13,000 people lived within the confines of the central business district.¹⁶ No new residential structures had been built downtown for at least a decade. Equally troubling was the report’s assertion that “the central business district is virtually surrounded by blight,” strongly hinting that only massive reinvestment in the central city could turn this trend around.¹⁷

The authors were more perplexed by the question of suburban growth. Its survey of local business and civic leaders, the reports noted, confirmed that annexation of certain “suburban areas that are dependent upon the city for their major income” was a desirable goal. However, the city-suburban conflict ran so deep that one anonymous suburban

¹⁶ Ibid, pp. 60-63

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 66

Whitefish Bay individual who favored annexation warned: “I have given an answer that would automatically excommunicate me from the village of Whitefish Bay.”¹⁸ The Downtown Association also collectively opposed annexation, believing it had taken away attention from the needs of the central business district. Thus while acknowledging that suburbanization was a problem, business leaders viewed downtown in its own context and refused to enter into the city-suburban stalemate. Many downtown experts began believing that the suburban “pull” was powerful enough to be replicated. Charles Stewart, a national official of the Urban Land Institute, warned real estate investors in Milwaukee, “People are moving out of the cities to get away from something—the gridiron street pattern, traffic confusions and hazards, and business and industrial drabness.” To compete with suburbs, cities needed to be “re-planned to give the same amenities are available in the suburbs.”

The Urban Land Institute report revealed vast differences in how public and private interests viewed urban growth. For over two decades, socialist municipal leaders had focused attention on horizontal expansion through annexation, improving housing conditions, and more democratic reforms such as municipal ownership of public utilities. Individual business leaders in the private market supported some of these initiatives. Their innate devotion to market trends, however, made it almost impossible to swallow more socialistic ideas like cooperative housing or Whitnall’s frequent attacks on the “unearned increment” of inflated urban land values. The city’s main problem was simpler: that very “increment” was lacking and as long as land valuation in the downtown area continued to stagnate or decline, redevelopment was necessary. This difference was primarily ideological. Large urban real estate interests, industrial leaders, and retail

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 70

concerns reacted primarily to the concerns of the market. They acted as part of what historian Sam Bass Warner identified as the “private city,” which defined urban places’ primary *raison d’etre* as enablers of the individual search for wealth. Thus individuals of the “private city” structured their concerns about urban problems around the logic of the marketplace.¹⁹ Municipal socialists, however, never bought into this conception of cities. Daniel Hoan, Charles Whitnall, and, later, Frank Zeidler each embraced the idea of a polity in which government interfered in the local economy, whether in the form of cooperative or public housing, public ownership of transportation and utilities, or even an eventual shift away from “profit” in land values.

Interestingly, these two vastly different models for urban governance had rarely clashed during Hoan’s tenure in the 1920’s and 1930’s. While many businesses resented the presence of municipal socialism in their city and actively campaigned against Hoan, no major political struggles pitted these two different ideologies against each other. Hoan governed through the Red Scare of the early 1920’s politically unscathed. Mayor Zeidler would later win his largest re-election margin in 1952, in the midst of McCarthyism. There are several reasons for this lack of conflict. First, as historians Eric Fure-Slocum, Richard Pifer, and others have already pointed out, the city’s most polarizing political battles occurred outside the realm of traditional city-hall politics.²⁰ Milwaukee’s large and often militant working class had indeed wrestled with industrial capitalism for decades and helped create the political culture that elected men like Hoan in the first place. Second, many local entrepreneurs realized that socialist plans—despite their

¹⁹ Sam Bass Warner, *The Private City: Philadelphia in its Three Periods of Growth*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press), 1968.

²⁰ Fure-Slocum, “The Challenge of the Working Class City,” Richard Pifer, *A City at War: Milwaukee Labor During World War Two*, (Madison, WI: Wisconsin Historical Society Press), 2003.

egalitarian and democratic intentions—promised to benefit private interests. Thus, Charles Whitnall’s countywide system of parkways was quite popular throughout Milwaukee’s real estate community. Third, urban business leaders and real estate interests did not dismiss all government interference in the marketplace out of turn, endorsing those that served to benefit them. The more downtown land values continued to decline, the greater interest grew in federally sponsored slum clearance and redevelopment. Both the Downtown Association and the Milwaukee Real Estate Board readily welcomed an increased federal presence in the urban economy, but only in a way that enabled the market and did not actively compete with it. As the secretary of the board explained to a group of African American residents of the Sixth Ward in 1945, it was “the American way” for private enterprise to rebuild cities.²¹ Accordingly, slum clearance and redevelopment held more promise than low-income public housing projects.

Most importantly, however, business leaders and municipal socialists did not openly and vocally clash because the issue of urban growth often transcended political ideologies. Virtually every public official in Milwaukee, regardless of political stripe, firmly supported Hoan’s programs of annexation in the 1920’s and consolidation in the 1930’s. As Milwaukee grew in size and city officials stepped up their calls for government unification, the issue of urban growth took on spatial dimensions. Residents of unincorporated towns were divided over annexation: some supported it and others did not. Incorporated municipalities almost always opposed metropolitan consolidation, whether they were middle class commuter suburbs like Wauwatosa or blue collar industrial cities like West Allis.

²¹ *Milwaukee Journal*, October 15, 1945.

The spatial dimensions of urban growth had faded into the background during World War II, as the region's attention, like most of the nation's, remained firmly committed to the war. But they never departed from scene either. Peripheral growth continued during the 1940s, albeit at a pace still slower than in the booming 1920s. As a result of the suspension of annexation activity in the midst of the Depression, the city's population grew at dramatically reduced rates during the Depression. In contrast, neighboring towns continued to fill up with families who moved out of the city. During World War II, when policies were expensive to execute, local officials made several studies of the region's continued trend of decentralization.²² The Board of Public Land Commissioners (BPLC) studied population changes within Milwaukee by census tract, discovering that inner city neighborhoods had been consistently declining in population from 1920 through 1940 and beyond.²³ Another study released in 1945 revealed that during World War II, seven wards in the city drew precisely *zero* dollars worth of building activity.

²² "Report of Richard O. Roll, Director of Real Property Survey on Substandard Housing in Milwaukee," MPL. "Facing the Housing Problem," Milwaukee Housing Council, MPL. "Control of Population Density Through Zoning," Milwaukee Board of Public Land Commissioners, Legislative Reference Bureau, Milwaukee, WI.

²³ "Population Changes by Census Tracts, 1920-1940," Milwaukee Board of Public Land Commissioners, MPL.

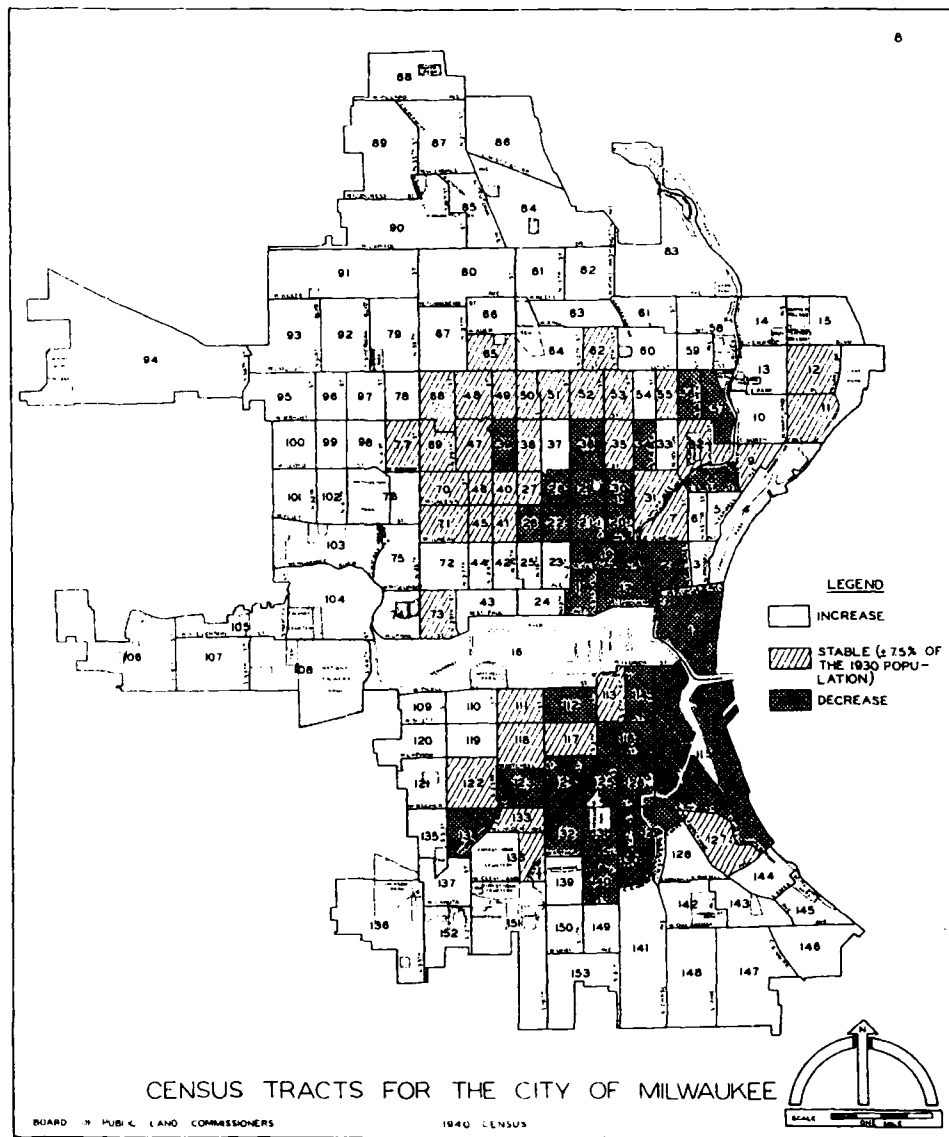


FIG 1 POPULATION CHANGES IN THE CITY OF MILWAUKEE BY CENSUS TRACTS 1920-1940

Inner City Population Decline, 1920-1940
 "Population Changes by Census Tract, City of Milwaukee, 1920-1940," by MPL.

These trends complicated perceptions of the urban core since it was widely recognized that close-in neighborhoods like the Sixth Ward were overcrowded, despite the district's population losses. However, it did reinforce city leaders' understanding that people of means were leaving the inner city for the incorporated villages and cities and unincorporated towns on the urban fringe.

To answer the question of why this very trend was occurring, the Milwaukee County Regional Planning Department conducted a comprehensive and revealing study of the county's unincorporated towns during the 1940's. Planner Richard Dewey, the primary author of the report, set out to examine why people had moved "from the built-up urban areas to the fringe" to help future planners better discern "what constitutes a good community layout." County officials distributed over 12,000 questionnaires to residents throughout the unincorporated towns of Milwaukee County that, after the construction lull of the Depression, were beginning to attract city residents again. The questionnaire elicited over 4,000 responses, providing regional officials with the clearest picture yet of the nature of residential decentralization.²⁴

The study uncovered several important patterns to Milwaukee's peripheral expansion. First of all, the peopling of upper class suburbs areas represented a gradual shift, not a Horatio Alger "leapfrog" from the urban core to the choicest communities on the periphery. For instance, the principal south of growth for the North Shore village of Fox Point, a bedroom suburb, came from migration from other suburbs, namely the white-collar communities of Wauwatosa and Shorewood. River Hills, rapidly becoming the most elite suburb in the region, drew its migrants from the wealthiest sections of

²⁴ Milwaukee County Regional Planning Department, "Residential Development in the Unincorporated Areas of Milwaukee County—Wisconsin," 1946, MPL.

Milwaukee's East Side and the upper class North Shore suburbs of Shorewood, Whitefish Bay, and Fox Point. Leaving behind a wealthy community for an even more elite place was not a tale of dramatic upward mobility, but instead reflected class-based residential patterns.²⁵

The authors of the survey found even more important the motivations of the thousands of new residents in the modest unincorporated towns outside of Milwaukee. The most common answers to the question of why one moved out of the city was that the new communities were "best for children," followed by "less congestion," "cleaner" and "larger lot." Only 11% of the thousands of respondents stated that "lower taxes" were the key reason for leaving the city, giving the "pull" of the rural fringe a decided edge over the "push" of abandoning the city. The survey also made it clear that residents preferred larger lot sizes. When people were asked about their attitude toward their current lot sizes, over half of all residents on lots with widths of forty feet believed their lots were too small. Where lot sizes were larger, residents' attitudes toward them grew more positive.²⁶

Desires to attain more space were balanced by the still powerful draw of community. Residents desired churches, parks, movie theaters, and schools to be within walking distance as well as some form of adequate mass transit. Interestingly, suburbia seemed to provide this more than the large center city. Over 80% of the survey's respondents stated they found "more of a community spirit in their new neighborhood as opposed to their old ones." In fact, privacy seemed more attainable in the city as some

²⁵ Ibid, pp. 41-43.

²⁶ Milwaukee County Regional Planning Department, "Residential Development in the Unincorporated Areas of Milwaukee County—Wisconsin," 1946, MPL, p. 51.

residents registered concern with the “lack of anonymity” of their new suburbs.²⁷ The community idyll was felt most strongly in the New Deal village of Greendale, just as its designers had intended. Over 97% of Greendale’s respondents reported that a “more neighborly spirit” existed here than in the city. Residents of Greendale gave so many unsolicited answers that Dewey, the report’s primary author, was moved to characterize the village as near to “the ideal community for the average American” as any he had ever seen.²⁸

The language of Dewey’s report designating place also reveals how local planners perceived the metropolitan region’s communities. Milwaukee, clearly, was the “city” and its neighborhoods constituted “urban” places. Incorporated villages and cities, such as Whitefish Bay and West Allis, were—just as obviously—called “suburbs.” The subjects of the study who had moved to Milwaukee County’s unincorporated towns, however, did not fit either designation of place. Instead, Dewey reported them as having moved to “rural” areas of the county. Eugene Howard, who was the director of the Milwaukee County Regional Planning Department wrote the introduction to the study, and noted that Milwaukee County’s towns were “largely in a state of flux,” gradually urbanizing as the residents spilled beyond Milwaukee’s boundaries.²⁹ The “rural” designation given to the towns reveals a political interpretation of the meaning of the word “suburb.” Only incorporated entities were true “suburbs” while unincorporated towns were not. This sharpened the differences in metropolitan political status. Using Milwaukee County planners’ designation of place, communities did not become “suburbs” until they

²⁷ Ibid, p. 55.

²⁸ Ibid, Chapter 4.

²⁹ Letter from E.A. Howard to Milwaukee County Park Commission, undated, in Milwaukee County Regional Planning Department, “Residential Development in the Unincorporated Areas of Milwaukee County—Wisconsin,” 1946, MPL.

incorporated which, not inconsequently, ended the city's chances of annexation. A city-suburban-rural distinction of this type was unusual and residents of Milwaukee's unincorporated towns may well have rejected the report's characterization of their "rural" status. The term nonetheless does reveal the political dimension of suburbanization. The mere act of moving away from the urban core was not in and of itself "suburbanization," but instead "residential decentralization," a demographic pattern that had yet to take a political shape.

Dewey's report also revealed what many Milwaukee officials had believed for some time: that many people who moved out of Milwaukee were not seeking escape from high city taxes, but instead simply sought better housing in particular and a better quality of life in general. Eugene Howard, Director of the Milwaukee County Regional Planning Department, agreed with Dewey's conclusions in his presentation to a postwar planning group in 1947, noting: "In the early 1920's, so-called forty-foot lots were accepted; in the 1930's, fifty-foot lots were considered a minimum standard."³⁰ Howard promised not to approve any plats less than 7,200 square feet in the unincorporated lands of Milwaukee County. "The crowding of buildings in the older sections of our communities is one of the greatest causes of blight," Howard noted.³¹ Dewey's report had demonstrated that public appetites dictated larger lots as well. The region's local media took notice. "It's Elbow Room, not High Taxes, that Keeps People out of Milwaukee," chimed the *Milwaukee Journal* after the Dewey report's release in 1946.³² The report offered no specific planning recommendations to county officials but its sympathy toward large-

³⁰ Eugene A. Howard, "Twenty Three Years of Planning for Milwaukee County," Park Commission Folder, Box 1, Milwaukee County Regional Planning Department Files, MCHS.

³¹ Ibid.

³² *Milwaukee Journal*, September 22, 1946.

scale community planning was obvious, hinting at future policies. Just two years later, city officials began one of the most ambitious community development programs in the United States.

While local planners remained concerned about balancing revitalization with peripheral growth, the private sector's most powerful actors continued to draw attention to Milwaukee's center. During the war, local business leaders created another organization in direct response to downtown's perceived decline. In 1944, Richard Herzfeld, the president of the Boston Store, one of the city's largest downtown department stores, retained a research firm to conduct population projections to gauge the city's future demographics. Herzfeld was shocked to discover that the firm predicted that Milwaukee's population would suffer an outright decline by 1960. Alarmed by this prediction, which echoed similarly ominous statistics revealed by the Downtown Association and the BPLC, Herzfeld contacted Irwin Maier, the president of the *Milwaukee Journal*, about the possibility of forming an association of business executives to revitalize the city.³³ At a luncheon in 1945, they formed the 1948 Corporation, ostensibly a "non-partisan, non-political, non-sectional" group which sought civic improvements that were to be underway by the year of Wisconsin's hundredth anniversary celebration in 1948. At its first meeting on November 30, 1945, the corporation adopted a platform intended to promote city improvements. The corporation called for a master plan of the city to be commenced, one involving the construction of a

³³ "Milwaukee Plans to Make Postwar Dreams Come True," *Providence Sunday Journal*, July 20, 1947, Folder 4, Box 5, William George Bruce Papers, Area Research Center, Golda Meier Library, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

new stadium and museum, and of freeways connecting downtown to key outlying areas like Mitchell Field, the city's airport.³⁴

The 1948 Corporation may have been a private organization, but its leaders vocally sought public funds to pay for the recommended projects. For this to happen, the corporation called for the city to reverse over twenty years of fiscal policy and go into debt by issuing millions of dollars in bonds. While debt elimination had initially been a pet socialist project conceived under the Hoan administration, his Nonpartisan opponents in the Common Council grew to embrace it as well. When Mayor Carl Zeidler left his duties to serve in the Navy during World War II, John Bohn took over as acting mayor and remained at the post after Zeidler's ship was lost at sea. As an alderman, Bohn had clashed repeatedly with Hoan during the 1920's and 1930's, but came to agree about the importance of avoiding indebtedness. As mayor, Bohn proved just as reluctant to issue bonds, publicly announcing his refusal to go into debt without a public referendum in 1946.³⁵ In his annual message to the Common Council that year, Bohn warned: "Our revenues are not sufficient to meet this extreme burden without increasing the load on the owners of property."³⁶

Bohn did not remain on the political scene to resolve the debt controversy, retiring at the age of eighty rather than running again for mayor in 1948. With Milwaukee's political future in the air, city residents once again turned to a socialist to govern the city. Frank Zeidler emerged from a primary of fifteen candidates and then defeated Henry

³⁴ Minutes of the First Meeting of the Board of Directors of the 1948 Corporation, November 30, 1945, Folder 3, Box 5, William George Bruce Papers, Area Research Center, Golda Meier Library, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

³⁵ *Milwaukee Journal*, March 13, 1946.

³⁶ "Mayor's Postwar Message to Common Council," April 16, 1946, Folder 3, Box 5, William George Bruce Papers, Area Research Center, Golda Meier Library, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

Reuss in the run-off election. Zeidler won not under the Socialist Party label, however, the party having slowly declined in numbers during the 1930's and 1940's, but as a candidate of the Municipal Enterprise Committee, a group of liberals who hoped to continue the progressive policies of the Hoan administration.³⁷ Nevertheless, Zeidler never shied away from revealing his political sympathies, remaining a member of the Socialist Party throughout his career.

A new era in Milwaukee's political history had begun and a variety of civic actors sought to reshape the city. Business leaders, newly concerned with economic decline downtown, coalesced around the 1948 Corporation and, deciding that the organization needed a permanent place on the civic scene, changed its name to the Greater Milwaukee Committee. The committee succeeded in forcing the issue of public debt onto a citywide referendum in April of 1947. Voters, heavily influenced by a barrage of publicity from the corporation, agreed that Milwaukee needed to issue bonds and go into debt to finance the baseball stadium, museum, and other public improvements.³⁸ One year later, however, they also voted Frank Zeidler into office, a politician who had campaigned against going into debt. As new actors emerged onto the scene, older ones departed. In 1949, Charles Whitnall died, ending over forty years of public service and commitment to planned dispersal.

Visions of a decentralized metropolis did not end with Whitnall's death in 1948. Nor were these prescriptions marginalized by an increased national focus on physically aging downtowns and the rise of urban redevelopment projects that sought to rebuild the central city, and slow or reverse decentralization. If anything, the end of World War II

³⁷ Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee*, 337.

³⁸ Fure-Slocum, "The Challenge of the Working Class City," 311-324, 345-347.

brought a renewed vigor to planning for decentralization that would make Milwaukee mightier by dramatically expanding its boundaries.

Zeidler, who served as Milwaukee's mayor from 1948 to 1960, knew and admired Charles Whitnall and Daniel Hoan. In many ways, his goals were a direct continuation of those that Whitnall and Hoan had both advocated for cities after World War One.

However, with the end of World War Two, in the midst of a national discourse on the best way to rebuild cities in the United States, the stakes had risen. With them came a renewed opportunity to reshape urban America. Impending federal legislation promised to make more capital available for urban redevelopment than ever before. The advent of the Cold War suddenly made densely populated cities appear vulnerable to possible nuclear attack. The return of hundreds of thousands of veterans from the war placed housing construction at an unprecedented premium. In short, American cities were going to undergo rapid transformation after World War Two. The trajectory of that change, however, had yet to be determined.

In their discussions of postwar urban governance, historians have invariably characterized it as a failure. Countless books have been written that break down in a myriad of ways how city leaders focused their energies on saving the increasingly aging central business districts, and clearing and redeveloping the decaying neighborhoods near the urban core. The history of postwar cities is presented as a series of failures —policies that resulted in segregated public housing, building of freeways, shortsighted downtown

renewal plans—that often served to exacerbate urban problems far more often than solve them. When discussions of urban renewal begin, they almost always start at the city’s center, where the obvious aging of downtowns led to the so-called “growth-coalitions” that dominate much of recent postwar urban literature. From there, historians often work outward from downtown.

There are valid reasons for this focus. Some cities did engage in successful redevelopment of their downtowns, often termed “renaissances.” Cities such as Pittsburgh and Chicago became paradigms for countless other mayors who attempted to initiate “renaissances” of their own. These projects received disproportionate attention from local media, often because they at least produced tangible results. To be sure, historians have examined growth coalition alternatives, usually cast as a mixture of progressive housing advocates, left-wing union activism, and a growing civil rights movement that pushed for racial parity in the form of open housing and the elimination of job discrimination. But recent scholars of the post-war city, such as Thomas Sugrue, June Manning-Thomas, and Kevin Fox-Gotham, readily acknowledge that growth coalition alternatives failed to one degree or another.³⁹ Because of this, urban policymakers who did not solely favor economic development in the downtowns as the best solution to improve cities seemed to have had a shrinking array of political options after 1945.

While growth coalitions undermined other urban policy alternatives after 1945, they also usually failed on their own terms to renew cities. Perhaps another reason for

³⁹ Thomas Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*, (Princeton, NJ; Princeton University Press, 1995) June Manning Thomas, *Redevelopment and Race: Planning a Finer City in Postwar Detroit* (Baltimore; Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997) Kevin Fox-Gotham, *Race, Real Estate, and Uneven Development: The Kansas City Experience, 1900-2000* (Albany; State University of New York Press, 2002).

the emphasis on these failed policies of the 1940s', 1950s', and 1960s' is that today, work is still very much underway to correct them. Chicago is in the process of demolishing the infamous Robert Taylor Homes. Pittsburgh still desires to redevelop its Lower Hill District, which was a viable urban neighborhood until it was destroyed during the city's first "renaissance." Boston is spending literally billions of dollars to dig a freeway under the city rather than through it. Milwaukee recently tore down a two-mile freeway on the city's Lower East Side that had only been stopped after acres of an old neighborhood had been cleared away for a road that was never finished.

Because American cities are still trying to wipe away the imprint of urban renewal on their landscapes, historical inquiry into the postwar era often leads to a type of teleology. The policies of city officials and civic leaders to "renew" urban America after World War II—well informed or not—*did* precede an urban crisis that marginalized the national presence of American cities, especially those of the industrial Midwest. Accordingly, historians of cities such as Detroit, Cleveland, Milwaukee, Chicago, Pittsburgh, and St. Louis often engage in a search for "symptoms" of urban decline. They are not hard to find. Some historians refer to the "urban crisis" of the 1960's, others focus on the rapid suburbanization of the 1950's and 1960's that drained the resources from central cities, and still others reach back before World War Two to find cities of the North growing at slower rates than the Sunbelt.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ For example, see Jon C. Teaford, *Cities of the Heartland: The Rise and fall of the Industrial Midwest* (Bloomington; Indiana University Press, 1993), *The Rough Road to Renaissance: Urban Revitalization in America, 1940-1985* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), Anthony Orum, *City Building in America* (Boulder, CO; Westview Press, 1995), Roy Lubove, *Twentieth Century Pittsburgh: Government, Politics, and Environmental Change* (New York; Wiley Publishing, 1969), Eric Sandweiss, *St. Louis: The Evolution of an American Urban Landscape* (Philadelphia; Temple University Press, 2001), Thomas Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*, (Princeton, NJ; Princeton University Press, 1995).

In these studies, historians understandably have adopted the narrative of “decline.” But by doing so, they may have not given urban policy in the immediate aftermath of World War II the proper attention. For example, was urban renewal strictly intended to eliminate inner city blight, prop up ailing downtowns, and, in effect, reverse decentralization? In Robert Fogelson’s excellent history of American downtowns from 1870 to 1950, he entitled a late chapter “The Specter of Decentralization.”⁴¹ Certainly from the perspective of downtown business interests, decentralization presented a very real threat to their livelihoods and accordingly downtown business interests employed a language of “blight” to spur increased government intervention to develop the urban core. But did *all* attempts to rebuild American cities result in the approach urban historians often take, that is starting with downtown and working outward from there? This, in fact, was not the case with Milwaukee.

To be sure, Milwaukee participated in “urban renewal” after World War Two as vigorously as any city in America, but with far different goals and intentions than historians usually attribute to postwar governance. Rebuilding the central city was a concern of local businessmen and other civic leaders.⁴² But this goal was countered by the Frank Zeidler mayoral administration, which sought to create a safer, more humane and efficient city through the creation of a politically unified and yet *spatially decentralized* metropolis. After World War II, Milwaukee embarked on an annexation program that was, again, specifically designed to incorporate vacant lands that would allow Milwaukee room for horizontal expansion. An urban redevelopment policy

⁴¹ Robert Fogelson, *Downtown: Its Rise and Fall, 1880-1950* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2001).

⁴² The best study that refutes the “growth coalition” model as applicable to Milwaukee is Fure-Slocum, “Challenge of the Working Class City.”

emerged that treated the “center” and the “periphery” in harmony; as the inner core was remade, the fringe would be built to provide “elbow room” for Milwaukee to decentralize its population and industry. At the edge of urban development, well-planned and even municipally-owned satellite communities would be built to alleviate civil defense concerns and provide replacement housing for those displaced by inner city urban renewal projects. High-quality “self-sustaining” suburbs fashioned after Ebenezer Howard’s Garden Cities and the greenbelt towns of the New Deal were to encompass decentralization in Milwaukee. By stripping itself of some of its more “urban” qualities,” especially the high population densities that had been anathema to its planners for so long, Milwaukee would be effectively renewed. For many Milwaukee government officials, decentralization was not a “specter” to be feared, but a demographic reality to be planned for in advance of inner city urban renewal efforts. This story of postwar planning in Milwaukee is, in large part, a history of an attempt by city officials to turn Charles Whitnall’s dream of a decentralized metropolis into a political reality by combining annexation with a balanced urban renewal program that regarded the periphery and the center with equal attention. If successful, the result would be a political unified and spatially decentralized metropolis.

Frank Zeidler brought a highly developed concept of urbanism—both political and technical—to the office of mayor upon his election in 1948. A committed socialist, Zeidler had served as party secretary from 1937 to 1941 and became an avowed admirer of Milwaukee’s previous socialist mayor, Daniel Hoan.⁴³ After failing in his quixotic run for governor of Wisconsin in 1942, Zeidler served on the Milwaukee School Board until

⁴³ Frank P. Zeidler, “A Liberal in City Government: My Experiences as Mayor of Milwaukee,” Unpublished Manuscript, MPL.

his election as mayor. Professionally trained as an engineer, Zeidler had worked in the 1930's for the U.S. Resettlement Administration as a surveyor of Greendale, Milwaukee's Greenbelt town, an experience that greatly influenced his views on the nature of urban development and made him an avowed proponent of greenbelt towns as a desired city form.⁴⁴

Like previous city leaders, Zeidler's ideal conception of the urban form throughout his twelve years as mayor from 1948 to 1960 was a city of greatly reduced population densities, with no exceptions. Echoing Charles Whitnall, Zeidler wrote in 1951, "Man was not meant to pass his days in that most ugly of our modern contrivances—the modern city. The blush of dawn, the glory of the sunset, the rustle of golden autumn leaves, the cleanness of the fresh snow, are lost to our modern children... Instead they know the policeman's whistle, the fireman's siren, the grinding noise of traffic, the false world of cheap entertainment."⁴⁵ The poor quality of life in cities was due more than anything else to excessive congestion. Zeidler believed this to be true even at the end of his administration in 1960 when he decried as unacceptable any spatial arrangement that situated more than thirty families per gross acre.⁴⁶ Reducing population densities had been a primary goal of Milwaukee's annexation program in the 1920's and remained a principle that Zeidler held to throughout his administration. He even opposed the rezoning of Prospect Avenue to construct high-rise apartments along Milwaukee's north shore because such buildings resulted in high densities telling a local

⁴⁴ "Biographical Sketch of Honorable Frank P. Zeidler, Mayor of Milwaukee, Folder 7, Box 118, Zeidler Papers, Milwaukee Public Library (MPL), Milwaukee, WI.

⁴⁵ "Redevelopment in Milwaukee—What We Did" by Frank Zeidler, Folder 2, Box 107, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

⁴⁶ "Making Urban Renewal More Effective," Third Report, by Frank Zeidler, Folder 9, Box 343, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

architect, “I cannot concur in the idea that it is good architecture to crowd people on ever more smaller areas of land.”⁴⁷ By the end of his three terms as mayor, Zeidler believed that one of urban redevelopment’s most deleterious features in American cities was the predominance of upper-income “residential skyscrapers” as well as high-rise low-income public housing.⁴⁸

Because Zeidler opposed congestion in principle, he understood the allure of suburbia to an increasing number of Americans in the postwar era. The growth of fringe areas, dotted with detached single-family homes, was a logical extension of the human desire to attain more “elbow room.” Zeidler noted that “the hunger of most people to own their own home is easily demonstrated anywhere in the world.”⁴⁹ Homeownership in less congested spaces, so important to Americans, was not antithetical to Zeidler’s unique brand of socialism.

What made Zeidler distinctive was his ardent belief that growth on the fringe should be carefully managed and planned by cities in *advance* of development to attain both maximum efficiency of land use and preservation of nature. Zeidler’s previous work on Greendale underpinned his commitment to avoiding unplanned and haphazard growth. A policy of decentralization would not yield urban sprawl if communities were planned with “compactness but not overcrowding.”⁵⁰ Growth on the fringe should be concentrated into “clusters,” much like Ebenezer Howard envisioned for England and American regional planning advocates Lewis Mumford and Clarence Stein called for in

⁴⁷ Letter from Zeidler, March 26, 1958, Folder 5, Box 191, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

⁴⁸ “Making Urban Renewal More Effective” Ninth Report, by Frank Zeidler, Folder 6, Box 344, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

⁴⁹ “Making Urban Renewal More Effective” Third Report, Folder 9, Box 343, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

⁵⁰ “Making Urban Renewal More Effective” Second Report, Folder 8, Box 343, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

the United States.⁵¹ Of course, this type of large-scale community building was often beyond the means of most real estate developers since it required so much land and yielded extremely high costs of infrastructure. However, cities were equipped with professional planners and public works engineers, and, therefore, appeared to be naturally suited to engage in this type of community development. Elmer Krieger, Milwaukee's chief city planner throughout Zeidler's three terms in office, believed that there was "no better way to plan a city" than to guide growth on the fringe into complete satellite communities, with a balance of residence and industry, and to maintain greenbelts to separate various land uses.

Postwar urbanism was obviously not solely defined in terms of unplanned or haphazard growth. What distinguished Zeidler still further was his advocacy of decent, well-planned housing for all, rich or poor, white or black. For those who could not afford single-family homes, public housing—also to be constructed on the periphery of cities—would provide the same modicum of comfort to lower income groups. To Zeidler, "elbow room" was not a privilege of the financially fortunate but a fundamental right to all urban citizens. Were the city to rid itself of blight at the center, then an adequate balance of replacement housing on the fringe would have to complement slum clearance. During his twelve years in office, Zeidler did often sound like any other postwar mayor in attacking "blight" and calling for slum clearance, increased federal assistance, and even advocating the development of expressways. The difference was, as Eric Fure-Slocum

⁵¹ For example, see Ebenezer Howard, *Garden Cities of To-morrow*, (Boston; MIT Press, 1965), Lewis Mumford, *The Culture of Cities* (New York; Harcourt, Brace, & Co., 1938), Clarence Stein *Toward New Towns for America*, (New York; Reinhold Publishing, 1957).

recently wrote, “unlike the growth proponents who understood efficiency as an economic measure, Zeidler saw efficiency as an issue of governance and politics.”⁵²

Zeidler was not by any means alone in advocating this type of planned decentralization. Since the 1920’s, the Regional Planning Association of America (RPAA) had called for comprehensive community development as a proper antidote to many urban ills. Catherine Bauer, a nationally renown housing advocate, had for years written that American cities needed to plan regionally to control decentralization. Ebenezer Howard’s Garden Cities were dedicated to bringing the working class closer to nature while maintaining cohesive communities. In studies of Los Angeles, historians Marc Weiss and Greg Hise note that since World War I even America’s private sector engaged in large-scale community building.⁵³

In Milwaukee throughout the postwar era, city planner Elmer Krieger and Richard Perrin, the Executive Director of the city’s Housing Authority, as well as various other officials, continued to advocate planned decentralization. In fact, planned dispersal contingent upon successful annexation came to *define* urban renewal to Milwaukee’s policy-makers. In a speech to the National Housing Conference in 1951, Perrin argued that three types of new development encompassed urban renewal. Low-rent public housing on the fringe was to serve as “relocation housing for low-income families.”⁵⁴ Middle income housing in the form of owner-occupied single-family homes was to serve the middle class. Finally, “new community-type development” would accommodate both low and moderate-income groups while also providing space for industrial expansion.

⁵² Fure Slocum, “Challenge of the Working Class City,” 333.

⁵³ Marc Weiss, *The Rise of the Community Builders: The American Real Estate Industry and Urban Land Planning* (New York; Columbia University Press, 1987), Greg Hise, *Magnetic Los Angeles: Planning the Twentieth Century Metropolis* (Baltimore; Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

⁵⁴ As quoted in *The American City*, May 1950, pp. 5-6.

Perrin essentially summarized what urban renewal meant for Milwaukee by saying that “if the core of the city is to be rebuilt according to a sound and logical plan, then it is equally important that the expanding periphery of the city be developed on an equally well-ordered basis.”⁵⁵

Milwaukee officials attempted to reverse urban decline reflecting Perrin’s “three-tiered” approach to redevelopment. An ambitious public housing program was announced and commenced, with the goal to provide most of the new housing on Milwaukee’s fringes. Milwaukee sought to provide middle-income housing—mainly to war veterans—by purchasing and developing hundreds of acres of vacant land in Greendale, the nearby greenbelt town. And finally, Milwaukee would try to purchase open land and develop a “new town” of its own, some fifteen miles north and west in neighboring Waukesha County. All these policies were initiated in the context of the burgeoning Cold War, thus giving credence to decentralization as an adequate measure for cities against possible nuclear attack. Milwaukee officials only minimally succeeded in this program of planned dispersal, building far less public housing than they desired, and failed to develop Greendale or its “satellite city” in the open spaces northwest of the city.

That these initial policies did not succeed does not mean they had no impact. Upon closer examination, it became apparent that Milwaukee’s municipal leaders were not at all passive to the forces that threatened cities in the aftermath of the war. When city officials expressed concern that Milwaukee would lose population to outlying areas but also regarded the city’s population density in 1945 of 14,090 people per square mile as socially and functionally undesirable, they were not presenting mutually exclusive

⁵⁵ Ibid.

fears. Rather, they were demonstrating that decentralization encompassed many of the dimensions of urban change and that transforming the city under the principles of dispersal could *benefit* Milwaukee if planned and administered appropriately. Postwar government in Milwaukee was “pro-growth” if we understand the term at its most literal; Milwaukee had to physically increase its size in order to survive as a healthy and thriving city. Thus a very different picture of urban “renewal” became apparent; Milwaukee was to engage in the planned dispersal of people, housing, and industry while expanding its borders. Eventually, the metropolitan area would become politically unified and spatially decentralized.

There were plenty of important motivations to expand Milwaukee’s borders. The most obvious in the immediate aftermath of World War Two was yet another housing crisis, at least the third one of the twentieth century and perhaps the most serious. This postwar housing shortage was a direct remnant of the Great Depression, when construction ground to a near halt. For example, the combined number of new housing units built in Milwaukee from 1931 to 1938 was less than the number of housing units constructed in 1928 alone.⁵⁶ Only \$14 million worth of new construction was undertaken in 1940, \$18 million less than had been built a decade before in 1930.⁵⁷ Even with this drop in construction, during the Depression the city's building inspection department was grossly understaffed as well. In 1939, only one-third of the required number of

⁵⁶“Report on Housing for Hon. Carl Zeidler, mayor” Building Inspector File, Box 5, The Zeidler Collection, *Milwaukee Public Library*, also see May 22, 1947 memo from Milwaukee Housing Authority to Milwaukee Common Council, in *Low-Rent Housing Units—Alleviation of Housing Shortage in Milwaukee*, pages 2-3, MPL.

⁵⁷Ibid.

inspections was made.⁵⁸ Milwaukee thus emerged from World War Two with a housing stock both old and of relatively poor quality.

During the 1940's, real estate developers had begun to purchase and sub-divide vacant land near Milwaukee's borders with the expectations that the city would annex it. Well aware that water and sewage extensions could be installed by the city at far lower rates than digging private wells or installing septic tanks, local real estate interests remained vocal proponents of annexation, often threatening to hold up new housing starts altogether if their land was not made a part of Milwaukee.⁵⁹ The city's budget supervisor, George Saffran, noted that by the end of World War Two, "the city was being criticized by practically everyone for holding up the development of the metropolitan area."⁶⁰ For example, in 1947, eight different builders promised to announce construction of over 1,100 new housing units upon annexation of their lands into the city with the resultant subsequent infrastructure improvements.⁶¹ A year later, Tilton Industries, one of the city's largest builders, announced plans for eighty single-family ranch homes on land just beyond Milwaukee's borders at the northwest fringe. John Tilton, president of the company, said that the homes would not be built until the city annexed the land and connected the subdivision with the city's water and sewer system.⁶² During that same year, another developer suggested to Zeidler that the city institute a moratorium on all non-residential building activities to concentrate construction solely on

⁵⁸"A Review of Building Activities in Milwaukee During 1940," Building Inspector File, Box 5, Zeidler Collection, *Milwaukee Public Library*

⁵⁹ See Arnold Fleischmann, *The Politics of Annexation and Urban Development: A Clash of Two Paradigms*, PhD Diss., University of Texas, 1984. Chapter 4 especially deals with the role of developers in Milwaukee's annexation program. Also see *Milwaukee Journal*, April 2, 1951, Annexation clipping file, MPL.

⁶⁰ Saffran, George, *Annexation Practices in Milwaukee: An Administrative Analysis*, June 1952, MPL.

⁶¹ Memo to Walter Swietlik, Commissioner of Public Works, August 22, 1947, Folder 2, Box 124, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

⁶² *Milwaukee Journal*, January 20, 1948, Annexation Clipping File, MPL.

housing.⁶³ Citizens virtually deluged Zeidler and the city housing authority with requests for decent housing.⁶⁴ Worse still, Zeidler was informed upon his election in 1948 that there were virtually no vacant lots left in the city that were ready for development.⁶⁵

The city's housing shortage and the subsequent pressure by the building industry had been the primary reason the Milwaukee Common Council voted to re-establish the Department of Annexation and Abstracting in 1946.⁶⁶ In a nod to continuity, Arthur Werba, who had served as annexation director during most of Milwaukee's expansion in the 1920's, was chosen to head up the re-born department. Werba, of whom the nationally renown housing reformer Catherine Bauer once wrote: "Eats, drinks, and sleeps annexation," resumed his task with a vigor that was to make him infamous throughout the Milwaukee region, especially in the unincorporated townships that bordered the city to the north, west, and south. To better coordinate annexation with long-range planning, city planner Elmer Krieger was to serve as a secretary for the annexation department. When it was estimated that Milwaukee would need anywhere from 10,000 to 30,000 new residential lots to accommodate demand, it appeared that private industry would account for the vast majority of new housing starts.⁶⁷

But to Milwaukee officials, annexation would do more than merely provide new space for real estate development. Annexation could be the primary means to attain the politically unified and spatially decentralized metropolis that had been dreamed of for forty years. In 1929, Werba had written of the "inevitability" of the consolidation of all

⁶³ Letter from Elton A. Schultz to Frank Zeidler, July 14, 1948, Folder 1, Box 77, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

⁶⁴ For example, see Folders 5-8, Box 78, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

⁶⁵ Memo from Arthur Werba to Frank Zeidler, May 5, 1948, Folder 1, Box 175, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

⁶⁶ Saffran, George, *Annexation Practices in Milwaukee: An Administrative Analysis*, June 1952, MPL.

⁶⁷ *Milwaukee Journal*, May 12, 1946, Annexation Clipping File, MPL.

governing units of Milwaukee County.⁶⁸ Krieger also endorsed annexation as the primary tool to properly decentralize Milwaukee. In a letter to Zeidler in 1949, Krieger noted that the goal of Milwaukee's 1920 zoning ordinance and subsequent annexation program had been to reduce Milwaukee's population density. Krieger also recognized that annexation could politically unify the metropolis. In his master plan for Milwaukee, released in 1947, Krieger wrote that the ultimate goal of annexation was to continue the process "until or unless all of the duplicating taxing units within Milwaukee County are consolidated."⁶⁹ Zeidler periodically restated this same goal throughout his years in office: Milwaukee had essentially no choice but to "grow or die."⁷⁰ If urban renewal was to amount to planned dispersal, large-scale annexations and political unification held the key to Milwaukee's future growth.

Annexation was equally important to alleviate the city's lack of industrial land available for expansion. Milwaukee emerged from World War II with a vibrant industrial sector that had little room for expansion within the city. The war had reinvigorated local industry. In 1939, there was over five million square feet of vacant factory space in the city. By early 1946, there was practically none.⁷¹ Milwaukee had reached its industrial capacity. In 1948, only 15% of the total acreage of land zoned for industrial use was available for development. Much of this property was not located close enough to rail lines or major arterials, making it poorly situated and thus considered unattractive by businesses.⁷² The spatial crunch that threatened Milwaukee's manufacturing capacity

⁶⁸ Arthur Werba, "Making Milwaukee Mightier," 1929, MPL.

⁶⁹ "A Master Plan for the City of Milwaukee," submitted by Elmer Krieger, 1947, MPL, p. 30

⁷⁰ As quoted from John Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee*, Milwaukee County Historical Society Press, 1999, p. 338.

⁷¹ "Report of the Commission on the Economic Study of Milwaukee," 1948, 107, MPL.

⁷² *Ibid.*

also made it difficult to attract new industry from other regions. Statewide, industrial expansion seemed to be bypassing Milwaukee for smaller towns such as Hartford, Wausau, and Stoughton.⁷³ New plants in these towns faced less competition and also often paid lower wages.⁷⁴ These conditions did not exist in Milwaukee. The Milwaukee Association of Commerce (MAC) had recently embarked on a program to attract defense-related industries to the region. With little to no land available in the city under its present size, any new industries that the MAC could attract would be located in the suburbs. Thus, in the immediate aftermath of World War II, stimulating industrial expansion was not as important as ensuring that it occur within Milwaukee's boundaries.

Attracting and maintaining industry also became an important function of municipal financing. In 1947, the Wisconsin state legislature forbade local governments from imposing income taxes on residents, thereby ensuring that property taxes would remain the most reliable revenue for the state's cities and villages. Upon assuming office in 1948, Zeidler appointed a group of civic leaders to examine ways to raise revenues in Milwaukee. The ensuing 120-page report of the Commission on the Economic Study of Milwaukee, completed during the same year, concluded that while Milwaukee's industrial workers enjoyed relatively high wages, the city's lack of usable industrial space meant future expansion would occur outside city limits. Because industry yielded a disproportionate amount of property tax revenues to municipalities, providing for its expansion was a matter of fiscal survival for cities like Milwaukee. Moreover, the study commission recognized that the most popular model of plant expansions were low-density, single story buildings, with enough open space to provide both parking for

⁷³D.W. Knight, "Subsidization of Industry in Forty Selected Cities in Wisconsin: 1930-1946", *Wisconsin Commerce Studies* vol.1, no.2, 1947, p. 185.

⁷⁴*Ibid*, 183.

workers who relied on automobiles for transportation as well as vacant land for future expansion. A local industrial real estate agent confirmed this in 1949 when he estimated that a 35,000 square foot production space—a relatively small amount of floor space—needed at least two and-a-half acres of land for both building and parking.⁷⁵ Another industrial agent warned “the lack of industrial property in this area is keeping new plants from coming in and old plants from expanding.”⁷⁶ In the postwar era, new industries would almost always require more space than the older, multi-storied plants had in the past. Accommodating this new industrial model would, therefore, require far more open land than ever before. With this in mind, the Economic Study Commission recommended an aggressive annexation policy to facilitate industrial expansion.

The re-establishment of annexation coupled with the need to keep industrial expansion within city borders was not new policy. City officials had sought to achieve these same goals during the 1920s. Continuity maintained itself in a very specific way. When the Annexation Department ceased operations in 1932, its entire staff, Arthur Werba included, shifted duties to the collection of delinquent taxes. During the Depression and war years, Werba was able to keep his staff largely intact. When the city re-established its Department of Abstracting and Annexation in 1946, to quote an observer, “there was a core of experienced annexation personnel who had only to change their job classification titles, hire one new annexation solicitor and one new stenographer and re-open their annexation files to again be in the ‘annexation business.’”⁷⁷ In 1929, Werba proclaimed the political unification of the towns, villages, and cities of Milwaukee

⁷⁵ *Milwaukee Journal*, April 24, 1949, Annexation Clipping File, MPL.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Charles Goff, “The Politics of Governmental Integration in Metropolitan Milwaukee” Ph.D. Diss., Northwestern University, 1952, 96.

County was “inevitable.” Now, two years after World War II, he—and the city—had another chance to realize the inevitable. “It’s the 1920’s all over again,” Werba told a local newspaper in 1947, predicting renewed conflict between city and suburbs.⁷⁸ The stakes had risen, however. Whatever the causes of inner city decay, the problem was real enough for the Common Council to announce in one of its resolutions that without annexation of vacant land, Milwaukee would simply “die” as a city.⁷⁹

Planned decentralization in Milwaukee had direct antecedents during the interwar period and metropolitan issues never left the table. As the next chapter demonstrates, new forces motivated these policies: namely, nuclear-age fears of wholesale atomic destruction. These new fears only reinforced the will of public officials to make Milwaukee mightier through a program of community building unmatched in scale and vision across the United States.

⁷⁸ *Milwaukee Journal*, August 8, 1947.

⁷⁹ *Milwaukee Journal*, November 23, 1949.

Chapter 4: Civil Defense, Greenbelts, and the Rise and Fall of the Satellite City

Milwaukee's model of urban renewal as planned dispersal became the vehicle to achieve a higher quality of life, to attack the postwar housing shortage, and to provide for future industrial expansion. None of these components differed materially from the dreams of Charles Whitnall, Daniel Hoan, and others in the 1920's. Planned decentralization had been a stated goal of various Milwaukee leaders for thirty years. The one new motivation for urban dispersal that was unique to postwar America was civil defense.

With a few exceptions, historians have paid very little attention to civil defense in the context of postwar urbanism.¹ However, in the midst of the Cold War, city planners and other national and local government officials made civil defense an integral part of the postwar urban planning discourse. Michael Dudley recently argued in an article that federal agencies encouraged low-density development on the periphery of cities to lessen vulnerability to nuclear attack. This encouragement, Dudley noted, was given legal sanction in the 1954 Housing Act, when the Housing and Home Finance Agency was charged with "facilitating progress in the reduction of vulnerability of congested areas to enemy attack."² Dudley argues that federal policy regarding civil defense contributed to metropolitan sprawl.

In fact, federal agencies were concerned about the possibility of atomic attacks on American cities almost from the moment bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and

¹ The most notable exceptions are a recent article by Michael Dudley, "Sprawl as Strategy: City Planners Face the Bomb," *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, Vol. 21, No. 1, pp. 52-63, and Jennifer Light, *From Warfare to Welfare: Defense Intellectuals and Urban Problems in Cold War America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), pp 10-31.

² Dudley, 53.

Nagasaki. A year after the war, the federal government produced a document titled “The United States Strategic Bombing Survey” that examined the damage to the two Japanese cities. The study asked the question ““What if the target of the bomb had been an American city?””³ The answers were unnerving, as the survey predictably concluded that “the overwhelming bulk of the buildings in American cities could not stand up against an atomic bomb bursting a mile or a mile and a half from them.” And even though Japanese cities were, on whole, more densely populated than cities in America, by day Manhattan contained more than double the number of people per square mile than Nagasaki. The only way to counter such devastation was “a reshaping and partial dispersal of national centers of activity”.⁴

The Strategic Bombing Survey was the first document to address what became a puzzling new problem for city planners and other government officials. How vulnerable were American cities to nuclear attack? What kinds of policies should cities adopt to prepare for attack? To answer these questions, cities began to rely on the expertise of certain city planners, atomic scientists, and ex-military officials, all of whom rather expediently became civil defense “experts,” both official and unofficial.

Foremost among city planners with civil defense credentials was Tracy Augur, an early member of the Regional Planning Association of America (RPAA) who had served as president of the American Institute of Planners in the 1940’s. After the war, Augur began to focus on urban problems in a nuclear age. By 1949, with the Soviet Union firmly behind the Iron Curtain, Augur noted that any hope that war could be avoided

³ *United States Strategic Bombing Survey*, June 1946, p. 36.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

“through international agreement” seemed remote.⁵ Worse yet, the target area cities presented had been growing continuously through amorphous urban expansion. To reduce the target area, Augur called for a planned dispersal that would allow the United States “to achieve a pattern of dispersed small cities located singly (*sic*), in small clusters, and in large metropolitan agglomerations that will give it the advantages of a highly developed urban civilization.”⁶ The ideal form of the new metropolitan landscape was “areas of industry concentration less than five miles, or urban concentrations of less than 50,000 people, separated by about ten miles of relatively open country.”⁷ To Augur, the nuclear bomb had instantly made the American city obsolete in its current form and logic dictated that it be replaced: “We do not hesitate to scrap an obsolete factory and rebuild it on new lines if it is failing to keep pace with the demands of national production; why should not the same course be applied to American cities?”⁸

Atomic scientists also quickly came to believe that permanent decentralization of urban areas was the best preventative measure against nuclear attack. The most vocal atomic expert who proposed decentralization was Randolph E. Lapp, a scientist who had worked on the Manhattan Project during the war and, like Augur, had become concerned with the bomb’s destructive power on American cities. In a 1949 book called *Must We Hide?* Lapp compared the nuclear age with the industrial revolution in its potential for forcing social change, particularly for cities. Lapp’s solution for safety paralleled Augur’s and he called for an immediate federal policy to reduce congestion. To Lapp,

⁵ Augur, Tracy, “Decentralization Can’t Wait,” *Appraisal Journal*, January 1949, p. 108.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

⁷ Augur, Tracy, “National Security Factors in Industrial Location,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, Vol 4, No. 10, p. 317.

⁸ Augur, Tracy, “The Dispersal of Cities as a Defense Measure,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, Vol. 4, No. 5, p. 132.

lessening nuclear vulnerability was a serious military concern; accordingly, under his model American cities were to be decentralized through the existing \$15 billion defense budget.

Lapp was also gravely concerned about the proper dimensions cities should take to maximize safety. He formulated three new urban models that would be adequate for civil defense. The first was the “rod-shaped city,” essentially an elongated ribbon, with the business district stretched along a few streets over ten miles. Residential and industrial districts were to be located at least two miles from the business district, separated from each other by parks, museums, golf courses, and green space, all of which were to act in part as fire breaks. Highways would connect the business district with the periphery at varying points along the rod. The second was the “satellite city” a circular arrangement with the central business district built around a park at the center, and residents and industry again located on the periphery, separated from the business district by parks, cultural institutions, and open spaces, again with highways radiating out of the center circle to connect to the outlying districts. Finally, the “doughnut city” was also circular, but with only an airport at the center and businesses, residences, and green spaces situated in loops surrounding the airport. In this model, industry was to be located even beyond the “doughnut,” in outlying areas connected to highways.⁹

Lapp’s models were not entirely revolutionary. Numerous city planners had called for smaller, compact cities that were efficiently organized in varying degrees and forms. It is also difficult to gauge Lapp’s influence on American city planners on a national level. The cost of implementing even small parts of the plan would have been astronomical. However, Lapp was not a lone voice in calling for a new urban form that

⁹ Ralph E. Lapp, *Must We Hide?* (Cambridge, MA; Adison-Wesley Press, 1949).

made proper civil defense provisions. In a 1948 issue of the *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, J. Marshak, E. Teller, and L.R. Klein argued that “ribbon” or “linear” cities were ideal urban forms because they presented no obvious target to a nuclear bomb. Recognizing that “complete dispersal” was impossible because of the nature of the American economy and that dense clusters were the most vulnerable urban formation, Marshak, Teller, and Klein believed that ribbon developments provided an adequate compromise between the two.¹⁰

Urban officials concerned with civil defense confronted an obvious problem. Even if Augur was correct—that cities *were* obsolete in the nuclear age—wishing them out of existence was by mere common sense impossible. Robert Moses, the famed New York City Parks Commissioner, dismissed urban planners who favored dispersion as myopic when he wrote “Even if dispersion for military reasons were logical, most people would still regard it as fantastic, absurd, and contemptible... Those who think we should scrap plans and substitute a revolutionary program of total reconstruction and dispersion are just a little bit mad.”¹¹ Rebuilding any city, let alone New York, was of course impossible. However, guiding future growth in a proper manner was an achievable goal. The postwar housing shortage, the lack of industrial space within cities for expansion, and the apparent social problems that accompanied congestion all could be addressed if cities were dispersed. New cities, whether formed as satellites, rods, ribbons or doughnuts, would provide more conveniently spaced new housing and room for industrial

¹⁰ Marchak, J., Teller, E., and Klein, L.R. “Dispersal of Cities and Industries,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, Vol. 1, No. 9, pp 13-16.

¹¹ As quoted in a letter from Harry Bogner and Fritz Grossman to Frank Zeidler, January 24, 1949, Folder 3, Box 142, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

expansion. Though still relatively compact, the new urban form would be far less congested than the compact industrial city.

Planned dispersion was a viable option in the context of postwar urban renewal and one that Milwaukee city officials did vigorously pursue throughout the twelve years of Frank Zeidler's mayoralty. Urban civil defense dovetailed with Zeidler's own sensibilities about the American city. To Zeidler, congestion inevitably bred a poorer quality of life. Acute shortages of land for new homes and industry already threatened to squeeze cities into obsolescence. Civil defense was only another reason for Milwaukee to engage in a planned decentralization that would make the metropolis not only more humane and efficient, but safer from nuclear attack as well. Even if urban renewal as dispersal was not popular with the general public, it could be justified by the principles of civil defense. Zeidler endorsed civil defense as public policy almost immediately upon taking office in 1948. In June of that year, he formed the Civil Defense Disaster Relief Committee, which agreed that local planning had to be coordinated with state and federal civil defense efforts. In 1951, the position of civil defense director was made permanent. And in 1952, to more fully coordinate defense planning, the Milwaukee common council created a separate Department of Civil Defense.

Throughout the postwar era, Milwaukee prepared itself for nuclear holocaust as best it could. When the city issued 100,000 civil defense questionnaires to its public schools, 66% of the recipients replied.¹² Emergency rescue trucks, nicknamed "Calamity Janes," were built.¹³ In 1960, the city received a \$200,000 federal grant for the

¹²1960 *Directory and Report of the Common Council*, p. 1, Marquette Memorial Library

¹³1955 *Directory and Report of the Common Council*, p. 44, Marquette Memorial Library

construction of a fallout shelter in the new public museum.¹⁴ Over 3,600 block wardens were appointed to work in conjunction with the Milwaukee police.¹⁵ In 1955 alone, public activity related to civil defense in Milwaukee was staggering. That year, every family in Milwaukee received evacuation guides. The civil defense speaker's bureau gave 198 talks to varying organizations and groups regarding civil defense.

Approximately 10,000 people attended the sessions. Radio and television time donated to the Civil Defense Department amounted to roughly 2,149 separate time units. A total of 24,403 people in the Milwaukee area watched 255 showings of civil defense films. A civil defense newsletter was sent out to over 9,000 "volunteers" each month.¹⁶

Because civil defense became so publicly prominent in Milwaukee in the postwar era, city officials were able to connect its importance to the trajectory of Milwaukee's urban transformation as well. Zeidler became an important enough civil defense expert in his own right to merit an invitation by the federal government to witness the detonation of an atomic bomb in Nevada in 1952. The chilling experience moved him to say, "No one who has seen this phenomenon can appreciate its beauty and horrifying power."¹⁷ Zeidler regularly communicated with civil defense experts, most prominently Lapp, whose book he much admired and which he distributed to Krieger and Deputy Civil Defense Director George Parkinson.¹⁸ Upon reading *Must We Hide?* Krieger wrote Zeidler that he was confident that Lapp's study "provides a compelling argument in support of Milwaukee's past and present approach to city planning."¹⁹ "The aim or our

¹⁴ 1961 *Directory and Report of the Common Council*, p. 44, Marquette Memorial Library

¹⁵ 1953 *Directory and Report of the Common Council*, p. 41, Marquette Memorial Library

¹⁶ *Civil Defense Program of Development, 1955-1956*, Milwaukee Public Library.

¹⁷ "Observer's Report of Atomic Test at Nevada Proving Ground" by Frank Zeidler, 1952, MPL.

¹⁸ Letter from Frank Zeidler to Ralph E. Lapp, April 4, 1951, Folder 7, Box 142, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

¹⁹ Letter from Elmer Krieger to Frank Zeidler, July 18, 1949, Folder 2, Box 191, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

zoning ordinance,” Krieger wrote, “seeks to spread the city horizontally rather than vertically,” as did the city’s annexation policy.²⁰ Administrative assistant John Kugler also agreed that Milwaukee’s plans were in concert with Lapp’s, but worried that Milwaukee did not have the suitable parks and green spaces that separated residential business, and industrial districts as fire breaks in event of nuclear attack.²¹ Civil defense consultant George Parkinson, an officer in the Naval Reserve, also concluded that planned dispersal fit into civil defense principles.

The nature of postwar urban planning in Milwaukee was thus established. Planned dispersion could transform Milwaukee into the long-dreamed-of decentralized metropolis. By reaching outward rather than upward, Milwaukee would keep pace with urban growth while providing the measure of safety that civil defense and planning experts dictated. The “three-tiered” urban redevelopment program could commence apace.

Milwaukee’s first opportunity to engage in planned dispersal came about almost by accident. At the end of World War II, the federal government began to make plans to sell off the three Greenbelt towns that had been developed in Maryland, Ohio, and Wisconsin during the Depression.²² Greendale, located ten miles south and west of Milwaukee, had only seen 572 housing units built out of an initial plan to develop over 3,000 units in the village’s 3,400 acres. In 1945, Elbert Peets, one of Greendale’s original planners, finished a government-sponsored plan to add 3,000 more housing units in neighborhood

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Letter from John Kugler to Frank Zeidler, August 2, 1949, Folder 3, Box 142, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

²² The most complete history of the Greenbelt towns remains Joe Arnold, *The New Deal in the Suburbs: A History of the Greenbelt Town Program* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1971).

clusters surrounding the original village. According to Greendale historians Arnold Alannin and Joseph Eden, Peets's plan "became the model for all subsequent public and private planning in the village."²³ Peets's greatest wish in planning for Greendale's addition was to preserve the garden city principles that had made it so appealing a place to live. Even though the 1945 plan was formulated without any guarantee of construction, with the housing shortage growing more severe by the day, Greendale's open land seemed as conducive to development as any in the region.

When the federal government announced its intentions to sell off the three greenbelt towns after the war, surprisingly few groups showed interest in buying and developing them.²⁴ One significant exception came from Milwaukee and within Greendale, possibly because the new Peets plan made development here seem more feasible. A group of veterans concerned about the lack of housing formulated a plan to purchase Greendale from the federal government upon passage of legislation that enabled the sales to commence. Upon purchase of Greendale, the open land around the original town could thus be developed as housing for veterans of the war in accordance with Peets's plans of 1945. Arthur Marcus, a Greendale resident, became the federal government's first serious bidder. Marcus had served in the Merchant Marines during World War Two and subsequently became a national advocate for veterans housing.²⁵ Marcus served on the American Legion's National Housing Committee and he saw in Greendale an opportunity to build the housing units that thousands of veterans needed in

²³ Arnold Allanin and Joseph Eden, *Main Street Ready Made: The New Deal Community of Greendale* Madison, The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1987, p. 76.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.76-78

²⁵ Allanin Arnold, and Eden, Joseph, *Main Street Ready Made: The New Deal Community of Greendale* p. 78.

the aftermath of the war.²⁶ To support his bid for Greendale, Marcus organized the American Legion Community Development Corporation (ALCDC) and, in October of 1948, the national convention of the American Legion approved of Marcus's plan.²⁷

Seeking adequate funding, Marcus canvassed local civic officials in both Greendale and Milwaukee and quickly found newly elected mayor Zeidler to be receptive. Zeidler, who had worked on Greendale in the 1930's, greatly admired its Garden City principles. With Milwaukee's housing shortage growing more acute by the day, Zeidler, like Marcus, saw in the potential purchase of Greendale the opportunity to build much-needed new housing for veterans. More importantly, Zeidler was becoming an advocate of publicly funded community development on his own. In August, 1948, Zeidler solicited ex-mayor Daniel Hoan's advice, based on Hoan's experience when developing Milwaukee's Garden Homes project in the 1920's. Hoan advised Zeidler to "eliminate the middle man" by having the city act as its own general contractor to mitigate construction costs.²⁸ Zeidler liked this idea enough to recommend to Perrin to have the housing authority give it due attention. The ALCDC's invitation to have Milwaukee act as a primary investor in buying Greendale provided the first opportunity for the city to gain greater control in planning on the periphery, if not as general contractor than at least as a possible investor.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Letter from Frank Zeidler to Richard Perrin, July 7, 1948, Folder 6, Box 176, Zeidler Papers, MPL.



Proposed Greendale Addition

Folder 7, Box 177, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

Wisconsin state law permitted Milwaukee to buy stock in building companies provided that construction took place within three miles of city limits.²⁹ Most but not all of Greendale's 3,400 acres were within these boundaries. Confident of the project's legalities, Zeidler publicly announced his support of the ALCDC's efforts on October 15, 1948, alluding to the housing shortage by saying that "the city is interested from the point of view of encouraging any groups, based on the principle of self-help, to put up homes."³⁰ Next, Zeidler turned to the Common Council, which proved equally impressed by the ALCDC's plan. On December 7, 1948, council members voted to approve the purchase of all of the preferred stock of the ALCDC, at a sum of \$300,000.³¹ Because the city of Milwaukee had invested so heavily in the corporation, it was given substantial representation on the ALCDC's Board of Directors, with Zeidler, three aldermen, two city attorneys, and the city comptroller joining three Greendale residents and an American Legion official on the Board. Marcus, one of the three Greendale residents on the Board, was elected the ALCDC's president.³²

Marcus and other ALCDC officials spent much of the winter of 1948-1949 in Washington DC, trying to convince the federal government to make Greendale more affordable by passing a new law that ended competitive bidding for the greenbelt towns and instead replace it with direct negotiations. Zeidler and Alderman Milton McGuire testified before the Senate Committee on Banking and Currency in February, 1949, arguing that Milwaukee's community development efforts were solid solutions to the present housing shortage. The ALCDC was also greatly helped by Wisconsin Senator

²⁹ Letter from Frank Zeidler to Walter Mattison, September 14, 1948, Folder 4, Box 176, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

³⁰ Statement by Frank Zeidler, October 15, 1948, Folder 4, Box 176,m Zeidler Papers, MPL.

³¹ *Milwaukee Journal*, December 7, 1948

³² Allanin and Eden, *Main Street Ready Made*,. 79.

Joseph McCarthy and Representative Clement Zablocki, whose district included Greendale. McCarthy was especially enthusiastic to the ALCDC given its ties to the American Legion and its promise of housing for war veterans.³³ Congress acquiesced by passing a new bill that eliminated competitive bidding and allowed for direct negotiations between federal housing officials and potential purchasers. President Harry S. Truman signed the new law on May 19, 1949. With all legal hurdles now cleared and a favorable status in Congress, the ALCDC seemed perfectly positioned to complete the sale. Further approval of the sale was provided, unsolicited, when the Greendale Village Board voted to support the ALCDC on May 3, 1949.³⁴ A perfect opportunity to develop the fringe had fallen into Milwaukee's lap

Once the sale was complete, as primary stockholder in the ALCDC Milwaukee could theoretically petition *itself* for annexation and give its entire expansion program an enormous jump-start. For Milwaukee officials, the development of Greendale was not merely a way to construct a large amount of homes for veterans, but an early step in the execution of planned dispersal. Greendale's garden city scale represented a desirable urban form that could be replicated in other vacant areas near the city. In February, 1949, Zeidler told Greendale Village President Walter Kroening that Milwaukee was considering another "townsite development" to the northwest.³⁵ Krieger was enlisted to provide both Kroening and the federal government with a brief explanation of Milwaukee's community development program. Krieger wrote that urban redevelopment "cannot be carried out without community development programs." Milwaukee was

³³ Arnold, *The New Deal in the Suburbs*, 234-235.

³⁴ Greendale Village Board Minutes, April 19, 1949, Book 2, Greendale Village Hall, Greendale, Wisconsin.

³⁵ Letter from Frank Zeidler to Walter Kroening, February 9, 1949, Folder 2, Box 190, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

ready to engage in such projects “but its ultimate success begins with the public ownership of adequate, properly located acreage.”³⁶ In this context, Greendale was only one component of Milwaukee’s eventual decentralization; Krieger wrote Zeidler that “Greendale is not an immediate answer but serves rather as a long pull project.”³⁷

But the purchase faltered. Critical to this failure of the ALCDC were suburban residents who feared annexation to the central city and desired local control over development, a type of group that would become all too familiar to Milwaukee. Both Zeidler and the Milwaukee Common Council had supported the financing of the ALCDC under the assumption that eventually Greendale would be dissolved and folded into Milwaukee.³⁸ Werba was enlisted and began trying to annex land to Milwaukee’s south to allow the city to border Greendale, thus making the consolidation legal. When Milwaukee’s intentions became public in the summer of 1949, support for the ALCDC within Greendale dropped considerably. *The Greendale Review*, the village’s local newspaper, vigorously opposed the sale of the village to the ALCDC in part because it promised annexation. In an open letter to Zeidler on July 22, the paper asked “Do you think that for moment the city of Milwaukee will colonize (annex) Greendale using the same despotic methods employed by the British in the Revolutionary War days?”³⁹ When a rival group of veterans called the Greendale Veteran’s Cooperative Housing Association (GVCHA) put forth its own plan for the village’s purchase, the village board voted to hold a referendum to allow citizens to choose between the two plans. Spurred

³⁶ Letter from Elmer Krieger to Frank Zeidler, February 14, 1949, Folder 2, Box 191, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

³⁷ Letter from Elmer Krieger to Frank Zeidler, May 20, 1949, Folder 2, Box 191, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

³⁸ See, for example, Letter from Frank Zeidler to Senator Joseph McCarthy, November 30, 1948, Folder 7, Box 177, Zeidler Papers, MPL, *Milwaukee Journal*, August 24, 1949

³⁹ *Greendale Review*, July 22, 1949, also quoted in Arnold Allanin and Joseph Eden, *Main Street Ready Made*, p. 83.

on by the *Review*, which in an editorial shortly before the referendum characterized a vote for the ALCDC as essentially a vote against personal freedom, village residents voted against the ALCDC's plan by the overwhelming margin of 621 to 98.⁴⁰ In the village board elections that following spring, every pro-ALCDC candidate up for re-election was swept out of office.⁴¹ Even though these votes were not direct statements on annexation, the message was clear: the ALCDC may have been the handpicked favorite of the federal government and Milwaukee, but Greendale residents had little use for the group.

In fact, the failed purchase of Greendale was not based solely on opposition to annexation, but also on the expressed desire of suburban residents to control their own destiny. Even before the summer of 1949, the ALCDC had done an extremely poor job of informing Greendale residents of its plans and intentions. When the initial ALCDC delegation left for Washington in December 1948 to garner Congressional support, they did so without informing the village board. The board responded with an angry telegram to President Truman and five Wisconsin Congressmen informing them that "the village of Greendale board of trustees, who represent the residents, have never been consulted by said legion group and therefore speak entirely without our or the resident's (*sic*) authority."⁴² Even when the village board eventually did vote to support the ALCDC plan, it did so at a special session at which no one from the general public was allowed to speak and over the dissenting votes of three board members.⁴³ Greendale's village

⁴⁰ *Milwaukee Journal*, August 24, 1949.

⁴¹ *Greendale Review*, April 14, 1950.

⁴² Memo from Greendale Village Board to Frank Zeidler, December 8, 1948, Folder 7, Box 177, Zeidler Papers, MPL, *Milwaukee Journal*, December 9, 1948

⁴³ Greendale Village Board Minutes, April 19, 1949, Book 2, Greendale Village Hall, Greendale, Wisconsin. *Greendale Review*, April 29, 1949.

attorney stated at the meeting that he had no real idea of what the ALCDC's plan entailed. Greendale residents also were bitter that their future was being decided arbitrarily. ALCDC President Marcus testified before Congress that village residents would have to absorb anywhere from 30 to 60% rent increases to make the project viable; the *Review* responded by inviting Marcus to lay out exactly what type of increases the ALCDC intended to levy. Marcus never responded, much to the paper's chagrin.⁴⁴ A public meeting of Greendale residents on July 17 revealed still more anger at the ALCDC's perceived paternalism, with one resident complaining that Marcus and the ALCDC had falsely implied to Congress that a majority of residents supported the veteran's group.⁴⁵

Greendale residents were motivated by a desire for local control and instead supported a second veteran's group, the Greendale Veterans Cooperative Housing Association (GVCHA). The *Review* periodically reminded its readers that this group, unlike the ALCDC, was made up entirely of village residents. The GVCHA commanded strong public support even though the group did not possess adequate funds to execute the purchase of the village. Because of this, Congress refused to enter into negotiations with the GVCHA. But even faced with this reality, the forces of local control proved strong. In the spring 1950, Greendale residents voted onto the village board a majority of officials who endorsed the GVCHA.⁴⁶

Zeidler tried to convince Greendale residents of Milwaukee's best intentions, writing the village manager in December of 1948 that whatever development did take

⁴⁴ See *Greendale Review*, September 3, 1948, September 17, 1948, and March 4, 1949.

⁴⁵ *Greendale Review*, July 22, 1949

⁴⁶ *Greendale Review*, April 14, 1950.

place in Greendale would be in line with Charles Whitnall's garden city principles.⁴⁷ But by advocating expansion, city officials had placed themselves in an unenviable position, one that they found themselves in time and again throughout the postwar era. Milwaukee's intentions to decentralize and unify the metropolis were increasingly viewed by suburban residents as hegemonic. Expansion was contingent upon acquiescence of residents in areas to be annexed; Milwaukee officials all too often assumed that residents on the outskirts supported the city's expansion. When Werba began to explore the feasibility of annexation of Greendale, he wrote the Common Council on July 15, 1949: "as is usually the case, the opposition appears to radiate from a minority of village officials and employees."⁴⁸ Just one month later, Greendale residents proved him wrong by overwhelmingly voting down the ALCDC.

Technically, even with Greendale residents officially opposed to the ALCDC, the federal government could have awarded the purchase to the embattled group. The referendum had no legal standing. But in its wake, it had become clear that the project was in peril. Further complicating matters, Arthur Marcus suddenly died and when the city of Milwaukee began to demand increased representation on the ALCDC board and the Legion resisted, it became clear that the project had faltered.⁴⁹ The ALCDC dissolved in 1951 and Milwaukee had to take the group to court to recoup its \$300,000 investment.⁵⁰ Other public housing projects for war veterans were completed, and all were located several miles away from the central business district, as city officials

⁴⁷ Letter from Frank Zeidler to Robert Eppley, Greendale Village Manager, December 10, 1948, Folder 7, Box 177, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

⁴⁸ Memo from Arthur Werba to the Milwaukee Common Council, July 15, 1949, Folder 7, Box 177, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

⁴⁹ Arnold, *The New Deal in the Suburbs*, p. 235, Arnold Fleischmann, *The Politics of Annexation and Urban Development: A Clash of Two Paradigms*, Ph.D. Diss., University of Texas-Austin, 1984.

⁵⁰ Allanin and Eden, *Main Street Ready Made*, 83-84.

intended. However, when 4,000 people applied to live in the 578 units finished by 1949, it was obvious that the housing shortage remained severe.

For his part, Zeidler managed to at least partially maintain Greendale's garden city heritage. He later managed to convince a group of Milwaukee civic leaders to form a consortium to buy the land surrounding the original village and develop it according to Peets's original plans.⁵¹ Greendale's garden city heritage maintained, but Milwaukee had failed in its initial attempt to control growth on the periphery.

Greendale was by no means Milwaukee's sole attempt to gain control of decentralization. City officials were planning an even larger community development project northwest of the city. Their goal was to create a comprehensive "satellite city" of homes, parks, industry, and retail, which would provide public and private housing for a variety of income groups. This "Northwest Community" would prove to be one of the most ambitious development projects attempted by any city in the postwar era. Like Greendale, it was ultimately defeated, not by poor administration or management, but by recalcitrant suburban and rural residents.

Almost from the date of his election, Zeidler and many of Milwaukee's planners had envisioned development of a complete community. City planners quickly decided that vacant areas northwest of the city were the best suited for development. Here, Milwaukee previously had made the most progress in its annexation program. Most of the city's major railroads ran to the northwest as well, meaning that land here would be better suited for industrial expansion.

⁵¹ Ibid., 87-88.

On December 11, 1948, Zeidler and Alvin Bromm of the BPLC publicly announced the city's intentions to develop one or two "huge communities" on the Northwest Side. Zeidler endorsed the project, saying "it is my hope that the city will not do things in driblets next year but start something on a more massive, community-sized scale."⁵² The project called for the city to annex and improve the land by adding streets, lights, water and sewer extensions, and stringent zoning requirements to segregate potential industrial, residential, commercial, and recreational areas. The city of Milwaukee was to purchase the vacant land and either sell it off to developers or set up long term leases.⁵³

To better coordinate planning the new satellite city between varying city departments, Zeidler asked Krieger to form a committee consisting of three aldermen, Werba, another city planner, and a local builder to look for proper sites.⁵⁴ The Common Council was enlisted to provide money for negotiations to purchase the vacant land. Council members followed through on April 11, 1949, approving an initial sum of \$25,000 as initial start up money to find an adequate location for the planned community. The *Milwaukee Journal* heartily endorsed Milwaukee's initial plans, noting that no large-scale housing starts had begun in Milwaukee in part because no single developer owned enough land to commence such a project.⁵⁵ In any case, Milwaukee was acting the part of "general contractor" as Hoan had earlier advised Zeidler.

The satellite city project quickly garnered national attention. With the National Housing Act being debated and eventually signed into law in 1949, cities scrambled to

⁵² *Milwaukee Journal*, December 11, 1948

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Untitled Memo, February 1, 1949, Folder 2, Box 190, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

⁵⁵ *Milwaukee Journal*, April 13, 1949

ensure that projects would conform to the legislation's stipulations. For Zeidler and Milwaukee officials, the housing act's "vacant land" provision inserted into Title I seemed to be a key component. This provision permitted cities to obtain loans to purchase open land, provided housing was constructed in a timely manner. For city officials, federal money was potentially available to help Milwaukee acquire land to establish its satellite city. In fact, while the housing act was being debated in Congress, Zeidler had filed a brief explaining Milwaukee's community development ideas to Senator John Sparkman of Alabama, who sat on the Banking and Currency Committee that was debating the bill. The brief arrived too late to be published in the official Congressional Record, but Sparkman assured Zeidler that it was helpful.⁵⁶ Other prominent officials—including Catherine Bauer—later credited Zeidler with helping ensure the inclusion of the vacant lands provision in the housing act.⁵⁷

The Regional Planning Association also expressed interest in Milwaukee's satellite city. Krieger explained to the association that while metropolitan government via city-county consolidation was of vital interest to Milwaukee, the "next best bet" to unify the metropolis was large-scale projects like Greendale and the "northwest community." Krieger also explained Milwaukee's conception of urban renewal as planned dispersal when he told the Region Planning Association that "planning must simultaneously attack on two fronts: it must plan for the old, built-up sections, and for the new, unimproved sections. But planning development in the newer sections is cheaper and usually more

⁵⁶ Memo from Mayor's Office to Elmer Krieger, February 9, 1949, Folder 2, Box 190, Zeidler Papers, MPL, Letter from Frank Zeidler to Andrew Biemiller, March 8, 1949, Folder 7, Box 115, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

⁵⁷ Letter from Catherine Bauer to Frank Zeidler, January 6, 1950, Folder 2, Box 191, Zeidler Papers, MPL. Also see Letter from William Wheaton, Professor of Planning, University of Pennsylvania to Frank Zeidler, February 8, 1954, Folder 3, Box 177, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

effective than in the older sections, and in general can provide large numbers of living units in a desirable environment at the most economical cost.”⁵⁸ Zeidler also described Milwaukee’s plans for satellite communities to the National Housing Conference and the US Conference of Mayors. Zeidler’s explanation of the push for satellite communities was again firmly in the context of urban renewal, as he wrote: “I first broached the idea of building satellite communities to the City of Milwaukee as a means to overcoming the housing shortage and of meeting the slum clearance problem.”⁵⁹ Satellite cities could “fundamentally attack the problem of blight in the city” by re-housing thousands of families who were to be potentially displaced by urban renewal.⁶⁰

Perhaps the most notable housing advocate who registered excitement over the project was housing reformer Catherine Bauer, then serving as a professor at Harvard University. Following a visit to Milwaukee in December 1949, she praised the satellite city idea to the *Milwaukee Journal*, calling it one of the best in the country.⁶¹ Bauer essentially repeated this to Zeidler, later writing him that “from my viewpoint at least, your scheme to purchase and annex the site for a satellite community, to include industry as well as private and public housing, is the most progressive and significant move being made in the whole field of city planning and housing in America today.”⁶² Bauer was also hopeful that Milwaukee could obtain federal funding made available by the Wagner Housing Act via the vacant land provision. In a speech to the National Housing Conference the following year, Bauer stated that “Milwaukee’s scheme for a complete

⁵⁸ “A Northwest Community Development Plan” by Elmer Krieger, December 1949, Wisconsin—Milwaukee Folder, Carton 33, Catherine Bauer Wurster Papers, Bancroft Library, University of California-Berkeley

⁵⁹ Letter from Frank Zeidler to Paul Betters, US Conference of Mayors, and Lee Johnson, National Housing Conference, February 11, 1949, Folder 1, Box 177, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ *Milwaukee Journal*, December 13, 1949.

⁶² Letter from Catherine Bauer to Frank Zeidler, January 6, 1950, Folder 2, Box 191, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

and balanced community as a first step toward central redevelopment, seem to me at least to hold the key to successful use of the tools of the housing act, in the immediate future.”⁶³

For Milwaukee officials, satellite community development comprised a key part of urban renewal. The heightening of the Cold War in addition made civil defense an equally compelling justification to develop satellite cities. After learning of the development of the hydrogen bomb, Krieger wrote Zeidler that “we ought to spread out anyhow, H-bomb or no H-Bomb.”⁶⁴ For their part, civil defense officials in Milwaukee, all firm proponents of decentralization of the kind favored by R.E. Lapp and Tracy Augur, were heartened that Milwaukee’s city planners also had always advocated dispersion for its own sake. Deputy civil defense commissioner George Parkinson wrote that “the city of Milwaukee has been very fortunate in having for many years the benefits of city planning of the Milwaukee City Planning Commission,” who had advocated decentralization since its early years under Charles Whitnall.⁶⁵ And since civil defense seemed to demand population dispersion, it clearly fit into Milwaukee’s postwar plans.

When city officials chose a different site for the satellite city, one much further into the countryside than the initial two square mile plot near 60th and Mill Rd., they did so in part to better coordinate the city’s expansion with civil defense concerns. By early 1951, over nine square miles in Waukesha County, just beyond the tiny village of Butler, were chosen as the new site for a still larger satellite community. Five years earlier,

⁶³ “Redevelopment and Public Housing,” transcript of a speech made by Catherine Bauer to the American Society of Planning Officials Conference, August 15, 1950, Carton 3, Catherine Bauer Wurster Papers. Bancroft Library, University of California-Berkeley. The speech is also mentioned in an undated memo from Elmer Krieger to the Board of Public Land Commissioners, Folder 5, Box 19, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

⁶⁴ Letter from Elmer Krieger to Frank Zeidler, March 27, 1950, Folder 2, Box 191, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

⁶⁵ “Dispersion Planning in Milwaukee” by George Parkinson, Folder 5, Box 190, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

Werba had annexed a five-mile long and 330 foot wide strip of land along Hampton Avenue to access the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad yards at the border of Milwaukee and Waukesha Counties.⁶⁶ Werba had done so in part to gain access to this as yet undeveloped but potentially valuable industrial real estate and also to give Milwaukee a window to neighboring Waukesha County, where ample vacant land existed that city officials believed was bound to be urbanized.

On January 31, 1951, in a speech before the Milwaukee Press Club, Zeidler hinted what was to come by announcing that city planners were about to release a more detailed plan for the city's expansion. Zeidler told the club that, eventually, Milwaukee would eventually develop several satellite cities that would extend into five neighboring counties, and all would be spread out enough from each other to make the region an uninviting nuclear target. This type of planning, Zeidler argued, was pro-active and creative as he told the Press Club: "I believe we must challenge the imagination of the people."⁶⁷

The Milwaukee region's imagination was duly challenged the following month when a report on the scope and nature of the satellite city written by Krieger was made public. In it, Krieger acknowledged that the planning staff had worked closely with civil defense officials to shape the new satellite community into an urban form that would be sufficiently less vulnerable to nuclear attack. The site consisted of 9.6 square miles of what was mostly agricultural land west of Butler. The plan called for the city to purchase the land and, as in Greendale, subsequently petition itself for annexation. 4.7 square miles were set aside for housing of all types, private and public, large and small lots, and

⁶⁶ *Milwaukee Sentinel*, December 15, 1946, Annexation Clipping File, MPL.

⁶⁷ *Milwaukee Journal*, February 1, 1951.

single-family homes and low-rise apartments. 50-75,000 people would live here in population densities roughly comprised of 17 to 25 persons per acre. Curvilinear streets replaced the urban grid, prompting applause from one local writer who believed that grid planning “has made Milwaukee and a hundred other cities dangerous, dreary, and expensive.”⁶⁸ The report noted that “both business and industrial land uses are necessary in creating a self-sustaining suburb” and consequently 1,000 acres were set aside for industry and 120 acres were dedicated to retail.⁶⁹ The remaining 2,000 acres were to serve as greenbelts and parks, echoing Ebenezer Howard and Charles Whitnall’s justification of quality of life and R.E. Lapp’s justification of civil defense. By owning the land and selling or leasing it, Milwaukee could “control its destiny” and thus better plan for the eventual decentralization of the metropolis.⁷⁰

Civil defense concerns rang throughout the report. Krieger acknowledged that “there will always be cities because of their obvious economic, social, cultural, and educational advantages.... but our compact, congested cities of today no longer offer protection.” Were cities to survive, they could no longer be built as compactly as they had in the past. Instead, “in the long run, planned dispersion is by far the city’s most practical, effective, and least expensive defense against air attack.”⁷¹ As a local newspaper later put it, the plan would “protect the city by scattering it.”⁷²

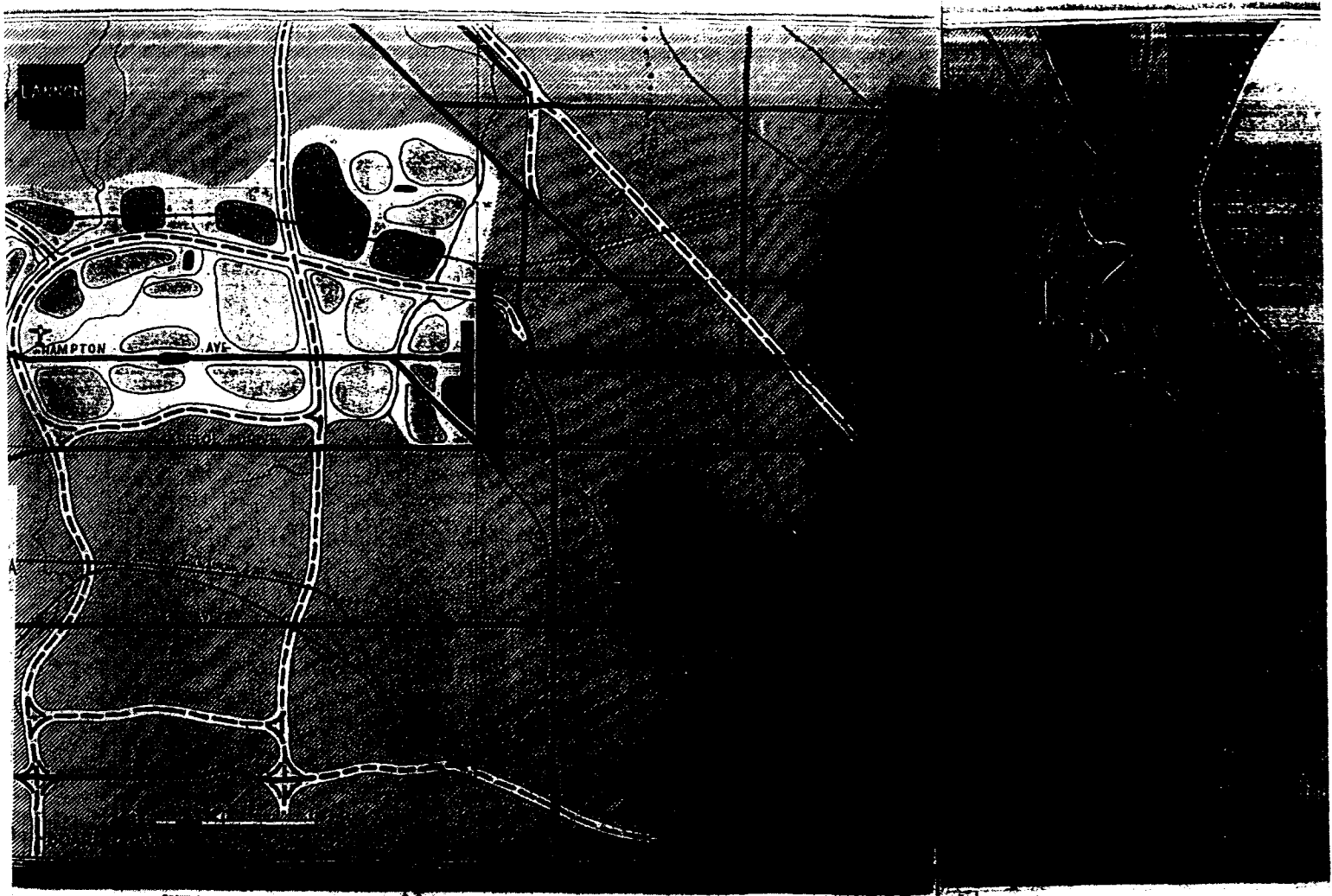
⁶⁸ *Milwaukee Sentinel*, July 16, 1950.

⁶⁹ “Coordination of Plans for the City’s Expansion and the Civil Defense Program” by Elmer Krieger, March 10, 1951, Folder 5, Box 190, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Milwaukee Sentinel*, March 11, 1951.



Milwaukee's Satellite City Plan
"Coordination of Plans for the City's Expansion and the Civil Defense Program" by Elmer Krieger, March
10, 1951, Folder 5, Box 190, Zeidler Papers, MPL

The Board of Public Land Commissioners voted to approve Krieger's report later in March and the Common Council made plans to hold public hearings on the satellite city.⁷³ Werba had told Zeidler several times the previous three years that the "Butler Strip" annexation, which made the proposed satellite city technically adjacent to Milwaukee, was the key to Milwaukee's entire annexation program. Werba also was confident that the village of Butler, which sat between Milwaukee and its satellite city, would vote to consolidate with the city.

But for the second time, residents of the areas affected by the city's plans vigorously opposed Milwaukee's physical expansion. A four square mile community, Butler had grown as an industrial village next to the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad yards in the 1910's and 1920's.⁷⁴ The 1940 census counted only 778 residents in the village, but urbanization had proved expensive even to this small number of people. By 1946, residents began clamoring for infrastructure improvements, especially to the village's water supply. The costs of a new water works for the tiny village were prohibitive. It was estimated that a new water system would cost residents \$300,000. Since the entire assessed valuation of Butler was only \$500,000, the increased taxes for the water works were deemed excessive to many residents, and the village began exploring other ways to improve its water and sewage systems without the great costs.⁷⁵ Milwaukee was the most obvious candidate to help Butler, since the city had re-established its annexation department that same year. The Common Council asked Werba to annex land to allow Milwaukee to border Butler and thus give residents there a chance to consolidate with the city should they vote to do so. Werba immediately

⁷³ *Milwaukee Journal*, March 12, 1951.

⁷⁴ "A History of Butler," compiled by Hugh Swaford III, Butler Public Library, Butler, WI.

⁷⁵ *Milwaukee Sentinel*, December 4, 1946, Annexation Clipping File, MPL.

predicted that “in nine months Milwaukee will be knocking at the door of Waukesha County,” and he delivered by annexing the 330 foot wide and ten mile long “Butler Strip” along Hampton Avenue.⁷⁶ Part of the annexed land was in the Town of Wauwatosa, an old opponent of Milwaukee annexation. The Town challenged the Butler Strip annexation in the state circuit court in 1948, but the courts upheld the legality of Milwaukee’s annexation in 1950.⁷⁷ Milwaukee’s first satellite city briefly seemed safe and legal.

However, the Town of Wauwatosa surprised Milwaukee by appealing the ruling to the state supreme court and enlisted the help of William Kay and Conrad Dineen, two suburban lawyers who had previously (and successfully) defeated other annexations by Milwaukee. Once it became apparent that Milwaukee officials desired to expand and politically unite the metropolis, the case became not only a matter of the legality of annexing land along Hampton Avenue, but one that would greatly determine the future development of the region in the postwar era. Again, Milwaukee was cast into the role of the local bully, gobbling up land at the expense of innocent residents of the semi-rural townships in Milwaukee. As the court listened to oral arguments in the case of the *Town of Wauwatosa vs. Milwaukee*, nine local attorneys representing nine different suburbs in Milwaukee County filed briefs on behalf of Wauwatosa.⁷⁸ Milwaukee’s planned decentralization was again being directly challenged by a unified suburban front.

Opposition to the satellite city, moreover, had rural sources as well. Residents in the Towns of Brookfield and Menomonee, where the satellite city was to be located,

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ *Milwaukee Sentinel*, March 7, 1950, Annexation Clipping File, MPL.

⁷⁸ *Milwaukee Journal*, June 7, 1950; *Milwaukee Sentinel*, July 7, 1950; *Milwaukee Journal*, March 8, 1951, Annexation Clipping File, MPL.

proved as reluctant as their neighboring suburbs to support Milwaukee. In 1951, most of this part of Waukesha County remained agricultural. Waukesha County had contained so many dairy farms in the nineteenth century that it became known as “Cow County USA” and its residents still continued to display a healthy agrarian distrust of the large neighboring city. After it became apparent that Milwaukee’s expansion plans included Brookfield and Menomonee, residents of the two towns formed a “Property Owners Association” of over 200 members to resist the city.⁷⁹ Following the public release of Krieger’s report, the association held a meeting attended by over 250 people to discuss the satellite city. Again, the opposition cloaked their arguments in the context of democratic local control, sounding remarkably similar to city residents who would later fight inner city urban renewal. Sylvester Claas, a farmer in Menomonee and the chair of the association, likened Milwaukee to a “dictatorship” because as he said “you don’t have any voice in what happens to you. They take your land and haven’t anything to say about it.”⁸⁰

The village board of Butler, once open to Milwaukee’s offer to consolidate, also took steps to insure it would not become a part of the larger city. Werba had warned Butler that if it voted to develop either a water or storm sewer of their own, the village could not join Milwaukee because the Common Council would be unwilling to incur the considerable debt Butler would take on. With a vote for public improvements now essentially a vote against joining with Milwaukee, village residents, once resistant to internal improvements, made their intentions clear in 1950 by voting to build a \$280,000

⁷⁹ *Menomonee Falls News*, March 22, 1951

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

storm sewer.⁸¹ The Menomonee Town Board also passed a resolution that officially opposed any annexation efforts on the part of Milwaukee and offered to provide whatever financial assistance the town could give to neighboring townships and villages that also fought the city.⁸²

The battle over the Butler Strip also reached the state legislature. Assemblyman Leland McParland, who represented the south side industrial suburb of Cudahy and also served as attorney for the Town of Lake, a town which bordered Milwaukee to the south and was also threatened by annexation, introduced several bills to delay annexation efforts by Milwaukee. McParland explicitly referred to the Butler Strip annexation so many times that assemblymen began to laugh when he would frequently hold up a map showing the annexation.⁸³ While the state legislature took no action against Milwaukee, the forces of opposition were apparent there as well.

On April 3, 1951, the state Supreme Court dealt Milwaukee's annexation efforts a serious blow when it ruled the Butler Strip annexation to be invalid. Justice Edward Gehl, who wrote the majority opinion of the case, ruled the annexation illegal because no referendum had been held in the annexed areas. In a ruling on another contested annexation to the south of the city, the court awarded 250 acres to the suburb of West Allis. This ruling implied that suburbs had the same rights to post notices of intent to annex as Milwaukee, thus reversing a 53 year old law that had given Milwaukee the first

⁸¹ Minutes of Butler Village Board, October 17, 1950, Village Hall, Butler, Wisconsin.

⁸² Minutes of Town of Menomonee Annual Meeting, April 8, 1952, Menomonee Falls Village Hall, Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin.

⁸³ *Milwaukee Journal*, March 1, 1951.

right to post notices of intent to annex.⁸⁴ As a result of these court decisions, annexation would now become a “right” of any incorporated municipality who wished to pursue it.

The threat to Milwaukee was obvious, and city officials were shocked and dismayed by the rulings. In a statement to the *Milwaukee Sentinel* in the aftermath of the ruling, Zeidler worried that “the city of Milwaukee is caught in a strangling grip. Caught in a similar situation, other American cities are slowly dying.”⁸⁵ In his memoirs written a year after he left office in 1960, Zeidler later characterized the day the Butler Strip was defeated by the Supreme Court as “a black day” for the city of Milwaukee. Krieger was asked to write an article in the July 1951 issue of *American City* magazine describing the Waukesha County satellite community, but with the Butler Strip annexation rendered null and void by the courts, the article sounded more like wish than a plan.⁸⁶

In fact, national exposure to Milwaukee’s unique brand of renewal as dispersal made little difference to Milwaukee’s rural and suburban opponents, who fully believed they were engaged in a battle with the city for the right to control their own destiny. They even dismissed the guise of civil defense out of turn, as a Butler village official scoffed that “Milwaukee is only exploiting the current war crisis for its own ends.”⁸⁷ Localism had a greater impact in the case of Greendale as well. When nationally-renown regional planner Clarence Stein published *Toward New Towns for America* in 1957, he wrote of Greendale’s governance: “There has been exceptional leadership on the part of one of America’s ablest town managers, Walter Kroening.”⁸⁸ As one of the Greenbelt

⁸⁴ *Milwaukee Journal*, April 4, 1951, *Milwaukee Sentinel*, April 4, 1951.

⁸⁵ Statement by Frank Zeidler given to *Milwaukee Sentinel*, April 5, 1951, Folder 9, Box 89, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

⁸⁶ “Milwaukee Coordinates Expansion and Civil-Defense Plans,” *American City*, June 1951, pp.118-119.

⁸⁷ *Menomonee Falls News*, March 22, 1951.

⁸⁸ Clarence S. Stein, *Toward New Towns for America*, (Cambridge, MA. Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1957) 187.

town's original planners, Stein obviously took great pride in the community he had helped develop and that Kroening administered. But ironically, seven years earlier many Greendale residents had come to perceive Kroening as a pawn of the federal government because of his complicity with the ALCDC's abortive purchase of the village.

For their part, Milwaukee's officials had proven that they were not ignorant of the forces of decentralization that threatened the city's survival. But planned dispersal had yielded forces of local control that remained prominent throughout the postwar era. Annexation became the most hotly debated and publicly prominent political issue in the region for the remainder of the 1950's, just as it had been in the 1920's.

Milwaukee's attempts to engage in planned decentralization did not end on April 4, 1951. But they had been dealt a serious blow. City officials had shown little regard for the fact that "vacant lands" were not in fact empty; the people who lived there often had very different ideas about the nature and trajectory of urban development. Arthur Werba and others may have still believed in the "inevitability" of the political unification of the region, as he had written at the close of the 1920's. In reality, political unity was even less inevitable in 1951 than it had been in 1929. The postwar era would not be defined by planned decentralization, but instead by a race between city and suburbs to control urban growth on the periphery through annexations, consolidations, incorporations, petitions, lawsuits, injunctions, public meetings, referenda, and more devious means. The result was not planned decentralization and political unity, but a "great race" that rapidly balkanized and suburbanized the political landscape of the Milwaukee metropolis.

Chapter 5: The Highest and Best Uses: “Municipal Mercantilism”, Industrial Growth, and the Suburbanization of Milwaukee

“Cities are obsolete...no one used to live in the country unless he had to. Today the situation is almost reversed. Practically no one lives in the city unless he has to.” –The Tri-Town News

In spite of the increasing difficulty that Milwaukee’s annexation program faced, Mayor Zeidler’s administration remained committed to planned decentralization and political unification as the best way to direct future urban growth. In a new report on annexation released in 1952, BPLC planners again endorsed taking in vacant land on the urban periphery as an essential component of inner city redevelopment. This perception coalesced with a general conviction among policymakers that residents—regardless of class—increasingly desired single-family homes on larger lots. If there was any doubt of this, studies of the type completed by the Milwaukee County Regional Planning Department in 1946 made this reality quite clear. “It’s precisely because city people don’t like dirt and congestion that they want their city to grow by expanding into open fields, where there would be room for a better kind of city life,” wrote William Norris, a journalist at the *Milwaukee Sentinel* who strongly favored annexation.¹ Even socialists like Daniel Hoan, Charles Whitnall, and Frank Zeidler accepted lower densities as an article of faith in city building. The problem was to ensure it took place in a politically unified metropolis. Throughout the late 1940’s and 1950’s, Zeidler never wavered from this goal. Court rulings that struck down annexations altered but did not end Milwaukee’s physical expansion. What ultimately stopped annexation dead in its tracks was the wave of political incorporations of outlying territories that sealed the city off from expanding its territory. An “iron ring” of suburbs enclosed Milwaukee in the fifteen

¹ *Milwaukee Sentinel*, June 13, 1951.

years after World War II. City officials specifically considered the individual acts of incorporation as “suburbanization;” in political terms, this was accurate enough.

Virtually all of the incorporations that occurred adjacent to Milwaukee’s borders in the postwar era were intended to stave off annexation. None went uncontested by the city

Political fragmentation amplified what a growing number of urban scholars term “uneven development,” generally referring to the unequal distribution of economic resources across metropolitan areas in the United States.² Numerous studies by sociologists and urban historians tie suburban economic growth to central city stagnation or decline. They usually focus on the overt practices by private market forces, unchecked or implicitly tolerated by public officials, to ensure that racial segregation and spatial exclusion remained in place. Uneven development thus became economically encoded along familiar lines of race and class. When historians study efforts to increase opportunity and redistribute resources more democratically, they usually place these stories in the larger context of the postwar efforts of racial minorities to win political and economic power denied them for generations. These movements often took place in central cities with shrinking resources available to attack the broader economic inequalities that uneven development fostered. Studies of this type address the socioeconomic problems yielded by uneven development instead of looking at how metropolitan inequality manifested itself in the first place.

To understand the outcomes, the *process* by which the fragmentation of metropolitan America took place must be examined. Metropolitan fragmentation is a

² Kevin Fox Gotham, *Race, Real Estate, and Uneven Development: The Kansas City Experience, 1900-2000*. (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002). Joe R. Feagin, Robert Parker, *Building American Cities: The Urban Real Estate Game*, (Englewood Cliffs, N.J. : Prentice Hall, c1990) Joe T. Darden, *Detroit: Race and Uneven Development*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987).

matter of both degree and kind, tied not only to national policy but also to state laws and local decisions by thousands of individuals. In the Milwaukee region, the bruising annexation wars of the late 1940's and 1950's gave a specific shape to political balkanization. From 1948 to 1960, eleven communities in the Milwaukee region politically incorporated as cities or villages, and all immediately became "suburbs" owing to their location adjacent to the city of Milwaukee or within the Milwaukee metropolitan area. In virtually all eleven cases, incorporation was a direct reaction to Milwaukee's annexation efforts, which nonetheless had doubled the city's size by the end of the 1950's. This chapter chronicles the annexation wars that gripped the Milwaukee region during the postwar era. These battles took place at precisely the moment when regional cooperation was most needed. Milwaukee's largest business association, the Milwaukee Association of Commerce (MAC), began to attempt to attract industry to the region and promote economic development. The MAC's strict subscription to laissez-faire economic conservatism contrasted sharply with Frank Zeidler's liberal/socialist politics, preventing any meaningful public-private political cooperation. The resultant political fragmentation of the postwar years had great impact on the growing economic inequality between the city and its suburbs, and eventually hampered regional planning initiatives, racial integration, and industrial development at the very time when all of these reforms were perhaps most necessary.

The structure of fiscal inequality within the metropolitan area requires further discussion. The decisions that contributed to the creation of new suburbs or the consolidation of towns with the city of Milwaukee were tied to these municipalities' increasingly aggressive pursuit of tax revenues. In a key study of metropolitan financing

in the Milwaukee region conducted in 1970, Donald Curran, an economist at Cleveland State University, characterized the municipal policies of unincorporated towns and incorporated cities and villages of the region as forms of “municipal mercantilism” that divided the region and politically codified economic inequality.³ “In the scramble for limited goods” noted Curran, “the success of one locality is at the expense of its neighbor.”⁴ Curran borrowed the term “municipal mercantilism” from Robert C. Wood’s famed study of the New York City region, *1400 Governments*.⁵ Wood’s term offers a useful analytical framework from which to examine Milwaukee’s postwar suburbanization. While in hindsight the 1950’s often appear to have been an era of limitless economic growth, a more complicated picture emerges when specific metropolitan areas are examined. The industrial Midwest grew at a far slower rate than the South and the West, a development which urban leaders of the Midwest were painfully aware. The “rising tide” of America’s postwar economy was not lifting all municipal boats to the same levels. Making matters worse, central cities were beginning to feel the fiscal effects of population loss to the periphery, where the number of incorporated suburban municipalities increased dramatically.

The relatively slower growth of the urban Midwest, even in the midst of the booming 1950’s, led many local leaders to redouble their efforts to maximize tax revenues to pay for the costs of public improvements. Urban leaders addressed disinvestments in a variety of ways, with local circumstance dictating each urban development effort. In St. Louis, for example, local elites opted to rebuild vast swaths of

³ Donald Curran, *Metropolitan Financing: The Milwaukee Experience, 1920-1970* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1973), 44.

⁴ *Ibid*, 146.

⁵ Robert C. Wood, *1400 Governments: The Political Economy of the New York Metropolitan Region* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961).

the city's urban core to stem decentralization, in part, at least, because the city's borders had been locked in for decades, making physical expansion impossible.⁶ Pittsburgh's annexation program had long-stalled as well, making central city revitalization the key component of that city's "Renaissance."⁷ The city of Detroit flirted briefly with large-scale annexation in the late 1940's, but Michigan state laws thwarted such efforts.⁸ In contrast, Milwaukee's borders remained fluid during the immediate postwar era, making annexation viable and city-suburban confrontation over growth virtually inevitable, considering the annexation conflicts of the 1950's. These intra-metropolitan conflicts occurred as the Midwest cities first began to truly struggle economically. This made the tax revenues that each municipality so desperately craved finite. Job growth in one locale often meant a corresponding job loss in another community within the Milwaukee region. "Municipal mercantilism," then, consisted of a heated competition between local governments—city and suburban—to capture the maximum amount of tax revenues at minimal costs. In this competition, city and suburban governments sought the "highest and best" land uses to obtain the optimum public wealth.

Both state and local revenue distribution dictated municipal mercantilism.

In 1911, the state of Wisconsin levied its first income tax and created a revenue distribution formula that was heavily weighted to return the taxes to the location of origin. The state kept only 10% of the income taxes it collected, returning 20% to the county of origin, and 70% to the city, village or town of origin. In 1947, the state

⁶ Joe Heathcott and Maire Murphy, "Corridors of Flight, Zones of Renewal: Industry, Planning, and Policy in the Making of Metropolitan St. Louis, 1940-1980," *Journal of Urban History*, Vol. 31, No. 2, 151-189.

⁷ Roy S. Lubove, *Twentieth Century Pittsburgh: Government, Business, and Environmental Change* (New York, Wiley Books, 1969).

⁸ June Manning-Thomas, *Redevelopment and Race: Planning a Finer City in Postwar Detroit* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 31-32.

legislature barred its municipalities from levying income taxes of their own, ensuring the state tax would “grow unobstructed.”⁹ In general, this usually worked to the suburbs’ advantage. Because the state distribution formula returned such a high proportion of income taxes to place of residence, rather than location of employment, for example, it favored high-income municipalities where a large number of affluent residents resided. Curran calculated that in Milwaukee County from 1920 to 1970, the suburbs’ per-capita shared income tax revenues increased by 1,413%, compared to 935% for the city of Milwaukee.¹⁰ The state also assessed the value of utility properties, collected the utility property and utility sales tax (which were counted together), and distributed the revenues under a formula that favored the municipality where the utility was located. For example, the massive Lakeside electric power plant in the Town of Lake, which yielded hundreds of thousands of dollars a year in tax revenues, paid its sales and property tax to the state, which then kept 15% of the revenue, returning 20% to Milwaukee County and 65% to the Town of Lake. The city of Milwaukee, whose residents were by far the Lakeside plant’s largest consumer, got almost nothing. Dating from the 1920’s, residents of Lake who lived near the Lakeside Plant repeatedly attempted to incorporate as a separate village, but Milwaukee officials had managed to thwart their efforts in court.¹¹

Shared taxes collected by the state of Wisconsin were important sources of public revenue, but local property taxes remained the largest revenue stream for municipalities. As a result, industrial land remained the most highly sought-after commodity for many annexing municipalities, especially Milwaukee, since it yielded the highest land values as

⁹ Curran, *Metropolitan Financing*, 37-38.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 82.

¹¹ “To the Farmers Living in the Town of Lake” by the Taxpayers and Voters League of the Town of Lake, Folder 1, Box 9, “City Club of Milwaukee. Records, 1909-1975. Milwaukee Manuscript Collection AS and Milwaukee Micro Collection 69. WHS, MARC, *Milwaukee Sentinel*, May 13, 1931.

well as corporate income tax returns and comparatively little in demands for public services, especially schools. Incorporated communities with large concentrations of industry, such as the city of West Allis and the village of West Milwaukee, almost always had high volumes of modest working class residences. At the close of World War Two, communities that were primarily residential in character with little to no industry tended to consist almost exclusively of middle to high-income homes. In varying degrees, each of the north shore suburbs—Shorewood, Whitefish Bay, Fox Point, and River Hills—all had established themselves as premiere residential neighborhoods with the subsequent homes that yielded high property tax returns. Wauwatosa, less affluent than the North Shore suburbs but still prosperous, also had long prided itself as a quintessential bedroom suburb, a “city of homes,” and virtually no major industrial property was contained within its boundaries. To the south and west, both the city of West Allis and the village of West Milwaukee had long existed as industrial tax havens for local manufacturers. The fiscal largess created by corporate income taxes and the returned revenue from the state allowed West Milwaukee to not levy any property taxes at all, a fact that did not escape Mayor Zeidler’s watchful eye. “Those plants could be helping support schools or other services in Milwaukee or West Allis,” he noted in 1951.¹²

The methods for increasing public wealth had changed little in the twentieth century, but the historical circumstances under which public wealth was gained had. The pressure of the baby boom in the postwar years altered the fiscal realities of municipal governance across the Milwaukee metropolis. As birth rates exploded, local governments came under tremendous pressure to build new schools to accommodate the sudden influx of children. The public costs of providing education to this postwar

¹² *Milwaukee Journal*, April 3, 1951.

generation of children proved startling, especially for communities that housed high densities of modest income families and thus collected lower proportions of tax revenue. As a 1959 city report noted, “A \$12,000, \$15,000, or even a \$20,000 home does not produce enough in tax revenue to pay for keeping a single child in elementary school.”¹³ Municipalities thus became ever more determined to secure the most public revenue as possible to offset the rising fiscal costs of services. Accordingly, each individual community sought as never before to attain, as Curran put it, “the most profitable land uses and land users” to produce the most revenue and demand as few municipal services as possible.¹⁴

In the contest to develop the highest and best uses of land, some incorporated communities had already built-in major advantages over others. By the middle of the twentieth century, the North Shore suburbs had already established themselves as affluent communities whose expensive housing stock, especially near Lake Michigan, offset the absence of industry. West Milwaukee’s overwhelmingly working-class residents were offset by the heavy concentration of industry within the village’s borders that allowed it to levy no property taxes. For this reason, West Milwaukee remained highly appealing to manufacturers.

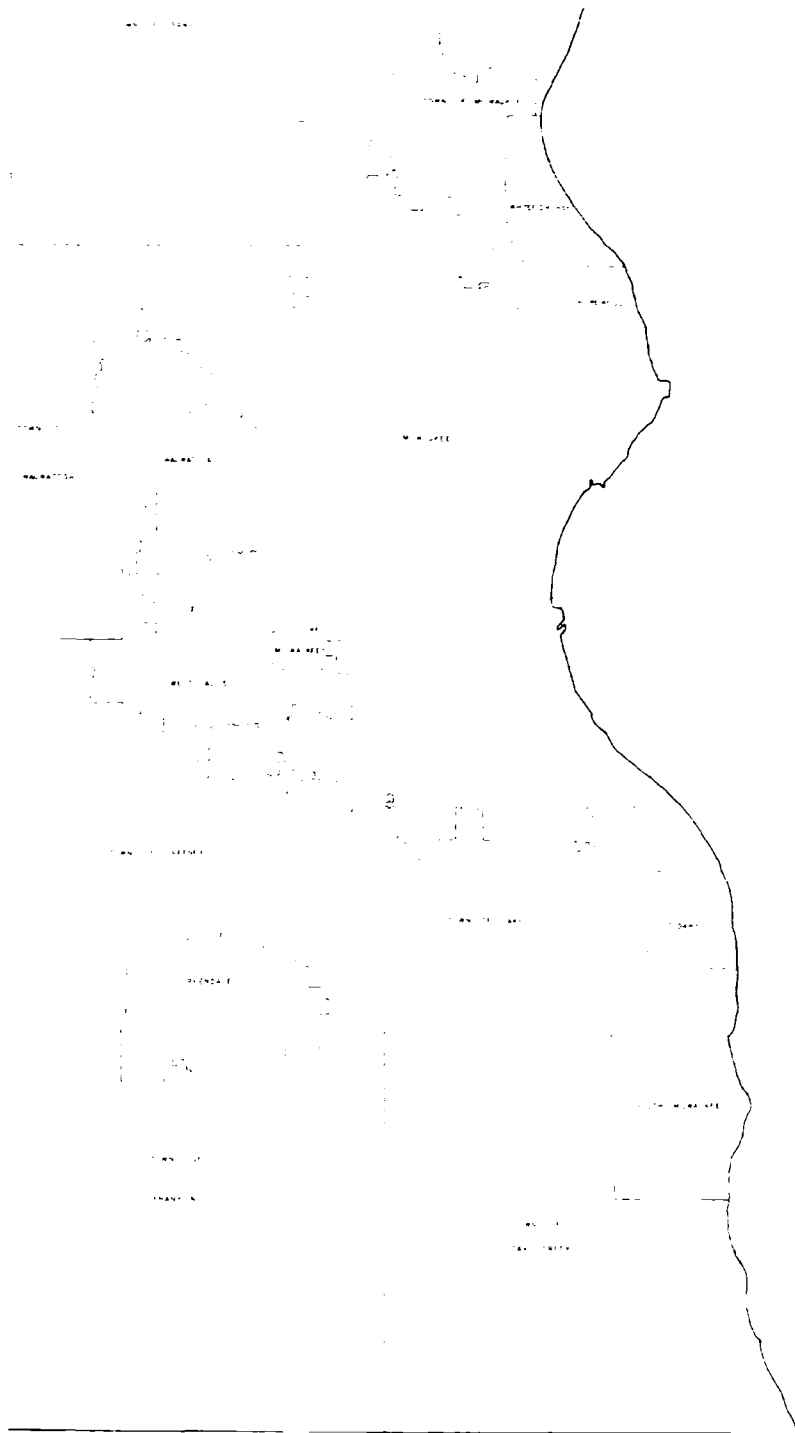
Conversely, communities housing large numbers of modest or low-income families were in relatively dire fiscal straights. Modest homes on smaller lots could not produce sufficient tax revenue and higher density developments meant that far more children would attend school, but without adequate property tax revenue to pay for it. The city of Milwaukee most obviously fit this bill; the quest to annex land was thus

¹³ “Report on City-Suburban Relations,” Milwaukee Community Development Corporation, MPL.

¹⁴ Curran, *Metropolitan Financing*, 144.

strongly motivated by the need to increase the city's property tax revenues. However, other communities felt the fiscal crunch as well. West Allis, whose population had swelled to 42,959 residents by 1950, the seventh highest in the state, was poised to take advantage of the state legislature's liberalization of annexation laws to take in more land, as was Wauwatosa.¹⁵

¹⁵*Metropolitan Area Fact Book, 1940, 1950, 1960*, p. 43, MPL



Milwaukee County Municipalities, 1950
Metropolitan Area Fact Book, 1940, 1950, 1960, MPL.

Meanwhile, unincorporated towns, vulnerable to annexation, desperately sought to protect their revenue enhancing assets. In 1951, residents of a large part of the Town of Milwaukee, which had already shrunk in size following the creation of the North Shore villages, voted to incorporate into the city of Glendale.¹⁶ This new city encompassed the growing industrial corridor north and east along both the Milwaukee River and the Chicago and Northwestern railroad line. The birth of the city of Glendale blocked Milwaukee's annexation to the north and east, and essentially placed a fence around some of the most valuable industrial land in the region. "We have seen 3,000 people in the new city of Glendale take millions of dollars of industrial property into their taxing areas to virtually eliminate their residential taxes," Zeidler proclaimed in the wake of Glendale's incorporation.¹⁷ The same fiscal logic drove residents of the eastern portion of the Town of Lake to incorporate as the village of St. Francis. The inspiration for this new village was the Lakeside power plant, which produced over \$300,000 a year in utility tax revenues.¹⁸ In terms of class, Glendale and St. Francis had modest housing stocks; their residents were mostly middle and working class, similar to tens of thousands of city of Milwaukee residents. However, the dictates of municipal mercantilism divided people according to political boundary, not class, further exemplifying that, as Curran concluded, "the common needs of the metropolitan area are not only neglected but are directly obstructed."¹⁹

Like most of postwar urban America, it was widely understood in Milwaukee that foremost among the "common needs" of the metropolis was continuing the economic

¹⁶ "Glendale: Rich Past, Bright Future, Fifty Years, 1950-2000," MPL.

¹⁷ *Milwaukee Journal*, April 3, 1951.

¹⁸ CGRB

¹⁹ Curran, *Metropolitan Financing*, 146.

growth spawned by the wartime boom. Influential local civic groups had taken urban development to heart during the 1940's, alarmed by the decline of land values in and around downtown Milwaukee. The Greater Milwaukee Committee (GMC) strongly pushed for the city to go back into debt, which the city had avoided since the Depression, to finance a variety of public improvements, including the veterans' war memorial and art museum along the lakefront, expansion of the Milwaukee Public Library, and a system of expressways to improve transportation within Milwaukee County. The GMC succeeded in bringing the issue of public debt to a citywide referendum in 1947, with Milwaukeeans pointedly asked whether the city should issue bonds again. The debt referendum passed over the objections of many city officials, including Mayor John Bohn, and soon-to-be-mayor Frank Zeidler.²⁰ While the public improvement program made headway in the 1950's with the construction of Milwaukee County Stadium, the lakefront war memorial, and the construction of a new museum, and a library addition, leaders of both the public and private sectors continued to search for ways to jump-start economic development. From the beginning of his three terms in office in 1948, Mayor Zeidler favored aggressive annexation of land with industrial potential as the surest way for the city to benefit from industrial expansion. The Butler Strip proposal, intended to capture valuable land along the Chicago and Northwestern railroad, was the most prominent example of this use of annexation as a tool to capture industrial development. Regardless, the reality of municipal mercantilism guaranteed Milwaukee's neighboring communities would just as actively seek out the same potential industrial land uses.

²⁰ Eric Fure-Slocum, "Cities with Class?: Growth Politics, the Working-Class City, and Debt in Milwaukee during the 1940s," *Social Science History* Volume 24, Number 1, Spring 2000, 257-305.

Attracting industry yielded the highest tax revenues at the lowest public costs, making it “highest and best” land use available in the dictates of public finance.

The open competition for industry between Milwaukee and its suburbs greatly complicated the role of the region’s oldest and most prominent private sector economic development generator, the Milwaukee Association of Commerce (MAC). Founded in 1861 as the Merchants Association, a consortium of prominent local commercial businesses, the group merged with the Manufacturers Association in 1894 to form the MAC, whose goal throughout most of the twentieth century was to “safeguard and promote the economic advancement and welfare of commercial and civic enterprises in Milwaukee.”²¹ The MAC was active in local politics, coexisting uneasily with socialist Mayor Daniel Hoan in promoting annexation and metropolitan political unification during the 1920s’ and 1930s’. By the close of World War II, the MAC had grown into an extremely heterogeneous organization, comprising over 3,000 business and professional firms, many of which were located outside the city of Milwaukee.²² This made the MAC the most naturally “metropolitan” organization in the region, a potential mediator between the various warring local governments. However, during the years following World War II, the MAC’s Board of Directors chose to stay out of the region’s endless annexation controversies. Instead the MAC operated as broader group above the fray. They promoted an apolitical image of a “Greater Milwaukee,” where politics never interfered with employment harmony and production. By 1964, the MAC even changed

²¹ Introduction to the Collection, Milwaukee Metropolitan Association of Commerce. Minutes, 1915-1964. Milwaukee Manuscript Collection 14, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Milwaukee Area Research Center, Golda Meier Library, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

²² By 1949, the MAC counted 3,077 business and professional firms as official dues-paying members. Folder 14, Box 2, Milwaukee Metropolitan Association of Commerce. Minutes, 1915-1964. Milwaukee Manuscript Collection 14, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Milwaukee Area Research Center, Golda Meier Library, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

its name to reflect its status as a metropolitan organization, reinventing itself as the Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce.

In reality, the MAC's non-partisanship was only skin-deep. The association's leaders consistently displayed their political conservatism on multiple levels. Its National Affairs Division voted to endorse and oppose a variety of federal legislation. For example, the Board of Directors vocally opposed the Wagner Housing Act of 1949, claiming it threatened to "socialize real estate" by taking a large chunk of building away from the private market. The Board endorsed the U.S. House on Un-American Activities Committee as a way "to bring to light subversive elements in our economy." In 1949, the MAC Board of Directors opposed repeal of the Taft-Hartley Act, opposed the Marshall Plan, opposed any minimum wage over 60 cents an hour, and opposed expansion of Social Security.²³

In local matters, the MAC's "official policy" remained non-partisan, but proved politically influential in obvious ways. In 1938, the MAC joined with the Milwaukee Real Estate Board, the Savings and Loan League, and Building Owners and Managers Association to form the "Affiliated Taxpayers Committee (ATC), a group dedicated to "promote efficiency in local government."²⁴ Through the ATC, the MAC and each of the region's real estate interest associations could support and oppose local measures as they saw fit while appearing to remain outside of local politics. By the postwar years, the MAC's relationship with such a partisan group came to rankle some of its leaders.

²³ Executive Committee Meeting, July 16, 1949, Folder 15, Box 3, Milwaukee Metropolitan Association of Commerce. Minutes, 1915-1964. Milwaukee Manuscript Collection 14, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Milwaukee Area Research Center, Golda Meier Library, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

²⁴ Board Meeting Minutes, February 27, 1946, Folder 11, Box 2, Milwaukee Metropolitan Association of Commerce. Minutes, 1915-1964. Milwaukee Manuscript Collection 14, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Milwaukee Area Research Center, Golda Meier Library, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

Clifford Randall, an MAC Board Member and prominent local businessman, repeatedly called for the MAC to break all direct ties to the ATC, recognizing its betrayal of the MAC's political independence. "Officials of city county government view the attitude and position of the Committee as primarily that of the Association of Commerce," Randall warned in 1950.²⁵ MAC leadership agreed to withdraw from the ATC, but remained "against public housing at all levels of government."

Momentum against public housing was already in motion. The real estate interests who formed the core of the ATC had emerged as the region's strongest opponent of public housing, which the Zeidler administration favored expanding in the postwar years. In 1951, ATC members created a "Citizens Committee" that succeeded in placing a referendum on the city's election agenda that essentially halted all new funding for public housing in the city. The MAC declined affiliation with the anti-public housing group, but vocally opposed low-income public housing through its Civic Affairs Committee, calling attention to public housing's "socialistic nature." Despite Zeidler's efforts to convince Milwaukee residents of the increasingly desperate shortage of low-income housing, the referendum passed, seeming evidence of a voter mandate for a moratorium on all new low-income housing projects within the city's borders. Coupled with the Wisconsin Supreme Court's nullification of the Butler Strip that same month, the anti-public housing referendum was a serious blow to the "three-tiered" approach to housing and urban redevelopment envisioned by Milwaukee's public officials.

²⁵ Letter from Clifford Randall to MMAC Board of Directors, March 17, 1950, Folder 1, Box 3, Milwaukee Metropolitan Association of Commerce. Minutes, 1915-1964. Milwaukee Manuscript Collection 14, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Milwaukee Area Research Center, Golda Meier Library, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

Annexation would continue, but affordable housing became ever more difficult to achieve in the region.

The MAC's deep conservatism also pervaded its marketing of Milwaukee to the rest of the state of Wisconsin. Historian Elizabeth Fones-Wolf has noted that the 1950's witnessed an unprecedented effort by American businesses to promote capitalism as a way to undermine labor activism and socialism.²⁶ Milwaukee's businesses were no exception. In 1952, for example, the MAC's American Opportunity Committee launched its first annual "Business-Agriculture Day," inviting hundreds of farmers from around the state to tour the city's factories and listen to lectures on economics, to better learn about the interconnectedness between farming and manufacturing. Over 800 farmers and their spouses attended the first "Business-Agriculture Day," about double the number expected.²⁷ In essence, the MAC-sponsored event was intended to counteract subversive political ideologies by championing laissez-faire capitalism. William A. Mann, chairman of the Opportunity Committee, and the event's key organizer, called the event's deeper purpose the purging of "false prophets" that Americans needed to abandon the "free enterprise system." Over 1,300 farmers attended the event in 1953, which continued for several years. The free enterprise doctrine remained its theme. With similar motivations, in 1956 the MAC took its free enterprise indoctrination to the classroom, holding a "Business Education Day" for local teachers.²⁸

²⁶ Elizabeth Fones-Wolf, *Selling Free Enterprise: The Business Assault on Labor and Liberalism, 1945-1960*, (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

²⁷ *Milwaukee Journal*, October 17, 1952, October 9, 1953, October 14, 1954.

²⁸ Report to the Board of Directors, February 23, 1956, Milwaukee Metropolitan Association of Commerce. Minutes, 1915-1964. Milwaukee Manuscript Collection 14, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Milwaukee Area Research Center, Golda Meier Library, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

On a national level, in 1945 the MAC assumed the task of attracting industry to Milwaukee to fill vacant plant space used by wartime defense industries. This effort accompanied a broader plan to “stimulate the establishment of main or branch plants in the Milwaukee area” by marketing Milwaukee’s industrial prowess to the rest of the nation. In 1946, the MAC produced a brochure titled “Milwaukee Has Everything—for Profitable Industry, for Enjoyable Living!” that characterized Milwaukee as a nearly perfect place to do business. The brochure went to great lengths to play down labor unease, focusing instead on the impressive productivity of Milwaukee’s manufacturers. The promotion included implicitly nativist language to describe the region’s workforce. Milwaukee County “boasted” the nation’s second highest percentage of native whites, the brochure reminded its readers. In 1946 and 1947, the MAC sent over 15,000 copies of “Milwaukee Has Everything...” to various businesses around the nation, hoping to attract industry to the region.²⁹ This description ignored the reality of the region’s labor relations. In 1946, for example, thousands of workers struck at the Allis-Chalmers plant in West Allis; the resultant long strike proved labor militancy had by no means subsided in the region.³⁰

Despite (or perhaps because of) its invention of Milwaukee as a veritable business garden of Eden, the MAC’s promotional efforts were initially successful after World War II. In 1947, the MAC gained a clear victory when two manufacturers, the General Electric X-Ray Division and Hotpoint, Inc., a producer of kitchen appliances, announced their intentions to locate a great portion of their manufacturing operations in the Milwaukee region. A year later, the MAC won an even bigger industrial prize when

²⁹ “Milwaukee Has Everything—for Profitable Industry, for Enjoyable Living,” Milwaukee Association of Commerce, MPL.

³⁰ Anthony Orum, *City Building in America* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995), 105.

General Motors' AC Spark Plug Division announced its intention to purchase a large, multi-story plant on Prospect Avenue in Milwaukee's East Side, to build bombing navigational equipment. The plant eventually employed over 5,000 workers, a huge economic coup for the city. Success continued in 1950 when two more sizeable manufacturers, American Can Company and Continental Can Company, announced their plans to build large manufacturing facilities in the Milwaukee area. Each plant would employ over 1,000 workers.³¹

The MAC's initial success in attracting industry to Milwaukee belied deep political divisions in the region. The race to gain the highest and best land uses meant that every new plant attracted to the metropolis was up for grabs. When G.E. X-Ray and Hotpoint decided to locate their new plants in the unincorporated Town of Greenfield, nearby communities engaged in a veritable feeding frenzy to annex the land where the plants would be built. Milwaukee, West Allis, and West Milwaukee each competed over this land. The Town of Greenfield's leaders tried to convince the companies to stand pat and not be annexed away from the town. In 1950, West Milwaukee won the land, announcing the annexation of land on which sat GE-X-Ray, Hotpoint, and eight other industries. The village levied no property taxes, and this was no doubt a key advantage in the minds of the annexed companies, which as landowners could sign the annexation petitions.³² Staying out of the city of Milwaukee was an equally strong motivator. For West Milwaukee, the eight new industries produced sizable corporate income tax revenue and as the village's attorney gleefully noted: "They don't have any children to make

³¹ Industries Division Report, January 24, 1950, Folder 1, Box 3, Milwaukee Metropolitan Association of Commerce. Minutes, 1915-1964. Milwaukee Manuscript Collection 14, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Milwaukee Area Research Center, Golda Meier Library, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

³² Memo and Letter, from Arthur Werba to Frank Zeidler, November 24, 1950, Folder 4, Box 124, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

demands on the school facilities.” Greenfield’s town leaders begged the industrial firms to stay. The city of West Allis even sent a group of local leaders to Chicago in an unsuccessful effort to try and convince General Electric executives to change their minds. The annexation robbed the Town of Greenfield of over a third of its public revenues, while reminding Milwaukee’s city leaders how difficult it would be to attract industry.³³ A further reminder came in 1951, when the Town of Granville sued the city of Milwaukee over an annexation that had brought the American Can Company’s new plant into Milwaukee.³⁴

The MAC may have acted as a non-partisan promoter of the entire metropolitan area, but political conflicts within the region complicated the group’s efforts. Attracting large new corporations such as GE X-Ray and Hotpoint created jobs, but also intensified municipal mercantilism. Both companies displayed an unwillingness to locate within the city of Milwaukee. More ominously, the MAC’s vocal support of *laissez-faire* conservatism put it at loggerheads with Milwaukee’s public officials, especially Mayor Zeidler. Neither side sympathized with the other’s politics; both co-existed uneasily at best. The MAC’s logic of purely “free enterprise” ideologically contested with Mayor Zeidler’s contention that the “purpose of a city is solely to advance human progress. The primary purpose of a city should be to help as many of its inhabitants as possible...even to the point of being substantially taxed.”³⁵ The MAC barely acknowledged the city’s long and sterling record of municipal efficiency and service delivery in its promotional material. The MAC’s Board of Directors also remained silent on the matter of annexation, reversing its vocal support of it in the 1920’s. Through the Affiliated

³³ *Milwaukee Journal*, April 9, 1950, *Milwaukee Journal*, April 11, 1950.

³⁴ *Milwaukee Journal*, September 28, 1951.

³⁵ Frank Zeidler, *A Liberal in City Government*, 61-62.

Taxpayer's Committee, other groups obstructed Zeidler's attempts to expand low-income public housing in the city. For his part, Zeidler ignored the city's business leaders "whenever he could," filling his appointive positions with labor leaders, academics, clergy, and other public officials.³⁶ Across the nation, postwar urban policy may well have been dominated by public-private partnerships, dubbed "growth coalitions."³⁷ No such consensus existed in Milwaukee, however, during this time. In his memoirs, Zeidler recalls that early in his tenure as mayor, when attending a social function sponsored by a group of local industrial leaders; "I was not uncomfortable in their presence, but I could see that these men moved in a stratum of society into which I had never entered."³⁸ While the MAC continued to push a conservative agenda through a variety of venues, the Zeidler administration battled it out with its neighboring cities, villages, and towns, escalating the city-suburban conflict to ever-greater heights.

The region's annexation battles were fought in a different legal context in the aftermath of the Wisconsin Supreme Court's nullification of the Butler Strip. To comply with the court's reinterpretation of annexation law, the Wisconsin state legislature moved quickly to amend annexation procedures. By the middle of June 1951, the legislature hammered out new regulations to make the annexation process more publicly competitive than it ever had been. This new law required any incorporated municipality that sought

³⁶ Bertil Hanson, "A Report on the Politics of Milwaukee," 196, V-4, MPL.

³⁷ John Mollenkopf, *The Contested City*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983), Jon C. Teaford, *The Rough Road to Renaissance: Urban Revitalization in America, 1940-1985* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985).

³⁸ Zeidler, *A Liberal in City Government*, MPL, 35.

annexation to post “notices of intent to annex” in at least eight public places (libraries, town halls, fire stations) within the towns where the proposed territory was located. Additionally, at least ten days before annexation petitions could be circulated, municipalities had to publish posting notices in a newspaper of “general circulation” within the county where the land in question was located.³⁹

The new annexation laws applied to all cities and villages, regardless of size. Zeidler, most of the Common Council, and other city policymakers firmly believed in the absolute necessity of annexation for the city’s long-term health, no matter how sharp suburban opposition became. Nonetheless, the strategy of obtaining massive parcels of land conducive to satellite city building had failed, forcing city leaders to review their annexation policy. The internal re-evaluation of annexation policy in 1951 took place alongside broader efforts at bureaucratic reform. Like the earlier generation of Milwaukee socialists, Mayor Zeidler believed strongly in municipal efficiency and gave great attention, especially during his first mayoral term, to technical experts. This resulted in the creation of a commission of economic experts to study the city’s revenue sources and recommend policy based on its conclusions. The Commission on the Economic Study of Milwaukee released its report in 1948 just after Zeidler took office. It placed most of the revenue concerns on maximizing property tax returns, reinforcing Milwaukee policymakers’ commitment to annexation and industrial development. The 240-page report also called for a detailed study of “the efficiency and methods by which

³⁹ “Annexation Practices in Milwaukee: An Administrative Survey,” Administrative Survey Committee, June 1952, MPL.

city departments, bureaus, boards, and commissions were being conducted.”⁴⁰ In reaction to the Commission’s recommendations, the Common Council and Mayor Zeidler agreed in 1949 to appoint a team of consultants to monitor the city’s government and to ensure maximum efficiency and economy were being achieved in each city department. The Chicago firm of Griffenhagen and Associates won the bidding and set to work on a comprehensive survey of the machinations of city government. To ensure that Griffenhagen’s study was given proper attention, Zeidler and the Common Council formed a twelve member committee to act as liaison between Griffenhagen and the Common Council. The makeup of the Administrative survey committee reflected Zeidler’s preference for appointing public servants and labor leaders to government commissions instead of business and civic elites. No seats were given to the Greater Milwaukee Committee or the Milwaukee Real Estate Board. In fact, only two of the twelve seats went to representatives of business: members of the Downtown Association and the Milwaukee Association of Commerce. Instead, the committee consisted of representatives of organized labor (the A.F.L. and C.I.O.), local public policy think tanks (the City Club, Citizens Governmental Research Bureau, and League of Women Voters). The remaining five seats were reserved for Zeidler, his budget supervisor, and three aldermen.⁴¹

Initially, the Administrative Survey Committee’s task was to execute the cost-saving measures recommended by the Griffenhagen consultants and, in 1950 and 1951, the city of Milwaukee did manage to save an estimated \$250,000 in various bureaucratic

⁴⁰ “Progress Report on the City’s Administrative Survey,” speech by Norman Gill, Citizens’ Governmental Research Bureau, to the Milwaukee Board of Realtors, May 29, 1951, Folder 8, Box 48, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

⁴¹ Ibid.

reforms.⁴² However, after the Wisconsin Supreme Court's nullification of the Butler Strip annexation and subsequent reinterpretation of state annexation laws in April of 1951, the survey committee turned its attention to the problem of annexation. They chose George Saffran, secretary to the committee and Budget Supervisor of the city of Milwaukee, to prepare a detailed report on Milwaukee's annexation. Saffran's report, released in 1952, perceived annexation as an increasingly uphill battle that revealed a growing divide between the city's annexation and planning officials. The report recalled the success of annexation in the 1920's, and disparaged the cessation of annexation activities in 1932 as "shortsighted," since Milwaukee's population density had crept back up during the war, forcing city officials to re-establish the Department of Annexation. Since annexation's return in 1946, the city gained 7.78 square miles, a scant total that did not keep up with the region's peripheral expansion.⁴³

Saffran's report revealed a growing rift in Milwaukee's policymaking circles over the nature of annexation. City planners in the Board of Public Land Commissioners (BPLC) favored taking in huge chunks of land at a time. Large-scale annexations of the kind attempted with the Butler Strip were more useful to the formation of planned communities. Planners could monitor land uses. Industry, residences, commerce, and public parks could all be included in new land plans from these types of annexations. Saffran reflected these concerns in his report, noting that piecemeal annexation created "animosity" and resulted in uneven deployment of city services. For the Department of Annexation, however, large-scale annexations were unrealistic and heavy-handed.

⁴² "City of Milwaukee Report #16—Board of Public Land Commissioners," Griffenhagen and Associates, November 16, 1949, MPL.

⁴³ "Annexation Practices in Milwaukee: An Administrative Survey," Administrative Survey Committee, June 1952, MPL.

Assembling massive parcels of land required convincing far too many property owners to join with Milwaukee. It also gave suburban officials more ammunition to characterize the city as a monster bent on gobbling up as much land as possible. Arthur Werba, the city's lead annexation official, had already threatened to retire on numerous occasions, often due to stress from the negative publicity heaped on him as the region's main lightning rod of annexation.⁴⁴ For these reasons, Milwaukee officials never again initiated satellite city planning. Instead, they sought to continue annexation of smaller parcels of land while attempting to convince unincorporated towns to merge with the city.

On July 9, 1951, Wisconsin Governor Walter Kohler signed the legislature's reworked annexation bill into law, giving incorporated municipalities virtual parity in enacting annexation.⁴⁵ The new law almost instantly set off a race in Milwaukee County to post notices of intent to annex all over the region. The first salvo came not from municipal governments, but from a group determined to save the financially troubled interurban transit line that ran from Milwaukee to the city of Waukesha. Two months after the new annexation bill became a law, five individuals announced that they had posted notices of intent for the city of Milwaukee to annex a whopping thirty-eight square mile stretch of territory in the Towns of Greenfield, Wauwatosa, and Franklin in Milwaukee County, and the Towns of New Berlin and Brookfield in Waukesha County. The proposed annexation was conditioned on the city of Milwaukee agreeing to purchase and operate the Milwaukee-Waukesha interurban line, formerly owned by the Milwaukee Rapid Transit and Speedrail Company, which had recently announced the abandonment of all operations and was about to have its assets liquidated. Part of this interurban route

⁴⁴ Letter from Arthur Werba to Frank Zeidler, December 1, 1948, Folder 2, Box 124, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

⁴⁵ *Milwaukee Journal*, July 10, 1951.

was in the path of a proposed new expressway that was to run west from downtown Milwaukee. Robert Crawford, the leader of the transit riders, acknowledged that the sole purpose of the gimmick was to save the rapid transit line. “We do not want annexation unless the rapid transit line will run again,” Crawford announced.⁴⁶

The transit riders’ request placed Mayor Zeidler’s administration in a difficult position. On one hand, an opportunity to annex a huge chunk of land had fallen into the city’s lap, one that could conceivably open up a new corridor of growth well to the south and west of the city. Conversely, the new annexation would require the city to assume the great cost of publicly operating what had been a privately run system. Between 1946 and 1951, five different companies had purchased the rapid transit line hoping to run it at a profit; none had success.⁴⁷ To Mayor Zeidler, purchasing the interurban was a “large order” that would require a citywide referendum to be made legal. Circulating annexation petitions in such a massive and unwieldy piece of land would take at least a year and, even if the petitions were successfully circulated (a dubious prospect, at best), there was no guarantee the sale of the transit line would go through. Of equal importance, political will to save older mass transit systems was already evaporating. Wisconsin Avenue, downtown Milwaukee’s busiest commercial street, had recently been stripped of its trolley tracks and replaced with buses. With older forms of mass transit in the process of being dismantled, saving the region’s interurban trains was not a high priority for Milwaukee’s policymakers who had for a long time tied the city’s transportation future to the automobile. The success of Charles Whitnall’s parkway system had spurred hopes that traffic congestion, an increasingly troubling problem,

⁴⁶ *Milwaukee Journal*, September 15, 1951.

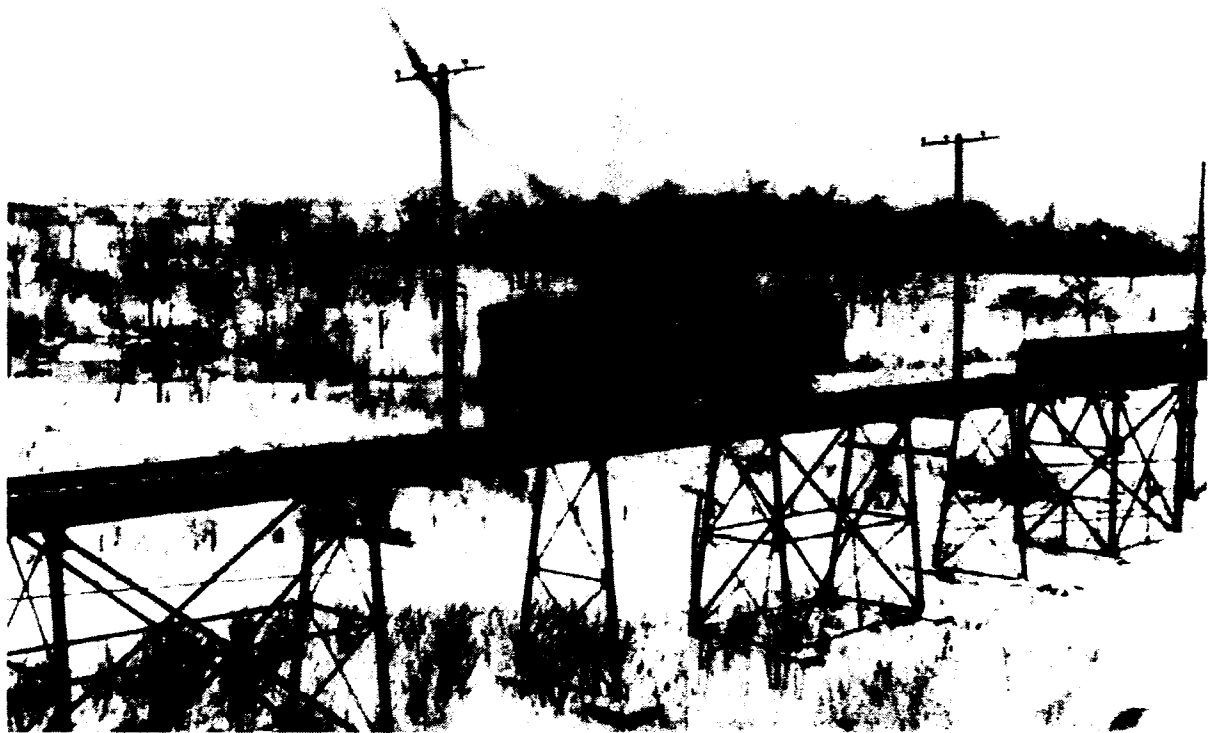
⁴⁷ Bill Vandervoort, “Milwaukee Interurban Railways,” <http://hometown.aol.com/chirailfan/histmk3.html>

could be solved by further accommodating the automobile. In 1946, a committee of Milwaukee County officials released a comprehensive plan of expressways that, once funded, would tie the region together in all directions. City leaders, cognizant of the decaying of downtown Milwaukee, hoped the expressways would improve access both into and out of the city. Zeidler even believed that expressway construction in Milwaukee's inner city could help *eliminate* substandard housing altogether.⁴⁸ In 1953, Zeidler told the Common Council "new trafficways (*sic*) tend to force destruction of decaying buildings and can redevelop entire neighborhoods altogether."⁴⁹ Since expressways seemed so important to the city's future, the task of reinvigorating other forms of mass transit was not in the realm of political reality.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Milwaukee County Expressway System: General Plan, Milwaukee County Highway Commission, MPL, 1.

⁴⁹ Quoted in Zeidler's 1953 speech to the Common Council, Folder 10, Box 55, Zeidler Collection, MPL.

⁵⁰ Zeidler came to lament the demise of the interurban lines. He later recalled that his "biggest regret" as mayor was choosing not to more deeply explore rapid transit's salvation in the early 1950's—Interview with Author, September 13, 2002.



By the 1950's, the Milwaukee region's privately operated interurban system was in financial trouble. This rail car is traversing Ozaukee County in the 1940's.
Official Web Site of Ozaukee County, <http://www.co.ozaukee.wi.us/history/Interurban.htm>

Milwaukee officials did not pursue the rapid transit annexation proposal. Its announcement proved to be ill timed coming on the heels of a pronouncement by the city that it had posted a notice of intent to annex twenty-seven square miles of land in the Town of Granville. If executed, the annexation would swallow up all but four square miles of the town. Werba tried to cushion the blow by claiming he had no realistic aims on all of the land in Granville, and instead intended only to slowly convince property owners in various parts of the town to join the city. Both annexation postings fed into suburban mistrust. In the minds of the outlying cities, villages, and towns, once again Milwaukee's expansion amounted to nothing more than municipal hegemony. Sylvester Claas, president of the Towns of Menomonee-Brookfield Advancement Association, who

had been instrumental in opposing the satellite city and Butler Strip annexation, scoffed at the newest postings as nothing more than a “bluff” by the city to secure additional land.⁵¹ A resident of the unincorporated community of Hales Corners, located in the Town of Greenfield and now in the path of potential annexation to Milwaukee, attributed his village’s intent to incorporate specifically to deep fears of Milwaukee’s annexation program. An official of the Town of Greenfield called the rapid transit annexation “an awful crazy scheme.”⁵² The *Milwaukee Journal*, the city’s afternoon newspaper, conducted random telephone checks of residents within the combined areas posted for annexation to Milwaukee and announced that affected residents “hated” the idea of becoming city residents.⁵³

The initial postings set off a frenzy of legal activity during the winter of 1951 and 1952. A group of municipal attorneys who represented a variety of suburbs in Milwaukee County immediately challenged the legality of the rapid transit annexation posting in court. The city of West Allis, eager to gain more public revenue, announced its posting a notice of intent to annex over thirteen square miles in the Town of Greenfield.⁵⁴ Residents of the unincorporated community of Hales Corners, located on territory posted for annexation to Milwaukee, decided to try to incorporate, an action which succeeded after a referendum in January of 1952.⁵⁵ Other municipalities jumped into the fray. The city of Wauwatosa posted notices of intent to annex eight square miles in the Town of Wauwatosa. The village of Butler, once in favor of consolidating with

⁵¹ *Menomonee Falls News*, September 20, 1951, Menomonee Falls Library, Menomonee Falls, WI., *Milwaukee Journal*, September 19, 1951.

⁵² *Milwaukee Journal*, September 28, 1951.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Milwaukee Journal*, October 2, 1951.

⁵⁵ *The Tri-Town News*, January 31, 1952

Milwaukee, but now bitterly opposed to annexation, posted for eight square miles of land on the western edge of Milwaukee County.⁵⁶ In early 1952, residents of a northern portion of the shrinking Town of Milwaukee incorporated as the village of Bayside.⁵⁷ By June of 1952, Milwaukee and a variety of incorporated suburbs had posted all of Milwaukee County for annexation, save thirteen square miles in the rural Town of Franklin.⁵⁸ Many of the postings overlapped, virtually guaranteeing legal conflicts.

Figure 5-1: Total Square Miles of Land Posted for Notice of Intent to Annex from August 1951-April 1952*

<u>Village or City</u>	<u>Amount of Land Posed</u>
City of Milwaukee	76 Square Miles
City of West Allis	28 Square Miles
City of Wauwatosa	12 Square Miles
City of Glendale	Posted Entire Town of Milwaukee
Village of Butler	13 Square Miles
City of Cudahy	2 Square Miles

“Annexation Practices in Milwaukee County: An Administrative Analysis,” George Saffran, City of Milwaukee Budget Director, 1952, MPL.

The reaction of city officials was predictably steadfast; Mayor Zeidler refused to let up on annexation, even in the spring of 1952 when he was running for re-election, warning “Milwaukee must and will fight for its right to grow.” For their part, city of Milwaukee residents gave Zeidler an apparent mandate on the issue of annexation, returning him to a second term by an overwhelming margin. In his second inaugural

⁵⁶ *Milwaukee Journal*, March 14, 1952

⁵⁷ *Milwaukee Journal*, April 6, 1952.

⁵⁸ “Annexation Practices in Milwaukee County: An Administrative Analysis,” George Saffran, City of Milwaukee Budget Director, 1952, MPL.

address to the Common Council, Zeidler made the annexation conflict his top issue, repeating that the best resolution would be political unification of the entire metropolis.⁵⁹

The posting race sped up the annexation wars, but the conflict's dimensions were remarkably similar to previous city-suburban confrontations. On June 13, 1952, a group of state legislators who represented various parts of Milwaukee County convened a summit of civic leaders, including mayors, municipal attorneys, real estate developer, and other civic leaders, to discuss annexation conflicts. Thirty-three individuals attended this all-day meeting. Mayor Zeidler led off the proceedings with a lengthy statement defending Milwaukee's expansion. He warned that the posting race threatened to upset the economic development of the entire region. The problem of physical growth was a metropolitan issue, Zeidler argued, but it had torn the region apart instead of melding it together.⁶⁰ Suburban leaders disagreed. George Schmus, city attorney for West Allis and a vocal opponent of Milwaukee's annexation, believed that resistance to annexation was a matter of political philosophy and that residents outside of Milwaukee "preferred to raise their families in smaller, more efficient and responsive communities."⁶¹ The city's plans were "tremendous in scope," said Schmus, claiming (accurately) that an anonymous city official told him Milwaukee wanted to add well over 75 square miles of land in the 1950's.⁶² Other suburban officials grilled Zeidler on the abortive satellite city plans for Waukesha County, calling the plan "forced annexation." As they had before,

⁵⁹ Frank Zeidler, Annual Speech to Milwaukee Common Council, 1952, Folder 9, Box 55, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

⁶⁰ Public Hearing, Regular Meeting of the Legislative Council, June 16, 1952, Council Minutes, Citizens Governmental Research Bureau, Metropolitan Problems Committee, Summary of Meetings, 1953-1954, C-1.14, Series 2-NNG, Gill Collection, Marquette University Archives, Marquette University.

⁶¹ Public Hearing, Regular Meeting of the Legislative Council, June 16, 1952, p. 5, Council Minutes, Citizens Governmental Research Bureau, Metropolitan Problems Committee, Summary of Meetings, 1953-1954, C-1.14, Series 2-NNG, Gill Collection, Marquette University Archives, Marquette University.

⁶² Ibid.

local developers continued to support annexation; a representative of the Milwaukee Board of Realtors called Milwaukee's annexation plans "proper and right."⁶³ Town officials registered the greatest alarm. The posting race threatened to "annihilate" town government within the metropolis, noted William Kay, an attorney for the Town of Wauwatosa. The only recourse for towns was to incorporate as cities, but most did not have the population density requirements necessary to do so.⁶⁴

The annexation summit resolved virtually nothing. As Zeidler had noted, the fiscal structure that encouraged municipal mercantilism was at root a problem that only the state legislature could address and it seemed unwilling to do so. Absent any reform at the state level, the annexation wars continued with the same allies rounded up on both sides. The city of Milwaukee's strongest carrot to coax annexation remained cheap water and sewage installations. As before, this placed city officials in a curious partnership with the region's real estate developers. The Milwaukee Real Estate Board had obstructed Zeidler's public housing program at every turn, but remained committed to annexation because of the money it would save in residential development. "The cost of raw land is the same wherever you go," a developer told the *Milwaukee Journal* in 1949, but to install water pumps, wells, and septic tanks for a single home in an unincorporated town cost nearly \$1,000. "In the city," the developer noted, water and sewers installations on a forty-five foot lot cost about \$200, meaning that, "The saving—and

⁶³ Public Hearing, Regular Meeting of the Legislative Council, June 16, 1952, p. 11, Council Minutes, Citizens Governmental Research Bureau, Metropolitan Problems Committee, Summary of Meetings, 1953-1954, C-1.14, Series 2-NNG, Gill Collection, Marquette University Archives, Marquette University.

⁶⁴ Public Hearing, Regular Meeting of the Legislative Council, June 16, 1952, p. 13, Council Minutes, Citizens Governmental Research Bureau, Metropolitan Problems Committee, Summary of Meetings, 1953-1954, C-1.14, Series 2-NNG, Gill Collection, Marquette University Archives, Marquette University.

ultimate result in a lower priced house—is obvious.”⁶⁵ Developers saved so much money from annexation to the city of Milwaukee that they occasionally went to extraordinary lengths to convince town residents to sign annexation petitions. One resident of a home located in an area posted for annexation to Milwaukee resisted joining the city because he claimed he could not afford the increased assessments that were to accompany water and sewer installation once the land around his home was connected to Milwaukee. The development company that sought annexation responded by giving the recalcitrant resident a gift of \$435 to cover the increased assessments.⁶⁶ Episodes such as this were rare; many town residents—especially those with more modest means—saw the benefits of annexation without monetary bribes.

Developers built thousands of modest homes on newly annexed land on Milwaukee’s northwest and south sides in the 1950’s, ultimately cushioning that decade’s population decline. However, the public costs of these improvements were beginning to overwhelm the city’s ability to provide adequate services. Infrastructure improvements of the type that developers so strongly favored usually cost more than the city assessed its new residents, a fact that did not go unnoticed by aldermen who represented older districts in the city. Milton McGuire, president of the Common Council and Zeidler’s most vocal critic within the city, warned that the inner wards of the city could not continue to subsidize development of the periphery through their property taxes.⁶⁷ Another inner city aldermen complained that the city was essentially subsidizing the real estate industry through its inexpensive service provisions. If Milwaukee annexed even

⁶⁵ *Milwaukee Journal*, March 27, 1949.

⁶⁶ *Milwaukee Journal*, June 12, 1952.

⁶⁷ *Milwaukee Journal*, June 14, 1952.

10% of the land it had posted for, the alderman claimed, the city would “go broke.”⁶⁸ The logic of municipal mercantilism held that modest homes on relatively small lots, which developers were constructing in unprecedented numbers in Milwaukee in the postwar era, did not come close to paying for what they demanded in city services. Supporters of annexation were quite cognizant of this problem. William Norris, a columnist for the *Milwaukee Sentinel* and for years a strong supporter of annexation, warned in a column written in the fall of 1952 that the preponderance of new residential homes threatened to plunge the city into “municipal bankruptcy.”⁶⁹ The city desperately needed to acquire industry and businesses to offset its new costs. Suburban municipalities operated under the same apparent fiscal logic, however, almost guaranteeing uneven development in the absence of political unification.

⁶⁸ *Milwaukee Journal*, October 16, 1951.

⁶⁹ *Milwaukee Sentinel*, September 5, 1952.



Local developers built thousands of modest bungalows on Milwaukee's Northwest and South Sides, enticed in large part by inexpensive infrastructure improvements the city of Milwaukee offered. This house is located on the far South Side.

Milwaukee Neighborhoods: Photos and Maps, 1885-1992, Digital Collection, Golda Meier Library, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI.

Web Site: <http://www.uwm.edu/Library/digilib/Milwaukee/index.html>

Slowly, almost imperceptibly, class lines began to harden as the annexation wars continued, lines that often were creations of government. Developers' land planning decisions did not merely respond to privately created "market forces." The city of Milwaukee's policy of public improvements encouraged developers to build in the smallest lots the zoning ordinance allowed, which remained forty-foot frontages in the 1950's. Almost as often, incorporated suburbs feared the encroachment of modest housing as well, driving some communities to annex land on their own to protect home values. "Iron ring" attorneys who represented the suburbs in their numerous conflicts with the city were perhaps more cognizant than anyone of the need to protect class interests. For example, in 1953, Richard Cutler, village attorney of Fox Point, an upper middle class suburb on the North Shore, encouraged the village to annex land bordering to the west. Cutler claimed that prefabricated mass-produced homes were planned for that territory, which he predicted would slice the home values of some village residents by over a third. To prevent this, Fox Point needed to annex the land and institute its own rigid zoning regulations. Suitably alarmed, the village government voted to annex the land to block the building of affordable homes.⁷⁰ The annexation ended at the Milwaukee River, where the Indian Creek Parkway had been built, according to Charles Whitnall's original plan, providing a natural "barrier."⁷¹

Milwaukee's policymakers remained confident that the city's sterling record of efficient service delivery and effective governance would convince the people of the Milwaukee region of the benefits of annexation. To city leaders, the anti-annexation culprits were a small but powerful minority and usually consisted of interest groups who

⁷⁰ *Milwaukee Journal*, November 28, 1953.

⁷¹ Citizens' Governmental Research Bureau, May 26, 1954, Volume 42, No. 9, Folder 9, Box 48, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

had the most to lose if Milwaukee succeeded in uniting the metropolis. Perhaps at the top of this list were publishers of a variety⁷² of small village and town newspapers. Should the town cease to exist, it followed, the newspaper that covered town activities would eventually lose its readership. To that end, suburban publishers actively involved themselves in the annexation conflicts. In the fall of 1951, Phil Nickerson, publisher of the *Tri-Town News*, which covered affairs in the Town of Greenfield, posted 13.5 square miles of land in the Town of Greenfield for annexation to West Allis, strictly to keep Milwaukee from further encroaching upon his town. This type of political activity made objective reporting in suburban newspapers a hopeless cause. In a *Tri-Town News* editorial a few years later that discussed suburban growth, the newspaper claimed that every technological convenience that had existed in the city was now available in the outskirts, meaning that urban places had essentially outlived their usefulness. “Cities are obsolete,” the newspaper declared; “Practically no one lives in the city unless he has to.”

Another sworn enemy of Milwaukee’s annexation was the group of suburban attorneys who in the 1920’s had formed the League of Suburban Municipalities (LSM) to give Milwaukee County suburbs a unified voice in legislative affairs. During the 1920’s, Arthur Werba began calling the LSM the “Iron Ring.”⁷³ By the 1950’s, this term’s meaning had changed to include all of Milwaukee’s suburbs, making for more dramatic newspaper headlines. When suburbs posted notices of intent to annex, the print media chimed in that more “links to the Iron Ring” had formed.⁷⁴ However Milwaukee’s suburbs differed from one another in terms of population, land use, and class; the LSM gave them a collective political consciousness. Not only did they legally challenge

⁷² *Milwaukee Journal*, October 2, 1951.

⁷³ Anthony Orum, *City Building in America* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995), 79-80.

⁷⁴ *Milwaukee Sentinel*, March 14, 1952.

countless annexations by Milwaukee, the LSM's leaders provided a reliable counterpoint to Zeidler and Werba's frequent public attacks. For example, in 1952, Zeidler claimed that suburban attorney Conrad Dineen was leading a "secessionist" movement in the region that did not differ from the actions of the Confederate states before the Civil War. Another attorney responded by calling Zeidler an Adolph Hitler clone: "There is no difference between Milwaukee's methods and Hitler's methods. Both are based on the same kind of compulsion."⁷⁵ The animosity between Milwaukee and its suburbs was so deep that in a book chronicling the history of the Town of Greenfield, William Bowman, an attorney who represented the Town of Greenfield in annexation matters, recalled that in the 1950's he once found bugging devices in his offices. Apparently, Milwaukee officials had installed the espionage equipment to anticipate the legal moves Bowman planned to make in various court proceedings to settle annexation conflicts. Having discovered the bugging devices, Bowman remembered with glee, he proceeded to "throw off" city officials by speaking one way in his offices and another way in the courts, apparently allowing him to win a variety of victories in court against Milwaukee's befuddled officials.⁷⁶

Absurdism aside, both parties flexed their political muscles at the state level of government. By 1959, Milwaukee was spending about \$13,000 annually on state lobbying; the suburban league nearly matched the city, spending \$12,800.⁷⁷ The frequent petitions from city and suburbs to Wisconsin's legislature often compelled the body to get involved in the region's annexation wars, but both groups had different agendas. The

⁷⁵ *Milwaukee Sentinel*, May 21, 1952.

⁷⁶ William H. Bowman, "The Incorporation of Greenfield," in Esther L. Fisher, *A Brief History of the City of Greenfield*, MPL, 135.

⁷⁷ Bertil Hanson, "A Report on the Politics of Milwaukee," 1960, part IV, MPL

city sought tax reforms to distribute more evenly what the Zeidler administration saw as metropolitan revenues. Representatives of the LSM, cognizant that the present annexation laws had helped set off a growing wave of political incorporations that weakened Milwaukee's expansion, characterized the annexation conflict as a "family affair" that did not require state intervention.⁷⁸ The LSM did, however, grow increasingly interested in securing state help to cut off what remained Milwaukee's greatest advantage in achieving annexation: municipally-controlled water provisions. As suburbs like Wauwatosa attempted to annex larger chunks of land, they exceeded their capacity to provide water to new territory. Milwaukee's water authority remained the most readily able to furnish the water installations, but the city steadfastly refused to provide it to any territory outside its borders. Suburbs with designs on annexation thus sought to use the state legislature to pry water from the city. Well aware that without the ability to offer efficient and affordable public improvements the city's physical growth would grind to a halt, Milwaukee's leaders jealously guarded this precious commodity.

The final group most opposed to Milwaukee's annexation program consisted of a town governments themselves, whose leaders were fully aware that the annexation race was bringing them ever closer to extinction. As before, town governments had three options, all of which they explored. They could stand pat and resist annexation in the courts. They could fully consolidate with the city of Milwaukee, which was by far the least appealing alternative. Or they could allow individual residents and property owners to decide their own political futures, which often led to a town's extinction. For example, when Glendale incorporated as a city, breaking away from the Town of Milwaukee in 1950, it took with it virtually all of the town's valuable industrial real estate. Alarmed

⁷⁸ Ibid.

residents of the Town of Milwaukee's northeastern corner, fearing being annexed by neighboring suburbs or even the city of Milwaukee, responded by incorporating as the Village of Bayside. A few years later, Fox Point and Glendale had swallowed up what remained of Town of Milwaukee, forever ending its existence as a political unit. Consequently, of the three viable options, town leaders first tried to fight for their survival, using any and all weapons at their disposal. In greatest peril were the Town of Granville, the Town of Wauwatosa, the Town of Greenfield, and the Town of Lake, all of which were adjacent to the city.

Of the five towns, Lake, which bordered Milwaukee to its south, had the longest history of conflict with the city, driven mainly by the logic of municipal mercantilism. The Wisconsin Electric Power Company's Lakeside Power plant, the largest in the region, produced over \$300,000 in tax revenue for Lake residents, keeping property taxes minimal and ensuring that Milwaukee would strenuously seek annexation of the plant. Wisconsin Electric officials had no desire whatsoever to become part of the city of Milwaukee. Nevertheless, Werba spent years trying to "trap" the plant by drawing annexation petitions in way that encompassed enough landowners to trump the utility company's unwillingness.⁷⁹ These plans continuously failed, but they further embittered Lake officials toward the city. Town of Lake chairman John Kowleski reveled in calling Milwaukee "The Big Octopus" that extended its tentacles throughout the region, choking off the weaker towns' ability to survive. At Kowleski's side was Lake's town constable, Louis Hibicke, whose methods against the city proved more heavy-handed. In 1947, a group of tavern owners in Lake accused Hibicke of extortion, claiming that when Hibicke heard of their intentions to be annexed to Milwaukee, he threatened to suspend

⁷⁹ Letter from Arthur Werba to Frank Zeidler, Folder 4, Box 124, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

their liquor licenses and have them arrested.⁸⁰ Hibicke, removed from his position, continued to thunder away at Milwaukee at public meetings, contributing to the perception that the city would have to move heaven and earth before they annexed all of Lake.⁸¹

The drive to attain the highest and best uses of land that municipal mercantilism demanded, in contrast, changed the Town of Lake's attitude toward the city. In July of 1951, residents surrounding the Lakeside Power Plant "put a fence" around its utility revenues, voting that month to incorporate as the village of St. Francis.⁸² Overnight, the Town of Lake lost over a third of its tax revenue.⁸³ "The Town of Lake faces a bleak prospect of rising government costs and lowered revenues—in other words, soaring taxes," predicted the *Milwaukee Sentinel*.⁸⁴ Sensing renewed opportunity, Milwaukee's annexation solicitors again sought to sell the virtues of the city to Lake's residents. The Department of Abstracting and Annexation got a name change in 1952, reinventing itself as the more palatable Department of Community Development. That year, city officials compiled an ostensibly objective report weighing the pluses and minuses of a complete consolidation of Lake with Milwaukee. The report warned Lake's residents that the structure of town government was ill equipped to handle their increasing service demands. Joining the city meant lower taxes since Milwaukee was prepared to assume the town's \$1.5 million debt, better-funded public schools, more reliable police

⁸⁰ *Milwaukee Journal*, April 6, 1947.

⁸¹ *Milwaukee Sentinel*, February 27, 1951.

⁸² As quoted in "Report on City-Suburban Relations," Milwaukee Community Development Corporation, 1957, MPL.

⁸³ "Town of Lake Considers Consolidation with City of Milwaukee on its 116th Birthday," Citizens Governmental Research Bureau Newsletter, vol. 42, no. 7, April 1, 1954, Folder 9, Box 48, Zeidler papers, MPL.

⁸⁴ *Milwaukee Sentinel*, August 2, 1951.

protection, and “a substantial increase in land values.”⁸⁵ The enticements worked. In 1953, Lake residents voted over four to one in a referendum to dissolve their town government and consolidate with Milwaukee.⁸⁶ Decades of bitter conflict between town and city ended over the fate of a power plant.

Examined strictly as a public asset, the consolidation of the Town of Lake minus its most valuable asset, the Lakeside Plant, added a tremendous new cost to Milwaukee city government. The city had agreed to assume all of Lake’s \$1.5 million municipal debt. A new aldermanic district was created to represent the entirety of the former town. The town’s civil service employees received jobs with the city as a stipulation of the consolidation agreement.⁸⁷ While some industry existed along three railroad lines that ran north and south, this tax benefit was offset by the absorption of 13,000 new, mostly working class residents, whose service demands offset the new property tax revenues gained through consolidation. Judged by the standards of municipal mercantilism, Milwaukee had not secured a highest and best land use. For the time being, however, the new public costs did not matter. The city had opened up a vast new corridor of potential growth to the south, one that seemed extremely unlikely to be available prior to the incorporation of St. Francis. The Town of Lake’s land uses were extremely heterogeneous, reflecting its geography as the last community of substantial residential outflow from the city. To the south, past the long lines of modest bungalows that dominated the northern portion of Lake, lie Mitchell Airport, now within city limits, and a series of farms, for which the city was forced to create a new agricultural land use

⁸⁵ “Consolidation? Cooperation? Advantages and Disadvantages of the Consolidation of the Town of Lake with the City of Milwaukee,” prepared by Milwaukee Office of Budget Supervisor, 1953, MPL.

⁸⁶ *Milwaukee Sentinel*, June 12, 1953.

⁸⁷ Citizens’ Governmental Research Bureau Bulletin, April 1, 1954, Volume 42, Number 7, Folder 9, Box 48, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

classification in its zoning ordinance. The vacant land had great potential for industrial development. The Chicago and Northwest Railroad ran through Lake and southward to the Town of Oak Creek. The region's transportation plans also included a proposed expressway (eventually Interstate 94) that would parallel the rail line, eventually connecting Milwaukee with the city of Chicago, ninety miles to the south.

Milwaukee officials were by no means alone in recognizing the vast development potential south of the city and along expressways. Since the 1940's, manufacturers began changing their shipping methods, favoring trucks over freight rail. The new shipping methods coupled with a desire by industries move away from multi-storied plants to horizontally-organized production sites surrounded by expanses of parking that would allow employees to drive to work. Newer plants such as these were almost impossible to build in dense cities, due to the lack of available space. Further encouragement for plant decentralization came from the federal government, where a variety of studies echoed Cold War fears of the nuclear vulnerability of cities. The National Industrial Dispersal Program of the early 1950's urged manufacturers to build all new plants at least 10 to 15 miles outside of "present industrial concentrations" to lessen the damage of nuclear attack.⁸⁸

Whether impelled by the federal government or the logic of plant location and newer shipping techniques, manufacturers were by the 1950's already pursuing decentralization and developing horizontal production systems that required far more space. In a 1960 study of plant location in Milwaukee County that covered 950 different

⁸⁸ Minutes of Milwaukee Association of Commerce Board of Directors Meeting, September 28, 1951, Folder 2, Box 3, Milwaukee Metropolitan Association of Commerce. Minutes, 1915-1964. Milwaukee Manuscript Collection 14, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Milwaukee Area Research Center, Golda Meier Library, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

firms, Norbert Stefaniak, a commerce professor at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Extension documented industry's new spatial needs. Of the 218 companies in Stefaniak's study that had built plants within ten years of 1960, 76% of them responded that they used no rail transportation at all.⁸⁹ Furthermore, Stefaniak estimated that two out of every three manufacturing workers in Milwaukee used automobiles to get to and from work, demonstrating the increased need to provide ample parking for the postwar industrial workforce. The future expansion of industry seemed bent toward new production methods that stretched plants out horizontally, increasingly utilized trucks to supplement or replace freight transport, and provided acres of parking for workers. Vacant land near future expressway expansion thus became extremely valuable industrial real estate and was also hotly contested throughout the postwar years.

Recognizing these trends, General Motors' AC Spark Plug Division, which had located its first large plant in the Milwaukee area on the city's crowded East Side, began to seek out vacant land past the urban periphery to expand its regional operations. In 1955, the company settled on a huge tract of vacant land at the northern edges of the rural Town of Oak Creek, which suddenly bordered Milwaukee in the wake of the Town of Lake's consolidation. Milwaukee officials immediately began making plans to continue annexation to the south, successfully taking in 223 acres of Oak Creek land in 1953.⁹⁰

The Town of Oak Creek differed greatly from other towns adjacent to Milwaukee. While Granville, Greenfield, and Wauwatosa had long absorbed residential outflow from the city, Oak Creek remained rural in the 1950's, with 80% of its land dedicated to

⁸⁹ Norbert Stefaniak, "Industrial Location Within the Urban Area: A Case Study of the Locational Characteristics of 950 Manufacturing Plants in the Milwaukee Area," Wisconsin Commerce Reports: Volume VI, No. 5, August, 1962, MPL.

⁹⁰ Arnold Fleischmann, "The Politics of Annexation and Urban Development: A Clash of Two Paradigms," Ph.D. Diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1984.

agricultural use. Approximately 7,000 people lived in a town that encompassed twenty-nine square miles.⁹¹ The town's rural characteristics greatly limited the options of its residents in preventing annexation. Communities near Milwaukee could incorporate as villages, since their population densities usually met the state requirements for village status. Oak Creek could not seek incorporation under present state laws, which required incorporated cities to have no less than 400 people per square mile.⁹² With the city knocking at its door, the town's officials began to explore its options.

Once again, the logic of municipal mercantilism infected another town's political future. The Wisconsin Electric Power Company, which operated the Lakeside Power Plant in St. Francis, made plans for its largest expansion to date, choosing to build a \$300 million plant along Lake Michigan at the southern edge of the Town of Oak Creek, promising to increase property tax revenues there by over \$300,000 per year. With the new plant under construction, residents first voted to combine the town's eight school districts together to more evenly spread out the utility revenue.⁹³ With that accomplished, Oak Creek officials next sought to prevent annexation by Milwaukee. Residents besieged town officials to try something, anything, to incorporate the entire town, but the aforementioned state laws made it impossible.

Anthony Basile, an attorney who had been persuaded by an old friend from school to work for Oak Creek, stepped into the picture. Basile convinced town officials that if Oak Creek took its case to the state legislature, where anti-urban sentiment had existed for years, there might be enough sympathy to enact a new law to allow Oak Creek to

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Curran, *Metropolitan Financing*, 44.

⁹³ "Town of Oak Creek's 114th Anniversary—Milwaukee County's Future Low Tax Community," Citizens Governmental Research Bureau Newsletter, Volume 43, No. 15, September 25, 1954, Folder 3, Box 187, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

incorporate. Town officials agreed to the plan. Basile crafted a bill that essentially waived the “urban characteristics” requirement *reserved only* for towns bordering the city of Milwaukee, paving the way for them to incorporate as “fourth-class cities” pending referenda. The town spent over \$50,000 lobbying state legislators in Madison to bring the bill to the state floor. In 1955, legislature debated the “Oak Creek Bill” which was more palatable to many legislators because it specifically applied to towns surrounding the city of Milwaukee. It proved controversial nonetheless. By the narrowest of margins, the Wisconsin state assembly voted approval by a vote of 44 to 42. The deciding vote came from an Assemblyman from Milwaukee’s South Side, who claimed to have voted in the affirmative only to ensure that the law would be reconsidered, a technical mistake that eventually allowed the bill to escape the legislature, as it passed through the state senate unchanged. Another Milwaukee assemblyman belatedly warned the legislature that Oak Creek only wanted to “grab the taxes” of the new Wisconsin Electric Power Plant and moved for reconsideration of the bill, but was voted down.⁹⁴

With the Oak Creek Bill now sitting on a wary Governor Walter Kohler Jr.’s desk, Basile again applied his persuasive skills, appealing for Kohler’s signature, ironically, on the grounds of regional industrial development. Basile warned Kohler that General Motors’ AC Spark Plug Division intended to build a large new plant in Oak Creek, but the corporation demanded assurances that it could avoid being annexed to Milwaukee. Given that guarantee, the plant’s construction would progress. Absent an apparent Oak Creek incorporation, General Motors had no desire to build anywhere else in Milwaukee and would instead expand to Florida or California. While Basile continued to persuade Governor Kohler, desperate Milwaukee officials maneuvered in “damage

⁹⁴ *Milwaukee Journal*, January 18, 1957.

control” mode. Joe Lamping, who had replaced the retired Arthur Werba as community development (annexation) director a year earlier in 1954, met with General Motors executives, hoping to convince them to build their new facility on land in the former Town of Lake.⁹⁵ To protect future expansion should the Oak Creek Bill fail, city officials quickly re-posted ten square miles of land in the northern half of Oak Creek for annexation.

An obviously ambiguous Governor Kohler signed the Oak Creek bill into law, telling the legislature that “I have some reservation about the ultimate effect of signing this bill into law,” and assuring them that he was convinced that the bill would be severely tested in the courts.⁹⁶ In the meantime, Kohler said, piecemeal annexation could be halted, which he felt was at the root of the city and suburban conflicts in the first place. Milwaukee officials were horrified. Zeidler believed the Oak Creek Law was “one of the worst developments that has occurred in the history of local government in the United States.”⁹⁷ The League of Wisconsin Municipalities, which broadly represented all cities and towns in the state, tried to get the legislature to pass a law allowing Milwaukee to contest the new law in court, but the state senate killed the bill. Meanwhile, Oak Creek town officials quickly moved to give town residents the chance to vote themselves into city status, scheduling a referendum for October 31, 1955. Now in a race against time, Milwaukee’s city attorney moved for state courts to issue a restraining order postponing the referendum until the Oak Creek Law could be legally contested in court. The legal maneuvering failed. To avoid having any legal papers served against

⁹⁵ Letter from Gerald Caffrey to Frank Zeidler, December 14, 1955, Folder 3, Box 79, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

⁹⁶ *Milwaukee Journal*, July 26, 1955.

⁹⁷ Letter from Frank Zeidler to Joe Lamping, July 12, 1957, Folder 9, Box 56, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

them, Oak Creek's town officials literally disappeared from site until the referendum. On October 31, town residents voted 2,107 to 126 for the incorporation of the city of Oak Creek.⁹⁸ Running out of legal options, the city next obtained a temporary injunction in a Dane County circuit court, where the state capitol of Madison was located, to restrain the results of the referendum. Oak Creek officials certified the election anyway. Before the state agreed to issue an official certification of Oak Creek as a city, hundreds of town residents gathered together and declared Oak Creek a city. By December, the state gave Oak Creek a charter, essentially ending the legal conflict for good.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ *Milwaukee Journal*, November 1, 1955.

⁹⁹ *Milwaukee Journal*, January 18, 1957.



Oak Creek's First City Officials, Standing in Front of Plans for A.C. Spark Plug Plant

Anita Rowe, Larry Rowe, *Oak Creek, WI (Images of America)*, Arcadia Publishing, 1998, 98.

Once again, state legislation had dramatically altered the political development of the Milwaukee region. The concept of reluctant urbanism was dying. “What is does,” claimed Zeidler, referring to the Oak Creek Bill, “is to prevent the city from spreading out horizontally. It means the city must now grow vertically and that will require changes in zoning and the entire concept of planning.”¹⁰⁰ The Oak Creek Law allowed even the most rural towns to incorporate as “cities” provided that they border Milwaukee. Only six years later, every single remaining town that surrounded Milwaukee had incorporated, closing the iron ring for good and essentially ending annexation. The city

¹⁰⁰ *Milwaukee Journal*, July 26, 1955.

did manage to convince the Town of Granville to consolidate with Milwaukee in 1956, and after a lengthy litigation process, the Granville-Milwaukee consolidation was made official in 1962.¹⁰¹ However, for officials who had banked on the complete unification of the Milwaukee metropolis, the Oak Creek Law was a devastating blow. It demonstrated, yet again, that the logic of municipal mercantilism invited conflict rather than cooperation and made a mockery of “metropolitanization” as a genuine exercise in regional development. With Milwaukee reeling from the Oak Creek Law, Governor Kohler, who had signed a law he was not sure was even constitutional, sought state help to solve metropolitan problems, arguing that a commission to study metropolitan problems in Milwaukee County was desperately needed. The Greater Milwaukee Committee (GMC) had long advocated the idea for a metropolitan committee, proposing it to Kohler on numerous occasions. As perhaps the city’s most influential group of civic elites, the GMC remained determined to market the region as a harmonious place. However, the politically fragmenting metropolis belied any possibility of political cooperation.

In fact, the economic health of metropolitan Milwaukee as a whole was complicated by intra-metropolitan conflict. The 1950’s were a time of general prosperity across the United States and the region was by no means left behind during this economic boom. Nonetheless, the annexation wars and subsequent political suburbanization had already taken a toll on the city of Milwaukee. If the contest was about which municipality could create, capture, or maintain the highest and best land uses, Milwaukee was losing the battle, despite dramatically increasing its size. The most valuable

¹⁰¹ John Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee*, (Milwaukee, WI: Milwaukee County Historical Society Press, 1999), 341-342.

industrial territory in Milwaukee County almost always wound up in other hands. Glendale's incorporation had fenced in the industrial corridor along the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad lines above Capitol Drive. West Milwaukee and West Allis had annexed most of the southwest corridor of industry. In 1953, Wauwatosa annexed 8.5 miles of mostly vacant land to its north and west, thereby acquiring ample room for industrial, commercial, and residential expansion. While these suburbs grew, they also increasingly attracted industry away from Milwaukee, an ominous sign demonstrating that well before *deindustrialization* drained jobs from the Milwaukee region, *industrial decentralization* was beginning to remove jobs from the city of Milwaukee itself. By the count of city officials, from 1949 to 1955, eighteen major manufacturers vacated Milwaukee. Of that number, only four left the region entirely, and the other fourteen moved to one of Milwaukee's suburbs.¹⁰²

The political conflicts between Milwaukee and its suburbs were not confined to legal maneuverings and inflamed rhetoric over physical growth. At no time in the history of American cities was regional cooperation more needed to address the increasing problems that of central cities. Despite record manufacturing employment, city officials had been well aware that Milwaukee's ability to prosper hinged upon fostering future industrial development within its boundaries. Political fragmentation made this exceedingly difficult, as did a deep distrust between Mayor Zeidler and Milwaukee's business community. Just as ominously, the city's social problems dramatically grew during the postwar era. Milwaukee's African American population substantially increased in size and the city's newest residents sought the same opportunities to advance

¹⁰² Memo from Gerald Caffrey to Frank Zeidler, January 25, 1956, Folder 2, Box 181, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

economically as had previous generations of urban migrants. However, those African Americans who moved to Milwaukee during the years following World War Two arrived in a city that was at an economic crossroads, beginning to lose ground to the increasingly growing number of suburbs that had emerged as a direct result of the annexation wars. The postwar city's social and racial problems were contested in this fragmented metropolis.¹⁰³ This reality gave a specific economic shape to both urban and suburban development, with resources distributed unevenly across newly created political boundaries that divided people by race and class.

¹⁰³ The term "fragmented metropolis" was first used by Robert Fogelson in *The Fragmented Metropolis: Los Angeles, 1850-1930* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967). Robert Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia* (New York, Basic Books, 1987). See also Jon C. Teaford, *City and Suburb: The Political Fragmentation of Metropolitan America, 1850-1970* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979).

Chapter 6: The Iron Ring Closes: The Racial, Political, and Economic Dimensions of Milwaukee's Metropolitan Failure

"Industry finds itself in a position comparable that of the only man shipwrecked on an island inhabited only by women."—Wisconsin Metropolitan Study Commission, 1959.

While political borders on the metropolitan fringe were hardening, equally dramatic changes were taking place in Milwaukee's urban core. From 1950 to 1960, over 40,000 African Americans moved to Milwaukee, beginning a "Late Great Migration" that tripled the city's black population in a single decade.¹ The influx of these new migrants altered the racial makeup of the city; in 1946, the Milwaukee Association of Commerce had proudly marketed Milwaukee to the nation as the second whitest metropolis in America. By 1960, however, Milwaukee's population of 741,455 included over 60,000 African Americans and the region's political boundaries subsequently became defined by race as well as class.

In the half first of the twentieth century, Milwaukee's African American population remained minuscule compared to other Midwest cities. African American migrants from the south were far more likely to settle in Chicago, where African American cultural and economic institutions were stronger and longer in establishment, or in Detroit and Cleveland, whose auto and steel industries more readily accommodated unskilled labor. Before World War II, African Americans occupied only a small and clearly defined section on the northwest end of downtown, living mostly within the confines of the Second and Sixth Wards, two of the oldest sections of the city.²

¹ The term "Late Great Migration" comes from Paul Edward Geib, "The Late, Great Migration: A Case Study of Southern Black Migration to Milwaukee, 1940-1970," M.A. Thesis, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 1993.

² Joe William Trotter, Jr. *Black Milwaukee: The Making of an Industrial Proletariat, 1915-1945*, (Urbana; University of Illinois Press, 1985).

Milwaukee's tiny African American population had accordingly existed as a city within a city. The Sixth Ward had long been associated with urban decay, but its population was racially mixed for most of first half of the twentieth century. Numerous Eastern European immigrant families lived in similar states of urban squalor. Reformers at that time had rarely opposed overcrowding in racial terms. Nonetheless, public policy disproportionately affected the city's black population before the post-World War II black migration. City planners had decided that older neighborhoods like the Sixth Ward were unfit to live in. The zoning ordinance of 1920 that had barred residential construction in Milwaukee's oldest neighborhoods also contributed to real decline in the homes in Milwaukee's black neighborhoods. For their part, Milwaukee's realtors also made explicit their intentions to facilitate racial segregation. In 1924, the Milwaukee Real Estate Board announced vague plans for a "Black Belt" on the North Side, demonstrating a commitment to segregation well before black migration reached postwar proportions.³ The city's demolition program of the 1930's eliminated thousands of dilapidated dwellings in the Sixth and the increasingly African American Second Ward, amplifying the housing shortage in precisely that area where African Americans concentration was the highest. These policies only reinforced the growing connection between African Americans and "blight" in the city.

The zoning ordinance and the staggering amount of demolitions revealed policymakers' assumptions that inner city residents, regardless of race or ethnicity, would slowly vacate the inner city. Between 1920 and 1940, the population of twenty-five inner city census tracts in Milwaukee's innermost wards did decrease, but racial segregation increased at the same time, as the black population grew during those same years from

³ *Milwaukee Journal*, September 16, 1924.

2,229 to 8,821 residents, within the confines of a slowly expanding “inner core” on the Northwest Side of downtown.⁴ By the close of World War Two, inner city wards remained associated with decay. It became more convenient to associate “blight” with African American residents, even though they still encompassed a tiny fraction of the city’s overall population.⁵

Figure 6-1: Milwaukee’s African American Population By Decade, 1910-1960

Year	Black Population	Total Population	Percentage of Total Population
1910	980	373,857	0.26%
1920	2,229	457,147	0.5%
1930	7,501	578,249	1.3%
1940	8,821	587,472	1.5%
1950	21,772	637,392	3.4%
1960	62,458	741,324	8.4%

Milwaukee Metropolitan Area Fact Book: 1940, 1950, 1960, (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press), 1962.

Equally important to many Milwaukeeans, Mayor Frank Zeidler’s urban policies, while rarely racially motivated, often implicitly threatened to upset the region’s racial status quo. Zeidler spent a good deal of his first term promoting large-scale community development schemes such as the acquisition of Greendale and the construction of a satellite city in Waukesha County, as well as developing a reliable source of funding for public housing. In different ways each plan threatened to bring urban problems to rural or suburban spaces. While the strongest source of opposition to Zeidler’s satellite city

⁴ William Slayton, “Population Changes by Census Tract, City of Milwaukee, 1920-1940,” Milwaukee Public Library (MPL).

⁵ “Observations on Housing Conditions in Milwaukee’s Sixth Ward,” A Report to Mayor John Bohn and the Common Council, from the Milwaukee Health Commissioner, MPL.

came from local residents determined to cling to local control, an implicit racial fear of the city existed as well, as one local Waukesha County resident accused Zeidler of trying to “eliminate Milwaukee’s slums and move them out here.”⁶ In 1951, Zeidler’s ambitious community development and public housing plans ended somewhat abruptly. City residents rejected a referendum that would have given the city greater latitude in the construction of public housing. Civic organizations such as the Greater Milwaukee Committee (GMC) and the Milwaukee Association of Commerce remained committed to subsidizing the rebuilding of downtown and gave no support to public housing. Even in 1955, four years after public housing was halted by Milwaukee citizens, the MAC continued to grumble about Zeidler’s support for “socialized housing.”⁷

Zeidler’s support for public housing and planned decentralization, matched with his blunt declaration that blacks moved to decaying inner core neighborhoods “because they are not welcome anywhere else,” made him an increasingly attractive target for a growing number of political opponents. Adding to Zeidler’s problems by the middle of the decade was the ever-increasing animosity between city and suburbs in Milwaukee County over annexation, which had culminated at the end of 1955 in the passage of the Oak Creek Law. These twin tensions boiled over in the spring mayoral election of 1956, the most contentious in Milwaukee’s postwar history.

The 1956 election hinged implicitly on the question of race, but it also revealed the deep political and economic tensions that were by now endemic to the metropolis. Zeidler’s opponent, Milton McGuire, commanded the support not only of white city

⁶ *Milwaukee Journal*, March 29, 1951.

⁷ National Affairs Committee Meeting, July 7, 1955, Folder 6, Box 3, Milwaukee Metropolitan Association of Commerce. Minutes, 1915-1964. Milwaukee Manuscript Collection 14, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Milwaukee Area Research Center, Golda Meier Library, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

residents nervous about the influx of African Americans, but also of business leaders increasingly put off by Zeidler's socialism and suburban residents obviously bitter at the city's annexation program. Zeidler's relatively narrow victory and subsequent last four years in office took place against a backdrop of a state-mandated Metropolitan Study Commission that had been established to herald a new era of metropolitan cooperation. Instead, the MSC failed to achieve political compromise, and in the process indirectly revealed that suburban sprawl and uneven development were persistent byproducts of the fragmented metropolis.

Several incidents quickly became the flashpoints for racial conflict that surfaced ominously in the early 1950's. For many whites, the most dramatic was the 1952 murder of three white Milwaukeeans by a recently arrived black migrant to Milwaukee. The murder, briefly recounted in historian Jack Dougherty's study of school integration in Milwaukee, spurred the city's law enforcement officials to call for increased police surveillance of the Sixth Ward. More broadly, the murder exemplified a "migrant crisis."⁸ Milwaukee's all-white Common Council believed that the majority of black migrants came to Milwaukee not to access well-paying industrial jobs, but instead to take advantage of the relatively generous county-operated welfare that was available to impoverished residents. A month after the murder of the three whites, the County Board began considering lengthening the residency requirements for relief. The Milwaukee Common Council passed a resolution supporting the Board's action. Zeidler vetoed the

⁸ Jack Dougherty, *More Than One Struggle: The Evolution of Black School Reform in Milwaukee* (Chapel Hill; University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 51-52.

resolution on December 23, recognizing that the new ordinance and the County Board's potential new policy sought explicitly to "prevent migrant people of southern origin from getting Milwaukee County aid easily."⁹ Zeidler's veto confirmed to many of his political enemies that the city's growing tensions and his apparent racial benevolence, made the mayor politically vulnerable. The Milwaukee Real Estate Board, who endorsed Zeidler's annexation plans, objected to increasing the construction of low-income public housing in the city, assuming that it, too, attracted "southern migrants." In a letter to Zeidler written soon after his veto, the Board pointedly asked if the county's relief policies and the city's newest low-income projects, Westlawn and Hillside, had been an "inducement" to blacks, noting that "more than half the colored tenants in the projects" had lived in Milwaukee in two years or less.¹⁰

Zeidler's frank observations about the city's racial tensions, his unwillingness to obstruct black migration to the city, and his oft-stated but never realized policy of planned decentralization infuriated some city and suburban residents. An anonymous resident of the Northwest Side asked Zeidler what he had done to discourage African Americans from coming to Milwaukee: "Why scatter them all over the city, creating trouble and problems for us?"¹¹ In reality, virtually no "scattering" had taken place. Over 98% of the city's black population was confined to the inner core. Yet the recent construction of Westlawn, the city's newest low-income public housing project that was located on the Northwest Side on land recently annexed from the Town of Wauwatosa, had frightened suburban whites. Westlawn was the last—and largest—low-income

⁹ Memo from Frank Zeidler to Common Council, December 23, 1952, Folder 11, Box 47, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

¹⁰ Frank Zeidler, *A Liberal in City Government: My Experiences as Mayor of Milwaukee*, Unpublished Manuscript, 1962, MPL.

¹¹ Anonymous letter to Frank Zeidler, Folder 11, Box 47, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

project the city built before the 1951 referendum halted public housing expansion. *The Wauwatosa News-Times*, the suburb of Wauwatosa's newspaper and frequent opponent of annexation, plainly stated in 1953 that while the suburbs "did not hate" Milwaukee, they did fear Zeidler's policies, particularly the idea of building low-income public housing in formerly rural territory. In implicitly racial terms, the *Times* claimed to "have listened to stories of good hard-working people who claim that they have, in good faith, fine residences in the city of Milwaukee only to have their values come tumbling down because of a Zeidler-inspired housing development erected 'right next door.'"¹² Westlawn's 750 units were racially integrated, but in the early 1950s only 18% of its residents were African American. Nevertheless, suburban residents did occasionally connect annexation to racial integration, further complicating the city's expansion plans. This only added to a groundswell of irrational rumors within white communities that Zeidler was initiating a plot to move large numbers of blacks to Milwaukee.

For those who sought to exploit racial fears to deny Zeidler from winning a third term in 1956, the emergence of Milton McGuire as a viable mayoral candidate was a virtual godsend. McGuire had served as an alderman of the Third Ward since 1936 and as President of the Common Council from 1944 through 1955, had opposed low-income public housing from the start. McGuire's candidacy has often been characterized solely in racial terms, as that of a white alderman seeking to unseat a racially "enlightened" mayor in the name of preserving racial homogeneity.¹³ The 1956 election was undeniably the first in the city's history in which race was a politically divisive issue. An April 1956 article on the election that ran in *Time* magazine under the title "The Shame of

¹² *The Wauwatosa News-Times*, August 6, 1953, in Folder 5, Box 159, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

¹³ Dougherty, *More Than One Struggle*, 57-58, Patrick D. Jones, "'The Selma of the North': Race Relations and Civil Rights Insurgency in Milwaukee, 1958-1970," Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, 2002, 33-34.

Milwaukee” brought the city’s racial tensions to the nation. A “whispering campaign” had Zeidler plastering the South with billboards inviting blacks to Milwaukee. Another rumor had Zeidler’s daughter and sister married to blacks. Apparently, McGuire’s aides called Zeidler a “nigger lover” out of public eye.¹⁴ McGuire himself called the rumors “shameful” and his official campaign platform made no explicit mention of race.

Nevertheless, McGuire did little else to dissuade people from believing he was, as one resident angrily wrote Zeidler, the only “honest white man” running for mayor.¹⁵

The 1956 mayoral election between Zeidler and McGuire partly hinged on race, to be sure, but it also amplified broader political, economic, and spatial conflicts festering within the metropolis. For the first time in his tenure, Zeidler’s socialism, while always problematic to the region’s business and civic elites, withstood a frontal assault from McGuire and his supporters. McGuire’s campaign kept silent over race, but loudly and frequently attacked Zeidler’s socialism as un-American. “Milwaukee needs a mayor who believes in the *American* system of free enterprise,” McGuire’s campaign literature told Milwaukee residents.¹⁶ Zeidler’s long pro-labor record ensured him the support of the city’s increasingly powerful unions, but McGuire could and did take aim at the city’s paucity of industrial expansion. “Labor is being ‘short-changed’ in Milwaukee because Milwaukee is not attractive to industry,” stated another McGuire pamphlet, adding that “industry is afraid of a city mayor who wants to end the free enterprise system.”¹⁷ When the Oak Creek Law passed in the fall of 1955, McGuire also attempted to exploit this

¹⁴ “The Shame of Milwaukee,” *Newsweek*, April 2, 1953.

¹⁵ “Here Are the Facts About Milton J. McGuire, Candidate for Mayor of Milwaukee,” McGuire for Mayor Club, Folder 2, Box 48, Zeidler Papers, MPL, Anonymous letter to Frank Zeidler, Folder 11, Box 47, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

¹⁶ “To the Voters of Milwaukee,” Folder 11, Box 47, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

¹⁷ “Here Are the Facts About Milton J. McGuire,” Folder 2, Box 48, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

major setback. Under Zeidler, McGuire noted, the Milwaukee had annexed miles of new territory, but not nearly enough industrial land, further ensuring that the city's manufacturing sector was crawling toward obsolescence. Finally, McGuire claimed that city-suburban relations had collapsed during Zeidler's tenure into all-out municipal war. "Greater harmony" was badly needed, starting with a mayor who could get along with Milwaukee's suburbs.¹⁸ This genteel rhetoric toward the suburbs was perhaps fiscally motivated. By the end of February 1956, McGuire's individual campaign donations from suburban residents outnumbered donations from city residents by nearly a two-to-one margin.¹⁹

There were other assaults on Zeidler's socialism. The "Milwaukee for America Committee" formed to help deliver the city to McGuire, issued a sixteen-page pamphlet titled "Think Milwaukee Voters!" that outlined in great detail the dangers of socialism. To encourage readers to "think," the committee contrasted its free market rhetoric with a variety of quotes from some of Zeidler's speeches. The pamphlet noted, in closing, that Zeidler's socialist "utopias...crashed upon the American reefs of roast beef and apple pie," further warning that: "Mr. Zeidler would do well to mediate on these words."²⁰ The *Milwaukee Sentinel*, long known as the city's more conservative newspaper, also saw salvation in McGuire and became a virtual mouthpiece for his campaign in the spring of 1956. In March, the *Sentinel* ran a series of articles titled "Americanism or Socialism?" practically implying Zeidler was a Soviet insurgent by repeatedly referring to him as a

¹⁸ "To the Voters of Milwaukee," Folder 11, Box 47, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

¹⁹ As of February 27, 1956, 58 of Milton McGuire individual campaign contributions came from people who resided outside of Milwaukee, compared to only 30 contributors who lived in the city; Folder 14, Box 47, Zeidler Papers, MPL

²⁰ "Think, Milwaukee Voters!" Folder 2, Box 48, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

“long-time, dedicated, doctrinaire, Marxian Socialist.”²¹ McGuire on the other hand was “a man who has thrown down the gauntlet against Mr. Zeidler and his socialism in the name of the American system of free enterprise.”²² The *Sentinel* gravely warned voters that the mayoral election was about “basic principles” that would forever be perverted should Zeidler be re-elected. The paper went to extraordinary lengths to cast Zeidler’s eight years in office as an utter failure. The paper dubbed a forty-six-page memo Zeidler wrote to his advisors on the city’s accomplishments and future needs: “Mayor Zeidler’s Confession of Failure.” *Sentinel* columnist William Norris, once a supporter of annexation but now in lock-step with the paper against Zeidler, even criticized the mayor for refusing to accept a salary raise. Norris reasoned that the sacrifice made Zeidler a poor “teammate” since the members of the Common Council all had voted themselves raises and stood to look selfish as a result.

Local industrial leaders, represented by such groups as the MAC and the Greater Milwaukee Committee, remained silent and non-partisan during the campaign. Nevertheless, the city’s business elites’ vitriol toward Zeidler was apparent. The MAC’s Board of Directors angrily condemned a Zeidler speech to a student group at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in October of 1955 where he “attacked” America’s system of free enterprise.²³ Zeidler had pointed out with some irony that “free” enterprise was never as *laissez-faire* as businesses liked to characterize it; corporate welfare existed at all levels of government. The speech came immediately after the signing of the Oak Creek Bill into law, which among other things, had created a virtual

²¹ *Milwaukee Sentinel*, March 23, 1956.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Board of Directors Meeting, November 22, 1955, Folder 6, Box 3, Milwaukee Metropolitan Association of Commerce. Minutes, 1915-1964. Milwaukee Manuscript Collection 14, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Milwaukee Area Research Center, Golda Meier Library, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

tax haven for General Motors' AC Spark Plug Division, a fact that well may have been in the back of Zeidler's mind during the speech. Whatever Zeidler's personal motivations in making his speech, the MAC's leaders considered any harsh words toward "free enterprise" subversive, and they were already planning subtle election year indoctrination of their own. The A.O. Smith Corporation, one of the city's largest employers, had previously required that its 10,000 employees view a video titled "Our Way of Living" that demonstrated the greatness of the American system of free enterprise and the importance of political participation. Recognizing that 1956 was an election year, the MAC decided to distribute "Our Way of Living" to forty other local companies as well.²⁴ Other local businesses actively campaigned against Zeidler in the workplace, explicitly citing his potential re-election as a threat of termination. The owner of a small manufacturing plant on the North Side passed out copies of "Think Milwaukee Voters!" to all of his workers, telling them to pass the chain along to friends. The memo sternly warned employees "IF YOU DON'T KEEP THIS CHAIN ALIVE (emphasis in original) you will get...oh; let's not think of unpleasant things."²⁵ On the other hand, a vote for McGuire supported "a man who firmly believes in the American free enterprise system."²⁶

Intimidation at workplaces failed. Zeidler's supporters strongly came to his defense, with organized labor in the lead. To counter the vicious racial rumors, the Federated Trades Council of Milwaukee wrote letters to unions in ten different southern

²⁴ Board of Directors Meeting Minutes, March 8, 1956, Milwaukee Metropolitan Association of Commerce. Minutes, 1915-1964. Milwaukee Manuscript Collection 14, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Milwaukee Area Research Center, Golda Meier Library, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

²⁵ Memo from E.E. Woerfel to Woerfel Corporation Employees, March 20, 1956, Folder 2, Box 48, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

²⁶ Ibid.

states asking them to check their territories for billboard from Zeidler welcoming African Americans north to Milwaukee.²⁷ None were found. The *Milwaukee Labor Press*, the city's local labor newspaper, characterized McGuire's attacks as two-pronged, one openly aiming at Zeidler's socialism, the other, a tolerance for the racist rumors about Zeidler and his family that had enveloped the city.²⁸ The migration of African Americans, the press noted, was a national phenomenon originally rooted in manufacturers' wartime needs for cheap labor. For his part, Zeidler remained above the fray, calmly explaining black in-migration in terms of economic opportunity, and calling upon city residents to ignore the rumors and vote their conscience. Only in an interview with an outside newspaper, the *New York Post*, did Zeidler's rhetoric heat up. "We're seeing the rise in Wisconsin of a new American fascism," he said of his political enemies, "These people took over the Republican Party; now they're trying to get Milwaukee."²⁹ If the effort really did represent a Republican insurgency, it failed completely. In the end, a majority of Milwaukee voters looked beyond the overt attacks on Zeidler, delivering him a third term by a margin of 117,912 votes to McGuire's 95,943.³⁰

Zeidler had won the bruising re-election by over 20,000 votes, no small accomplishment considering the flood of propaganda he had faced. In fact, the 1956 election made Zeidler something of a national figure in civil rights circles. The *Pittsburgh Courier*, the nation's second largest black newspaper, twice sent a reporter to Milwaukee to feature Zeidler's struggles against the racist rhetoric.³¹ Philadelphia Mayor Joseph

²⁷ Bill Lueders, "Last of a Breed," *Milwaukee Magazine*, November, 1985.

²⁸ *Milwaukee Labor Press*, March 15, 1956, Folder 1, Box 48, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

²⁹ *New York Post*, March 15, 1956, Folder 11, Box 47, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

³⁰ "1956 Mayoral Campaign Analysis," Board of Election Commissioners, City of Milwaukee, Folder 3, Box 48, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

³¹ *Pittsburgh Courier—Midwest Edition*, April 7, 1956, Folder 12, Box 47, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

Clark and Pittsburgh's popular postwar mayor David Lawrence both came to Zeidler's aid, calling him one of America's best mayors.³² Recent historians of civil rights struggles in Milwaukee have offered a more nuanced assessment of Zeidler's civil rights credentials. Jack Dougherty noted that Zeidler showed far more genuine concern for the plight of African Americans than other political leaders of Milwaukee, but was nevertheless pressured by whites to view the "migrant crisis" within the confines of the inner core.³³ The city's newest residents needed to be "acculturated" to city life by first adjusting their behavioral patterns to be more acceptable to the white majority of the city. Patrick Jones has similarly concluded that Milwaukee public officials "'invariably explained away inequality as a problem of 'acculturation.'"³⁴ They therefore had little use for a growing civil rights insurgency that was beginning to politicize race more militantly than ever before.

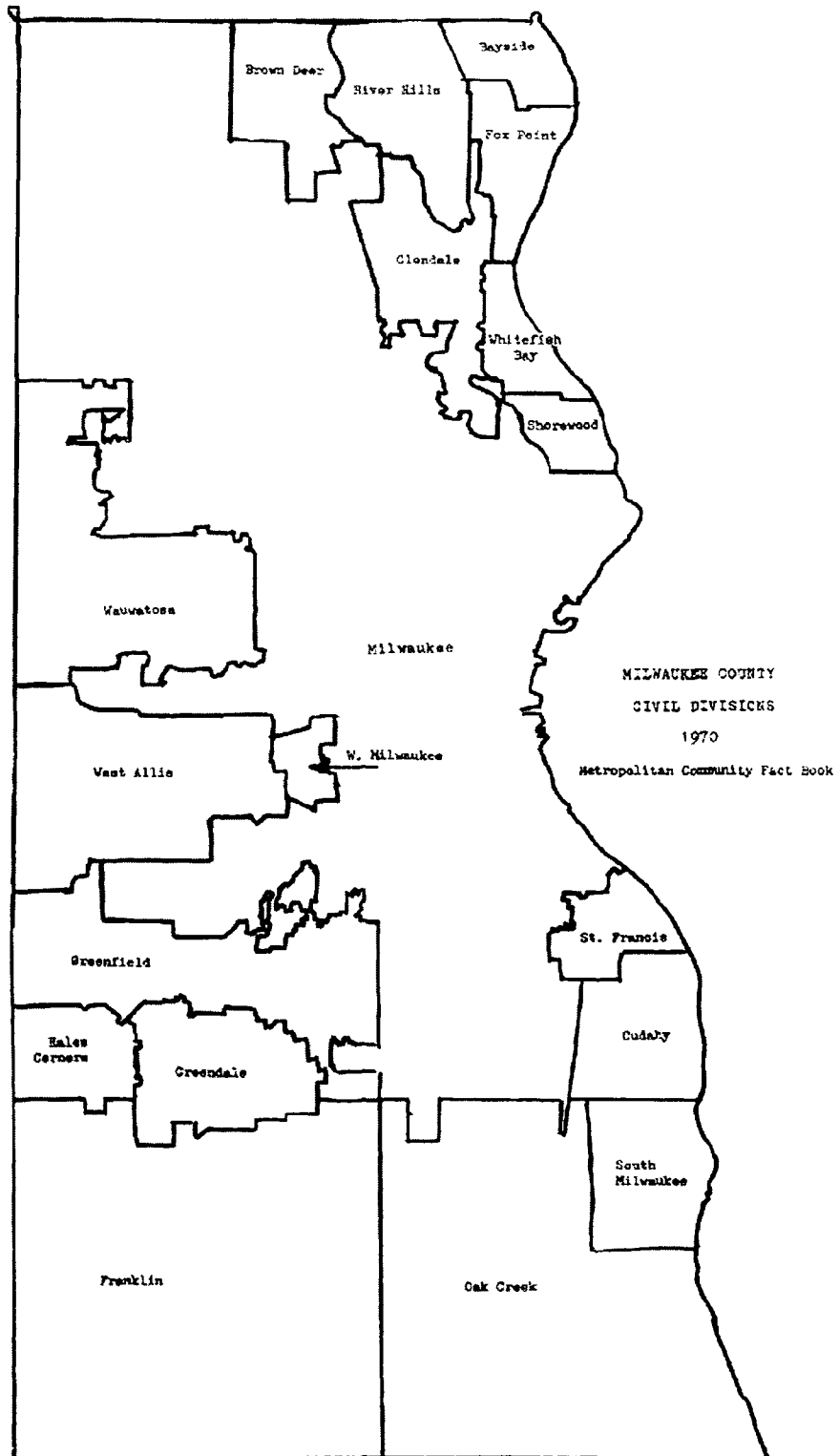
The combination of heightened racial tensions and rapid suburbanization was undeniably a problem of degree and not kind in virtually every large city in America. Municipal leaders who encountered unprecedented racial conflict had few resources to address these problems. Zeidler's racial politics were constricted not only by an apparent racial "moderation" but also by the very real boundaries that hardened in reaction to his annexation program and increasingly divided the Milwaukee region by class as well as race. During Zeidler's final term that closed out the 1950's, the Wisconsin state government essentially forced the city and its Milwaukee County suburbs to explore ways to address "metropolitan" problems of common concern. As Zeidler repeatedly

³² Speech by Joseph Clark, November 14, 1955, Folder 12, Box 48, Zeidler Papers, MPL, Speech by David Lawrence, undated, Folder 1, Box 48, Zeidler Paper, MPL.

³³ Dougherty, *More Than One Struggle*, 57-60.

³⁴ Jones, "The Selma of the North," 35.

noted, suburbs were only willing to discuss issues that affected their residents, mainly improving their access to water and sewage facilities, but were utterly unwilling to discuss slum clearance, unequal tax burdens, and other problems which the city disproportionately bore. Absent meaningful metropolitan cooperation, urban problems were guaranteed to remain marginalized in a central city that was losing the economic resources most needed to help its new residents. Zeidler thus acted on a metropolitan stage during his last term as he had done before, advocating on behalf of the city in a suburbanizing metropolis. If the problems of race manifested across political boundaries, as civil rights leaders repeatedly asserted, then solving them meant addressing the very boundaries that divided the region to begin with.



Milwaukee County After the Annexation Wars
Metropolitan Area Fact Book, 1940, 1950, 1960, MPL.

The 1956 election was a flashpoint not only for Zeidler's socialism or the city's increasing racial tensions, but also the city-suburban conflict and Milwaukee's fractured public-private institutional cooperation. Suburban residents whose hatred for Zeidler ran deep could not vote in a city election; they nonetheless financially supported McGuire. Zeidler emphasized suburban support for McGuire; in a public statement made in late February, he warned city residents that McGuire's "slush fund" came mostly from suburban residents, noting that the fund should serve as a warning to Milwaukeeans that "a drive is underway against their independence and self-government and home rule."³⁵ The erosion of Milwaukee's "independence" was most apparent in the suburbs' obstruction of annexation, but suburban political opposition had manifested in the 1956 election as well. During the decade's last four years, the undermining of the city continued, and the "iron ring" ring sealed shut.

Even before the 1956 election, it had become apparent that the region's issues were unsolvable on a strictly municipal level. In 1954, the Milwaukee County Board voted to create a permanent "Committee of 21" consisting of seven Milwaukee aldermen, seven county supervisors, and seven representatives of suburban governments to consider "matters of mutual interest to the local governments." The Committee met first in December 1954 and throughout 1955, but agreed on virtually nothing. Suburban officials complained that the city only seemed interested in complete metropolitan unification and a Milwaukee alderman confirmed this suspicion. From the start, Zeidler never supported the Committee of 21, arguing that it disproportionately represented suburban interests. Furthermore, Zeidler and other Milwaukee officials were growing increasingly concerned that "metro organizations" were nothing but a front for suburbs to access city water

³⁵ Statement of Frank Zeidler, February 27, 1956, Folder 12, Box 47, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

without having to consolidate or voluntarily allow annexation. Milwaukee's ability to provide water to outlying territory had long been the city's strongest annexation weapon and in the wake of the Oak Creek Law's passage it seemed to be its last significant asset.

The continued bickering between Milwaukee and its suburbs irritated the region's civic organizations most of all. The Greater Milwaukee Committee considered itself an independent arbiter in metropolitan issues and, with both city and suburbs at a stalemate of mutual disgust, sought to fund an independent research firm to examine key issues facing city and suburbs alike. The GMC first tried to force the Committee of 21 to allow it to control the scope and content of the proposed study. Zeidler, always suspicious of suburban bias at the GMC, helped convince the county to reject the proposal.

Undeterred, the group appealed to Governor Walter Kohler Jr. to appoint a "citizens' study commission" to examine metropolitan problems. Governor Kohler, acutely aware of city-suburban animosity, agreed to push for legislation to create a state-funded Metropolitan Study Commission. The legislature eventually agreed, voting in the summer of 1957 to form a commission of fifteen members, appointed by the governor, to examine the "common problems" faced by municipalities in Milwaukee County and to seek solutions. Vernon Thomson, who replaced Kohler as Governor in 1957, signed the bill into law that summer. Local media lauded the bill as progressive and foresighted, an example of the civic cooperation that was driving urban renewal in cities across America.

Only on the surface did the creation of the Metropolitan Study Commission (MSC) indicate willingness on the part of Milwaukee and its suburbs to engage in meaningful intergovernmental dialogue. In fact, the arduous process of drafting the bill that established the commission proved once again that suburban interests trumped urban

ones in the state legislature. The GMC flexed its political muscles in the state, presenting Governor Kohler with a list of fourteen prominent private citizens from which Kohler chose seven individuals to recommend the legislation that the state government should pursue. Robert Dineen, Vice-President of the Northwestern Mutual Life Insurance Company, and an active GMC member, headed the seven-member delegation. The committee originally proposed to study only the region's water and sewage problems. Infuriated city officials were now more convinced than ever that any "metropolitan" commission would be nothing more than a front for suburbs to gain access to or even take over Milwaukee's water authority. Henry Schmandt and William Standing, authors of a monograph that covered the history of the MSC, concluded that suburban officials supported the Dineen committee and the commission that grew out of it "only because they felt that the primary objective of civic officials at the time was the solution to the water problem. Since they had no control over this function, one which was of real concern to them, they stood to gain from such a study."³⁶ Acutely aware of the potential of a metropolitan body weighted against Milwaukee, Zeidler warned Kohler prior to the Governor's exit that extending water service outside of city boundaries would bring about an "exodus of industry" to the suburbs.³⁷ Zeidler correctly suspected that his own perspective had "little weight" in the decisions that led to the creation of the MSC; he had no knowledge of which GMC members had actually advised the Governor on the MSC in the first place.

³⁶ Henry Schmandt and William Standing, *The Milwaukee Metropolitan Study Commission* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1965), 82.

³⁷ Letter from Frank Zeidler to Phil Drotning, Secretary to Governor Walter Kohler, October 1, 1956, Folder 1, Box 160, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

When the geographical distribution of the MSC's members was first discussed in December, 1956, Zeidler requested that the commission members' place of residence be tied to the county's demographics, a proposal which would have ensured the city a majority, since Milwaukee's population still made up the vast majority of Milwaukee County. Absent a demographically fair representation on the MSC, Zeidler warned, the result would be a commission "composed of suburban citizens to study how to parcel out the city of Milwaukee's services." Any trace of "impartiality" would thus cease to exist. The city's pleas fell on deaf ears. The Governor, again under advisement of the GMC, had great latitude in commission appointments. The commission had fifteen members, twelve of whom were to be Milwaukee County residents who did not hold elective office of any kind; the remaining three members public officials, one from the city of Milwaukee, one from suburban cities, and one from suburban villages. The geographical makeup of the original fifteen members confirmed the city's fears that Milwaukee's suburbs were usurping political power from the city. When added up, nine of the fifteen members of the MSC resided in Milwaukee County suburbs, compared to six city residents.³⁸

The state's bill that created the MSC directed the commission to undertake four main functions. First, the MSC was to "investigate the adequacy, cost, and efficiency of the principal services provided by the various governmental units of Milwaukee County." Next, the commission was to investigate and uncover the "extent" to which the county's municipalities cooperated with each other. Third, the MSC would determine what services could be provided on a local level and a county level. Finally, the MSC would

³⁸ Schmandt and Standing. *The Milwaukee Metropolitan Study Commission*, 301-308.

submit written reports to the Governor and state legislature detailing its findings, and to offer recommendations for future metropolitan cooperation and coalescence.³⁹

As disappointed as Zeidler and other city officials may have been over the MSC's makeup, they still hoped to influence the commission. Fighting to save the city's water supply was a necessary rear-guard action, but city officials also tried to use the MSC as a forum to float the long-hoped-for metropolitan solutions. Foremost among these was the long-sought-after consolidation of the region, or at least Milwaukee County, into a single metropolitan government. George Parkinson, Civil Defense Director of Milwaukee, represented the city on the MSC. Shortly after the MSC began its official duties, Parkinson released a "proposal" that sought to make the "record clear" from Milwaukee's perspective. "I believe metropolitan government is urgently required for the Milwaukee area," Parkinson asserted, calling for the complete consolidation of all governmental units in the county. Parkinson acknowledged that getting the county's suburbs to agree to such a plan would be "difficult, if not impossible."⁴⁰ His resolution stated: "It is the long-standing position of the city of Milwaukee that the entire contiguous urban area of the Milwaukee region should be under one single unit of government, a municipality," the Milwaukee Common Council reminded the MSC in a 1959 resolution.⁴¹ Milwaukee had laid its cards on the table.

The politically unified metropolis was a dream long shared by many city groups. The City Club, Milwaukee Real Estate Board, and Milwaukee Association of Commerce

³⁹Ibid, 86-87.

⁴⁰ "Proposal Regarding Metropolitan Government," George A. Parkinson, Folder 8, Box 159, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

⁴¹ "Resolution Setting Forth the City's Position Concerning Questions Proposed in the December 31, 1958 Communication from the Metropolitan Study Commission Concerning Metropolitan Governmental Organization," Folder 3, Box 160, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

had each reacted positively to the possibility of consolidation during the Depression, which coincidentally was the most recent time when the Wisconsin state legislature had closely looked at metropolitan cooperation. By the late 1950's, these same groups seemed amenable at least to the spirit in which the MSC was intended to operate. The MAC gave its public support to studying metropolitan problems and one of its directors, Ebner Lueztow, was chosen to serve on the MSC. However, when Lueztow asked the MAC's Board of Directors to donate funds to support the MSC's studies (which received only a paltry \$30,000 from the state budget) the board rejected the request.⁴² The City Club, on the other hand, strenuously supported some form of metropolitan government in Milwaukee County, consistent with its previous support of consolidation during the Depression. Leo Tiefenthaler, the longtime secretary of the City Club, appeared before the state legislature during the debate of the MSC bill in December of 1956 and encouraged the state to expand its study of metropolitan problems beyond the provision of water. "The Milwaukee metropolitan area is one economic unit," Tiefenthaler reminded the state. He appealed for consolidation on the well-worn merits of civic greatness, echoing the famous Daniel Burnham phrase: "Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir men's blood...remember that a logical diagram once recorded will not die."⁴³ However, the City Club's membership and influence in local politics had been long on the wane; groups like the Greater Milwaukee Committee had far greater influence over civic affairs. For its part, the GMC seemed less interested in genuine

⁴² Letter, John Lobb to Board of Directors, June 13, 1958, Folder 9, Box 3, Milwaukee Metropolitan Association of Commerce. Minutes, 1915-1964. Milwaukee Manuscript Collection 14, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Milwaukee Area Research Center, Golda Meier Library, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

⁴³ Presentation by Leo Tiefenthaler to the Milwaukee Metropolitan Survey Committee, October 19, 1956, Folder 6, Box 159, MPL.

political unification; it viewed as more important creating the *perception* of municipal cooperation. Well aware that other American cities had tackled urban problems with public-private partnerships that were “metropolitan” in makeup, the GMC considered city-suburban bickering as a nuisance that obstructed economic development. The GMC did not necessarily care to equalize growth across the region’s fragmented boundaries.

The appeals to civic greatness fell on deaf suburban ears. Political fragmentation had in fact multiplied the Milwaukee region’s “economic units,” as interrelated as they may have seemed to objective observers. While Milwaukee’s suburbs remained different from each other in a myriad of ways, their stance against the city, once again, gave them common ground. Almost uniformly, Milwaukee County’s suburbs envisioned the MSC less as a mediator between their conflicts with the city than as a conduit through which to clarify their municipal independence once and for all. In fact, at the same time that Milwaukee officials from called on the MSC to pursue metropolitan government, the city of West Allis Common Council in a resolution that same year asserted that the region’s suburbs “had attained municipal government close to their people, responsive to their people, important to their people, and participated in by their people.”⁴⁴ This municipal pride had, if anything, only grown during the annexation wars and it precluded the MSC from reaching any meaningful level of intergovernmental cooperation. With economic growth healthy in most of the region’s suburbs, these communities had less incentive to pursue consolidation or even recognize that Milwaukee’s problems were of regional concern. As one suburban newspaper put it bluntly: “We don’t have any ‘metropolitan

⁴⁴ Land Use and Zoning Committee Folder, Box 2, Metropolitan Study Commission Collection, Wisconsin Series 1720, Milwaukee Area Research Center, Golda Meier Library, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

problems,' except perhaps one—to get the metrocrats to leave us alone (emphasis in original)!"⁴⁵

In fact, from 1956 to 1961, at the very time of the creation and term of the MSC, four towns bordering Milwaukee (Franklin, Greenfield, New Berlin, and Mequon) took advantage of the provisions of the Oak Creek Law and incorporated as fourth class cities, further lending claims to suburban independence. Unlike past incorporations of relatively intact and self-contained communities, the four newest suburbs were huge in physical size and short on people. In 1956, the year the Town of Franklin, located southwest of Milwaukee, incorporated as a “city,” and it recorded a population density of only roughly four people per acre. Mequon’s 8,543 residents were scattered over an area of land larger in size than the entire city of San Francisco. Upon hearing of Mequon’s birth in 1959, a Milwaukee city official observed that it heralded a closing of “the ring of suburbs around the city of Milwaukee.” The four newest suburbs totaled 122.4 square miles, or 20% more than Milwaukee’s land size, with 689,000 fewer residents.

Rapid suburbanization had also increased the demands on local government. As the MSC’s Land Use and Zoning Committee observed in 1959: “The dream of country living far from the smoke, noise, and dirt of the older industrial areas has become clouded by increasingly troublesome demands for new school buildings, better sanitation, and more of the services which city expatriates had become accustomed to in the older urban areas.” Put more bluntly, suburbanites wanted the municipal services of the city without having to pay for them or reside there. By the late 1950’s, this primarily meant gaining access to the Milwaukee water system, which pumped cheap and plentiful water from Lake Michigan to city residents. Suburban communities had sought access to city water

⁴⁵ *West Allis Star*, April 23, 1958, in Folder 8, Box 159, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

for decades and some, especially on the North Shore, were able to purchase water from the city by contractual agreements long in effect.⁴⁶ City policymakers, cognizant of the fact that water was its chief weapon in compelling outlying areas to be annexed, had for years steadfastly refused to sell city water to other new suburbs. Thus municipalities such as Wauwatosa were forced to dig wells; and some developers of subdivisions outside the city dug private wells of their own. By the end of 1957, with suburban development mushrooming, there were over 20,000 private wells in the region, by one estimate. Many suburbs also used septic tanks instead of sanitary sewers. The threat of seepage into private wells was real enough that the MSC's Metropolitan Functions Committee made its primary focus to study the problems posed by private wells and septic tanks to the public health of Milwaukee County. In a report released in 1958, the committee acknowledged that water contamination, especially in areas where the soil contained clay, posed a potential threat to public health. However, the Metropolitan Functions Committee decided not to publicly identify subdivisions that did have contaminated wells. As Ebner Luetzow, the committee chairman and MAC Board Member, worried: "Such action might have an adverse effect on real estate values in those areas."⁴⁷ Nevertheless, the Wisconsin State Board of Health was already working to educate suburban residents to the dangers of water contamination and suburban governments used the public health threat as an excuse to zone larger lots, which mitigated the volume of seepage.

⁴⁶ Charles Beveridge, "History of the Water Supply in the Milwaukee Area," Submitted to the Committee on Metropolitan Functions, Metropolitan Study Commission, 1958, Marquette Memorial Library.

⁴⁷ "Report of the Metropolitan Functions Committee Relating to Statement of the Wisconsin Board of Health relating to problems of Water Pollution in Private Wells in the Milwaukee Metropolitan Area," Folder 7, Box 160, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

Suburban governments were already hard at work using the public health issues of water supply to their advantage. Having sought access to city water for decades, rapid postwar suburban expansion made the water issue more crucial than ever. This was more particularly obvious in the city of Wauwatosa. After annexing over eight square miles of land in 1953, Wauwatosa repeatedly applied to the city of Milwaukee's water authority, seeking permission to purchase city water to facilitate its development. Milwaukee steadfastly rejected each application. As Zeidler wryly noted in 1958, Wauwatosa's water shortage was its own fault and the huge annexation had given it a case of "municipal indigestion."⁴⁸ Having been thwarted by Milwaukee, Wauwatosa's leaders turned to the state's Public Service Commission (PSC), the governor-appointed authority that regulated public utilities within Wisconsin. In April, 1958, the PSC ruled in favor of Wauwatosa, forcing the city to sell its water to every piece of land in the burgeoning suburb.⁴⁹ A dismayed Zeidler suspected political motivations behind the decision, recognizing that the PSC was filled with appointees of Republican Governor Thomson. It had ruled in favor of an overwhelmingly Republican suburb and against an equally Democratic Milwaukee.⁵⁰

The PSC's ruling made the functions of the MSC almost completely irrelevant to suburban municipalities and the city of Milwaukee, for different reasons. Since city water had been wrested away, no other problems of "metropolitan concern" preoccupied suburban leaders, as they would repeat time and again. For city leaders, metropolitan government's last gasp had ended. The precedent of the PSC's ruling was bound to compel it to furnish water to other, equally thirsty, suburbs. From the city's vantage

⁴⁸ Statement of Frank Zeidler, March 27, 1958, Folder 8, Box 159, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

⁴⁹ *Racine Journal-Times*, April 12, 1958.

⁵⁰ Frank Zeidler, "A Liberal in City Government: My Experience as Mayor of Milwaukee," 158-164, MPL.

point, suburban influence at the state level had been overwhelming throughout the 1950's. The PSC's decision had completed a dubious political trifecta. Through its judiciary branch, the state had ended the development of satellite cities by repealing the Butler Strip annexation. Through its legislative branch, the state had accelerated suburbanization through the passage of the Oak Creek Law. At least indirectly through its executive branch, the state had now taken away Milwaukee's water authority. The city thus had little reason to cooperate with the MSC, a body whose makeup had been created without its input in the first place. Any faith in the MSC's ability to solve metropolitan problems had ended and it was apparent the study commission's creation came at the end of an era, not the beginning.

In this political climate, the Metropolitan Study Commission carried out its duties. Each potentially meaningful reform the MSC introduced for discussion was perceived as a slight to one side or the other. The MSC's first president, Charles Lobb, suggested that metropolitan consolidation was at the very least a matter that deserved consideration. Suburban reaction to Lobb's remarks was predictably hostile, further undermining the MSC's already limited legitimacy. In 1958, the MSC decided to survey each municipality in Milwaukee County to determine what types of "metropolitan cooperation" the municipalities were willing to accept. Save for support of a "metropolitan" water authority, each suburb uniformly rejected practically any type of metropolitan cooperation. The county's newest incorporated municipalities adopted the rhetoric of suburban independence as assuredly as their forerunners. The newly minted city of Franklin accused Milwaukee of "political warfare."⁵¹ Hales Corners and St.

⁵¹ City of Franklin Resolution, Folder 4, Box 2, Metropolitan Study Commission Collection, Wisconsin Series 1720, Metropolitan Study Commission Collection, Wisconsin Series 1720, State Historical Society

Francis, both incorporated in the 1950's, invoked the rights of home rule in their respective resolutions rejecting "metropolitan cooperation."⁵²

One year later, in 1959, hoping to hinder unplanned or poorly managed sprawl, the MSC began to explore ways to merge the County's planning departments into a regional body that would have broad powers in regulating land use. Suburban governments in Milwaukee County had virtually no professional planners on their staffs, often relying instead on non-professionals in their local government to handle land use planning. For example, in 1959, the city of Milwaukee budgeted \$175,000.00 for its Planning Division of the BPLC and the Milwaukee County's other eighteen municipalities budgeted a *combined total* of only \$32,000.00 for planning.⁵³ The MSC assumed that there was a clear need for a regional planning authority, one that would have regulatory power. However, city and suburbs alike refused to cede their zoning powers. When queried by the MSC about countywide planning, every single municipality in Milwaukee County, including the city of Milwaukee, rejected the idea.

With the regulatory muscle of a regional planning agency having been uniformly dismissed, the MSC tried to compel the city and suburbs to agree to an advisory body that would tackle issues of "metropolitan impact." At a public meeting of the MSC's Land Use and Zoning Committee, the commissioners asked representatives of each municipality to name specific common problems of "metropolitan impact." No one

of Wisconsin, Milwaukee Area Research Center, Golda Meier Library, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

⁵² City of Hales Corners Resolution, City of St. Francis Resolution, Folder 4, Box 2, Metropolitan Study Commission Collection, Wisconsin Series 1720, Metropolitan Study Commission Collection, Wisconsin Series 1720, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Milwaukee Area Research Center, Golda Meier Library, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

⁵³ "Existing Planning Agencies for Zoning and Platting," Folder 1, Box 161, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

present managed to name a single issue.⁵⁴ Zeidler again stated that any metropolitan planning agency should be only one function of a metropolitan government that had broad powers. An uneasy consensus of sorts was reached over the scope of land planning. Since development was spilling outside of Milwaukee County and into Waukesha and Ozaukee Counties to the west and north, it was agreed that an advisory land use planning body that served these counties (and perhaps Washington County to the northwest) would be useful. However, any regional planning agency would have only advisory powers; suburban and city governments remained unwilling to give up their autonomy. The eventual result of these preliminary discussions was the Southeast Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (SEWRPC), established by state legislation and an executive order by Governor Thomson in 1960. After the United States Congress passed the Federal Aid-Highway Act in 1962, which compelled local governments to cooperate with each other more fully in highway planning, SEWRPC's primary function became coordinating the region's nascent expressway system. However, SEWRPC's land use planning authority was in an advisory capacity only; local governments could utilize its technical assistance yet still veto any of the commission's recommendations. The reality of the politically fragmented metropolis meant that regional planning in Milwaukee was essentially stillborn. SEWRPC was unable to restrain suburban sprawl; from 1950 to 1990, the land consumption rate in metropolitan Milwaukee was eight times the rate of population growth, as compared with a national ratio of three-to-one.⁵⁵

⁵⁴Summary of October 20, 1959 Public Hearing of Land Use and Zoning Board by Richard Cutler, Folder 6, Box 2, Metropolitan Study Commission Collection, Wisconsin Series 1720, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Milwaukee Area Research Center, Golda Meier Library, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

⁵⁵ David Rusk, *Creating Livable Communities: Are We Going To Live Together?* web site, <http://www.gamaliel.org/Strategic/StrategicpartnersRuskMadisonArticle.htm>

The MSC's Land Use and Zoning Committee may have failed to convince city and suburbs alike to cooperate in matters of planning, but its studies did reveal that intra-metropolitan competition for economic growth remained a byproduct of municipal fragmentation. In a broad report that studied land use patterns in Milwaukee County, released in 1959, the Land Use and Zoning Committee reached several conclusions about the results of each municipality's quest to capture maximum tax revenues at minimal costs. The most obvious was that newer suburbs tended to zone larger residential lots, both to ensure that local schools could absorb the sudden influx of students and to attract individuals of "higher income levels." In the competition for public wealth, newer suburbs had awakened to the "shocking recognition" that most homes did not yield enough tax revenue to pay for the services demanded by their residents. New suburbs thus ignored Milwaukee's tradition of "medium density housing." The Land Use Committee noted bluntly that some of the suburbs "use the zoning power in an attempt to prevent the construction of less expensive homes."⁵⁶ The city of Franklin, anticipating the fiscal strain of growth, decided to zone for minimum lots of a half-acre and forced developers to pay for water and sewer installations, costs that were usually passed on to consumers. The city of Mequon, north of Milwaukee in Ozaukee County, also required a minimum of half-acre lots. Greenfield and Oak Creek considered similar restrictions, and the city of Brookfield in Waukesha County required minimum lot frontages of 100 feet.⁵⁷ These public land use policies virtually guaranteed the upper middle class—and therefore white—character of many postwar suburbs well before they were fully populated, further intertwining suburbanization with class, race, and uneven development. The MSC could

⁵⁶ Land Use and Zoning Committee, MSC, "Proposed Findings and Conclusions Concerning Zoning in Milwaukee County," Folder 5, Box 6, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

illuminate these problems, but the deep freeze in city-suburban relations precluded meaningful land use reform.

Zoning larger lots could ensure that more affluent middle-class residents would populate newer suburbs, but did not guarantee that local taxes would stay low unless non-residential sources of revenue were secured. This usually meant creating space for industrial development. As the Land Use and Zoning Committee noted, continued competition for industry between many municipalities had “intensified the disunity and fragmentation of the natural metropolitan unit.” Local industrial concerns had long complained of high local and state taxes, which they claimed put them in an unfair competitive position in comparison with other regions of the country. The Milwaukee Association of Commerce’s Industries Division was perhaps the most vocal proponent of this position.⁵⁸ The frequent complaints had long annoyed Mayor Zeidler, who was obviously preoccupied with keeping industry within city limits. However, even Wisconsin’s Republican Governor, Vernon Thomson, had had enough by 1957. At a speech to a junior chamber of commerce group that year, Thomson claimed that the state’s “worst enemy” in industrial development was the state’s own industrialists, who invariably called attention to the poor business climate within Wisconsin. The rhetoric did not stand up to the MSC’s Land Use and Zoning Committee’s observations about industry, which enjoyed an enviable position in the growing battle within metropolitan Milwaukee between city and suburbs to attract industrial development. In this battle, the committee wryly noted, “Industry finds itself in a position comparable that of the only man shipwrecked on an island inhabited only by women. While a few of the so-called

⁵⁸ “State Tax Climate Under Fire at Annual Meeting, *Milwaukee Commerce*, Volume 37, No. 20, November 25, 1958, Folder 1, Box 37, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

‘luxury suburbs’ are completely self-sufficient and express no present interest in wooing industry, the majority are becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the state of residential ‘single-blessedness,’ and the competition for the security of an ‘industrial daddy’ is growing ever keener.”⁵⁹

Figure 6-2: Suburban Industrial/Heavy Commercial Zoning & Land Use Characteristics, 1958*

<i>Municipality & Year of Incorporation</i>	<i>Area zoned for Industrial Purposes</i>	<i>Area in Industrial Use</i>
Village of Brown Deer (1956)	966.40 acres	137.51 acres
Village of Bayside	0 acres	0 acres
Village of Fox Point	0 acres	0 acres
City of Cudahy	1,152.75 acres	300.08 acres
City of Franklin	335.40 acres	156.95 acres
City of Glendale	774.04 acres	324.49 acres
Village of Greendale	82.58 acres	49.40 acres
City of Greenfield	0 acres	9.79 acres
City of Oak Creek	1,533.69 acres	748.74 acres
Village of Hales Corners	37.86 acres	7.53 acres
Village of Shorewood	30.14 acres	23.90 acres
City of St. Francis	456.23 acres	166.42 acres
City of South Milwaukee	432.30 acres	186.97 acres
Village of River Hills	0 acres	0 acres
City of Wauwatosa	943.68 acres	581.27 acres
City of West Allis	1,566.92 acres	608.84 acres
Village of Whitefish Bay	0 acres	0 acres
Village of West Milwaukee	514.09 acres	378.34 acres

Land Use and Zoning Committee Folder, Box 2, Metropolitan Study Commission Collection, Wisconsin Series 1720, *Milwaukee Urban Archives*

Of the four municipalities that incorporated after the passage of the Oak Creek Law, three (Oak Creek, Franklin, and Brown Deer) had zoned a considerable amount of land for heavy commercial and industrial purposes. However, postwar suburbanization

⁵⁹Land Use and Zoning Committee, MSC, “Proposed Findings and Conclusions Concerning Zoning in Milwaukee County,” Folder 5, Box 6, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

transformed the character of older suburban communities as well. Nowhere was this more evident than in Wauwatosa, one of the region's oldest and most self-consciously residential suburbs. As the village grew in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, its boosters began to market Wauwatosa as the quintessential dormitory suburb, a place where middle class families could escape the chaotic bustle of an industrial urban landscape. The village reclassified as a city in 1897, but clung to its suburban residential character, proudly dubbing itself the "city of homes."⁶⁰

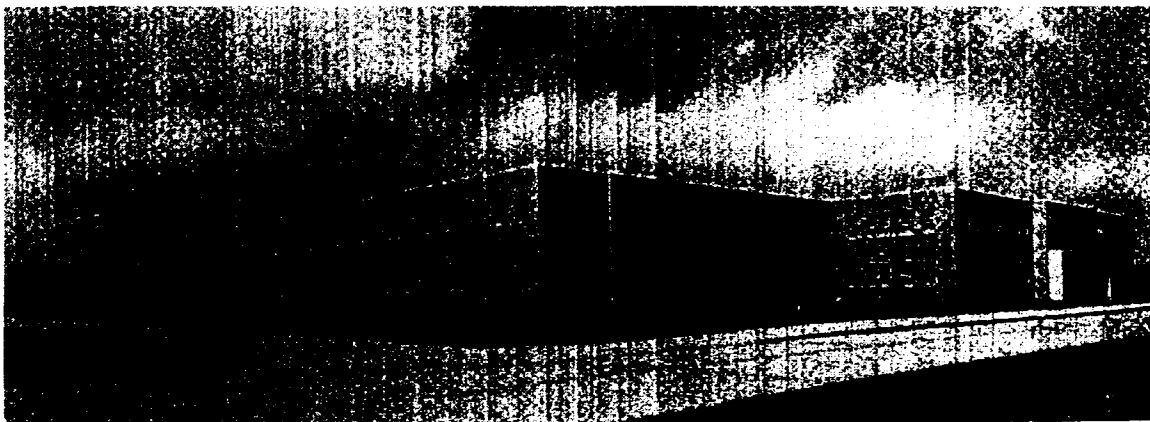
The twin strains of municipal mercantilism and Milwaukee's annexation compelled Wauwatosa officials to pursue their own physical expansion in the early 1950's more aggressively. In 1953, Wauwatosa annexed an 8.5 square-mile tract of land to its north and west, virtually tripling its size. Much of the newly acquired land lay next to railway lines and a future expressway extension, making its commercial and industrial uses self-evident. Wauwatosa officials—with the approval of a committee of citizens from the newly-annexed land—zoned much of the new land for commercial and industrial purposes; large local manufacturers quickly moved in.⁶¹ In the early 1950's, the Briggs and Stratton Corporation purchased 85 acres of land in Wauwatosa and built a new plant that eventually covered over 1.5 million square feet and employed several thousand workers. Briggs and Stratton also began gradually phasing out work from its two older plants in the city of Milwaukee, vacating its offices in its facility on

⁶⁰ *Milwaukee Journal*, August 1, 1920, Suburbs Clipping File, Legislative Reference Bureau, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

⁶¹ Bulletin of the Citizens Governmental Reference Bureau, Vol. 43, No. 9, October 8, 1955, p. 3, Folder 9, Box 48, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

Milwaukee's north side in 1967 and ending production there entirely by 1974. Briggs also moved its employment offices to Wauwatosa in the 1960's.⁶²

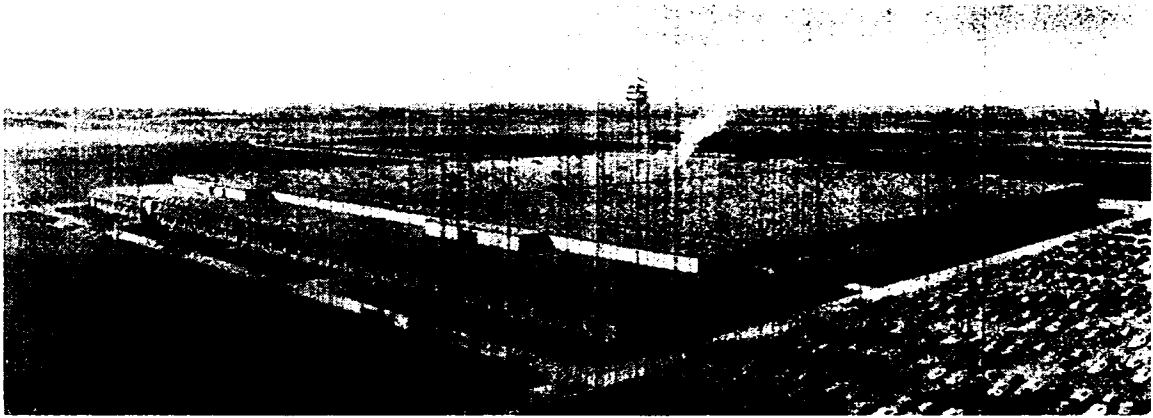
Shortly thereafter, Stroh Die-Casting and S-B Manufacturing built large installations in Wauwatosa. In 1957, the Harley Davidson Corporation built a production facility in Wauwatosa that initially employed 600 workers. J.C. Penny's built a massive distribution center in 1962, eventually covering two million square feet. Wauwatosa was the site of the construction of the region's largest indoor shopping mall, Mayfair, rushed to completion in 1957. The PSC's decision to force Milwaukee to connect Wauwatosa to its water system was heralded at a "historic" day by the city bulletin, one that would allow economic development to continue unabated well into the future.⁶³



Harley Davidson Plant, 1957, Wauwatosa
1957 Official Bulletin of the City of Wauwatosa, Folder 1, Box 2, Wauwatosa Collection, Milwaukee County Historical Society.

⁶² "A History of the Briggs and Stratton Corporation," 1985, MPL.

⁶³ *1957 Official Bulletin of the City of Wauwatosa*, Folder 1, Box 2, Wauwatosa Collection, Milwaukee County Historical Society.



Architect's Drawings, Briggs and Stratton Plant, 1957, Wauwatosa
1957 Official Bulletin of the City of Wauwatosa, Folder 1, Box 2, Wauwatosa Collection, Milwaukee
County Historical Society.



Architect's Drawing, Mayfair Mall
1957 Official Bulletin of the City of Wauwatosa, Folder 1, Box 2, Wauwatosa Collection, Milwaukee
County Historical Society.

Wauwatosa had won numerous revenue plums through its expansion and in the process had transformed itself. No longer a bedroom community, Wauwatosa had grown into economically diverse city, a change that its officials now readily embraced. The new industries allowed Wauwatosa to assess property taxes at only 38% of the land's full value, keeping taxes low, virtually a *raison d'être* for postwar suburbs.⁶⁴ Wauwatosa's annual bulletins of the late 1950's featured numerous photographs of the new structures. Industry was no longer an aesthetically dubious stepchild; a caption under a photo of the Stroh Die Casting plant proudly noted the plant to be "typical of many of the architecturally beautiful manufacturing plants in our city." Wauwatosa's status as a city of homes had ended and its moniker eventually changed with the character of the community. By 1965, the annual bulletin had reinvented Wauwatosa as the "City of Homes, Industry, and Commerce."⁶⁵

The functional transformation of suburbia was not separate from the plight of cities. It had been widely understood that Milwaukee and its suburbs were at political loggerheads, dating back well before the 1950's. What became increasingly clear, however, was the postwar upward mobility personified by the suburbs. "It all adds up to a revolution in community development—a revolution being felt on the edges of city after city across the nation," observed the *Milwaukee Journal* in a series of articles that ran in 1957 addressing the "strangling of Milwaukee."⁶⁶ Older incorporated communities of the region had been peopled by a variety of classes. North Shore suburbs were wealthy. Wauwatosa was middle class. Cudahy, South Milwaukee, West Milwaukee,

⁶⁴ Citizens Governmental Research Bureau Bulletin, October 8, 1955, Volume 43, No. 9, Folder 9, Box 48, Zeidler Papers, MPL.

⁶⁵ 1957 *Official Bulletin of the City of Wauwatosa*, Folder 1, Box 2, Wauwatosa Collection, Milwaukee County Historical Society.

⁶⁶ *Milwaukee Journal*, January 14, 1957.

and West Allis were industrial satellites and working class in character. Postwar suburbs, by conscious intention, existed specifically as nodes of new or growing middle class wealth. “Joe Suburb lives in Brookfield, Bayside, or Franklin...he’s making more money than he ever did before,” noted the *Journal*.⁶⁷ The “dream” of the region’s new, large communities was also unprecedented: “a rural atmosphere mixed with sprawling industrial plants.”⁶⁸ The upward mobility metaphor was now a suburban symbol.

Undeniably, the 1950’s were, very generally, a time of great economic growth in the United States. However, when just where and how that growth took place is examined, it becomes obvious that the rising economic tide gave suburbs disproportional benefits when weighed against the city. Even more ominously, political boundaries proved to be far more than lines on a map. Suburban leaders were simply unconcerned about Milwaukee’s social and economic problems. By the 1950’s “urban problems” conflated with race and, since a miniscule number of African Americans had moved outside of the central city, suburbanites did not have to use overtly racist methods to defend or develop their communities. Suburban policy may not have been racist in intent, but nonetheless did have racial consequences. A vigorous debate exists today over the extent of Milwaukee’s segregation, with different measurements reaching different conclusions. The Mumford Center for Urban and Suburban Research has concluded that, based on the 2000 U.S. Census, Milwaukee is the second most racially segregated city in the United States. A recent study conducted at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee’s Employment and Training Institute insists the Mumford Center’s methodology is flawed

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ *Milwaukee Journal*, January 20, 1957.

and that the city is not nearly as segregated as had been previously believed.⁶⁹ The *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*, which has observed: “Perhaps no label associated with Milwaukee is more derogatory than ‘hypersegregated,’” eagerly publicized the UW-Milwaukee study.⁷⁰

No such confusion should exist, however, when the Milwaukee metropolitan area is examined as a whole. By any measurement, the metropolitan area is hypersegregated by race and class, with less than 2% of African Americans in the metropolitan area residing in the suburbs. Even the authors of the UW-Milwaukee study that played down segregation within the city acknowledged in their findings; “Except in Brown Deer and a small number of other scattered blocks, almost no black-white integrated blocks were located in the suburbs or rural communities of the Milwaukee area.”⁷¹ Black exclusion from suburbia was not an unfortunate coincidence and neither was the overdevelopment of the suburbs and the underdevelopment of the city; all are consequences of political fragmentation, and the suburban development policies pursued as direct results of that fragmentation. The parameters of inequality within metropolitan Milwaukee were well-established before the emergence of the more tumultuous civil rights movement in the 1960’s. Those racial confrontations had been shaped by four decades of urban and suburban policies at the local and state levels that transformed the region.

⁶⁹Lois M. Quinn, John Pawasarat, *A Block Level Analysis of Racial Integration in Urban America: A Block Level Analysis of African American and White Housing Patterns*, Employment and Training Institute, School of Continuing Education, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, December 2002, revised January 2003.

⁷⁰*Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*, January 13, 2003.

⁷¹*Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*, January 18, 2003.

Conclusion

Scholars of American cities remain divided over the significance of the closing of the 1950's. John Gurda, Milwaukee's redoubtable historian, interpreted that era as a time when Milwaukee was "at a pinnacle, a civic summit that seems all the more imposing in hindsight."¹ Gurda pointed to the 1960 U.S. Census, which counted Milwaukee's population at an all-time high of 700,000 residents, along with the recent completion of a variety of civic projects including a new art museum and veterans' memorial on Lake Michigan and a new baseball stadium that lured the Braves away from Boston. Anthony Orum's study of city building in Milwaukee, on the other hand, notes "the decline happened rather swiftly after the war."² Orum focused on the closing of the ring of incorporated suburbs, which sealed off Milwaukee's growth, as well as the flight of industry from the region to the Sunbelt.

Opinions about the civic condition of other American cities are equally divergent. Writing of American cities more generally, Michael Johns' *Moment of Grace* portrays bustling downtowns and working class neighborhoods in a "remarkable heyday" a period that would not be replicated in the twentieth century. "America reached its peak as an urban society in the 1950's," stated Johns in the very opening sentence of the book.³ More specifically, however, Thomas Sugrue's history of postwar Detroit that predates the "urban crisis" of the 1960's portrays a city already in the throes of deindustrializaion in the 1950's. The city of Detroit, Sugrue wrote, lost almost 130,000 manufacturing jobs

¹ John Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee* (Milwaukee, WI: Milwaukee County Historical Society, 1999), 352.

² Anthony Orum, *City Building in America* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995), 117.

³ Michael Johns, *Moment of Grace: The American City in the 1950's* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), 1.

from 1948 to 1967.⁴ These losses accelerated in the 1950's, interlocking racial inequality with the disappearance of the well-paying manufacturing work in city neighborhoods that European immigrant families had used to buoy themselves into the middle class.

In short, American cities, including Milwaukee, were at a crossroads at the close of the 1950's. On one hand, Milwaukee seemed to have fared better demographically than other industrial cities of similar size. Annexation had allowed the city to grow from 637,392 residents in 1950 to a peak of 741,324 in 1960. St. Louis, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, and Cincinnati all lost residents in the 1950's. Milwaukee's annexations doubled the city's size, but also propelled it into a series of conflicts with burgeoning suburbs. The result was a fragmented metropolis and one ill prepared to address the divisions created by political balkanization. Annexation provided "elbow room" for growth, but it did not prevent the city's industrial base from eroding. Nor was annexation sufficient to allow for the satellite city projects in Greendale and Waukesha County that two generations of Milwaukee policymakers tried to develop in reaction to the city's rapid urbanization. Instead, the northwest side of Milwaukee where most of the annexations took place became, as Mayor Zeidler later recalled, merely "subdivisions, neat and clean, but without special character and with the dulling sameness of amorphous growth of an urban area."⁵ Judged against the lofty goals set by city reformers for most of the twentieth century, annexation failed. As a tool to achieve metropolitan unity, it exacerbated political tensions between city and suburbs.

⁴ Thomas Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

⁵ Frank Zeidler, *A Liberal in City Government: My Experiences as Mayor of Milwaukee*, Unpublished Manuscript, Milwaukee Public Library (MPL).

Frank Zeidler chose not to run for a fourth term as mayor in 1960. Worn out by the racial tensions and intergovernmental conflicts of the fifties, Zeidler passed the city's reins to Henry Maier, who defeated Congressman Henry Reuss in the 1960 election. Maier, a Democrat who had served as state senator in the 1950's, distanced himself from Zeidler's socialist ideas, and began building coalitions with the region's business elites. This strategy, coupled with Maier's colorful populist rhetoric, proved politically successful. Maier served a remarkable seven terms in office, from 1960 to 1988, and was rarely challenged for office. He displayed relatively scant interest in public housing, but became a vigorous advocate of urban redevelopment, in 1964 calling for the establishment of a "blight line in Milwaukee." Between 1956 and 1975, the city redeveloped 256 acres of land north, west, and east of downtown. Freeway construction also rapidly progressed; between 1959 and 1971, bulldozers cleared 6,334 housing units and displaced over 20,000 residents, the vast majority of whom lived in Milwaukee's city neighborhoods on the north and south sides. The new roads were a Milwaukee County project but city leaders supported the initial plans when released by the Milwaukee County Expressway Commission in 1946. By the early 1970's, however, a variety of groups had grown tired of seeing neighborhoods swallowed up. Maier himself argued that freeways had become a "concrete monster, which gulps up huge blocks of housing each year." Urban redevelopment and freeway construction were not mutually exclusive, either. About ten percent of all of the land the city "redeveloped" went to freeway usage.⁶

Urban renewal and freeway construction exacerbated the region's racial tensions, which became far more acute in the 1960's. Milwaukee's civil rights movement grew

⁶ Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee*, 366-367.

along with the city's African American population, which topped 100,000 residents by 1970. Maier gained a reputation for soft-pedaling race, dismissing a Zeidler-appointed study of black neighborhoods as a useless mass of facts and figures. When a key Maier appointee to a new inner city commission commented that poor blacks had "an IQ of nothing" and all looked alike, Maier's administration became a prime target of the city's civil rights leaders. Not incidentally, Maier's popularity rose dramatically in white ethnic neighborhoods on the south side and far northwest side. The mayor increasingly projected an image of "law and order" in the face of racial turnover and increasing poverty. In 1967, a riot broke out along North Third Street and spread to adjoining neighborhoods, killing three people and injuring almost 100 hundred more. Maier acted quickly to quell the disturbance, calling in the National Guard and issuing a mandatory curfew. His popularity only increased among white residents. The 1968 mayoral election proved to be a landslide for Maier, who won 86% of the vote, an all-time record in Milwaukee's history.⁷

Critics of Maier argued that he sidestepped race too frequently. Maier preferred to blame Milwaukee's heightened racial tensions on a variety of issues tangential to city politics, especially a lack of adequate federal funding for anti-poverty programs and the "iron ring" of suburbs where whites moved to in ever-greater numbers in the 1960's and 1970's. Civil rights leaders who emerged in Milwaukee during the 1960's, especially Father James Groppi and Alderwoman Vel Phillips (Milwaukee's first African American member of the Common Council), made the passage of a citywide open housing ordinance a top political priority. Maier was, at best, lukewarm toward the open housing idea. Instead, he singled out the region's suburbs for refusing to absorb their share of

⁷ Ibid., 374.

African Americans, which resulted in “urban apartheid.” In his view, no open housing ordinance would work if suburban communities refused to embrace integration along with the city.

Maier’s frequent attacks on Milwaukee’s suburbs, whatever their true political motive, were not without substance. Milwaukee’s racial tensions played out in a fragmented metropolis. The newly incorporated communities that formed the iron ring became, by explicit design, middle class havens. Suburbs sought to attain the highest and best uses of land at the lowest possible costs of service provision. Anthony Orum dubbed these communities as virtual “barricades behind which the wealthy can take refuge.”⁸ This process of community building made scant provisions for lower-income housing. It also made the matter of “open housing” irrelevant. Even if communities adopted non-discrimination policies toward housing, few blacks could afford to move there anyway. This became apparent in 1969, when the sprawling community of Mequon, which first incorporated ten years earlier, became the first suburban community to adopt an open housing ordinance. Mequon’s strict residential zoning required half-acre lots in much of the community. African Americans did not move there in any significant numbers. By 2000, Mequon’s median family income was more than double the national average; African Americans represented just over 2% of its nearly 22,000 residents.⁹

Further complicating the problems of race and class in the fragmented metropolis was Milwaukee’s industrial decline. Job losses in manufacturing could be felt as early as the 1950’s, but decline progressed more rapidly in the 1960’s and 1970’s. The Milwaukee metropolitan area’s total of employed industrial workers dropped from

⁸ Orum, *City Building in America*, 140.

⁹ US Census Bureau, 2000 US Census,

138,500 in 1950 to 127,800 in 1960. By 1971, the number of employed industrial workers in the four-county metropolitan was only a little over 110,000.¹⁰ This decline in industrial employment during the 1960's occurred at the same time that globalization began to have real consequences for the Milwaukee's industrial companies. Long time privately-held and managed corporations such as Nordberg Manufacturing and Chain Belt, "with no family to continue management," merged in 1970.¹¹ A new generation of executives took over the helm at the Allen-Bradley Corporation beginning in 1967 and brought with them "a new attitude toward market penetration, acquisitions, and product development." Allen-Bradley established branch plants or acquired subsidiaries in England, Mexico, France, West Germany, and South America.¹² The new executives, lacking the familial ties to community forged by earlier industrialists, found it easier to move operations out of the region. In the 1970's, Allen-Bradley shifted 1,200 production jobs from Milwaukee to El Paso, Texas, and Greensboro, North Carolina, and convinced its Greensboro workers not to form a union. Corporate restructuring immediately preceded the decline in manufacturing that occurred across the region. From 1968 to 1976, seventy-six different Milwaukee area companies, employing a total of 16,000 workers, closed down, reduced operations, or moved out of the region.¹³ Once open, the

¹⁰ "Economic Fact Book on Metropolitan Milwaukee," Urban Research and Development Division, Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce, 1972, Marquette Memorial Library.

¹¹ Nordberg Manufacturing Company, Folder 9, Box 30, Founding Industries of Wisconsin (Survey project). Records, 1880-1993. UWM Manuscript Collection 41. University Manuscript Collections. Golda Meir Library. University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee Founding Industries of Wisconsin (Survey project). Records, 1880-1993. UWM Manuscript Collection 41. University Manuscript Collections. Golda Meir Library. University of Wisconsin--Milwaukee.

¹² "Changing with the Times: A History of the Allen-Bradley Company," 1987, MPL.

¹³ Allen-Bradley Folder 7, Box 1, , Founding Industries of Wisconsin (Survey project). Records, 1880-1993. UWM Manuscript Collection 41. University Manuscript Collections. Golda Meir Library. University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee Founding Industries of Wisconsin (Survey project). Records, 1880-1993. UWM Manuscript Collection 41. University Manuscript Collections. Golda Meir Library. University of Wisconsin--Milwaukee.

floodgates never closed. In 1970, the ten top employers in the Milwaukee region were either manufacturers or brewers. By 2004, every company from 1970's list vanished from the top ten, a lineup that did not include a single manufacturer.¹⁴

The deindustrialization of Milwaukee both transcended political borders and exacerbated the effects of the fragmented metropolis. Suburban communities, especially older industrial satellite communities like West Milwaukee, West Allis, and Cudahy, experienced the impact of industrial decline as strongly as Milwaukee. More broadly, deindustrialization was a global phenomenon. It had multiple causes, most of which were well beyond the control of city, state, and even federal policymakers. Virtually no American city emerged from deindustrialization completely unscathed. However, the reality of fragmentation contributed to the uneven effects of deindustrialization. In a study of employment changes in the Milwaukee region from 1979 to 1987, a team of researchers at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee led by Sammis White Jr. discovered that the city of Milwaukee lost over 32,000 manufacturing jobs during that span. Gains in other sectors did not compensate for the industrial decline, as the city also recorded a net loss of over 29,000 jobs across all economic sectors. The four-county (Milwaukee, Waukesha, Ozaukee, and Washington) region's suburbs did lose over 18,000 manufacturing jobs, but made dramatic gains in service in every other sector. While the city's losses mounted, the suburbs gained a net of over 36,000 jobs.¹⁵

Milwaukee's economic struggles were not unique. Nor was the political acrimony that characterized the metropolis during the twentieth century. Not every suburb remains economically healthy, either. Regardless, the political lines that divide

¹⁴ *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*, December 5, 2004.

¹⁵ Sammis White Jr., et.al., "City and Suburban Impacts of the Industrial Changes in Milwaukee, 1979-1987," The Urban Research Center, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 1989, pp.3-4.

Milwaukee and its suburbs were not the result of circumstance, accident, or coincidence. People created them for specific reasons. In Milwaukee's case, a remarkable number of suburbs came into existence out of three motivations: to prevent annexation, protect or enhance tax revenues, and preserve local government. This heightened the importance of making new suburbs so residentially exclusive that people became segregated by class. Furthermore, it led suburbs to welcome commercial, office, and industrial development, which increased tax revenue, accelerated suburban sprawl, and only further eroded the central city's revenue base. Milwaukee's leaders never took the third motivation seriously enough. They consistently misinterpreted desires for local autonomy as a cabal orchestrated by suburban government officials determined to hold on to their jobs, a small circle of suburban attorneys who made litigating against the city their primary source of legal work, and suburban newspapers who feared that the loss of local government would end their existence. While suburban residents themselves often shared the same fears as their government officials and local media, they also resented what appeared to be a hegemonic city government arbitrarily deciding their political future.

More broadly, city policymakers' own perception of urbanism was problematic. The fragmented metropolis was an indirect and unintended consequence of reluctant urbanism. At the crest of urbanization, industrialization, and immigration in the early twentieth century, a yawning gap existed between perceptions of how cities should have ideally functioned versus how they actually existed. In 1920, Milwaukee was a crowded industrial city, teeming with densely packed neighborhoods. To urban reformers like Charles Whitnall, density equated with a number of pathologies. Urbanization was an

environmental dilemma since a generation of city residents did not have easy access to nature. It was also an exercise in exploitation, whereby landowners enhanced their wealth through increases in property values and the more congested cities became; the more money urban realtors seemed to make. Progressive reformers offered similar observations about most large American cities, but urbanization's symptoms seemed especially acute in Milwaukee; which was the second most densely populated city in America. To reduce density and plan for satellite communities outside of the crowded urban core, Milwaukee's leader adopted several steps. They created a comprehensive zoning ordinance and embarked on a program of annexation to allow for decentralization to take place within city boundaries. The Great Depression and World War Two did not alter this policy of planned decentralization. In fact, the onset of the Cold War appeared to make reducing congestion and therefore vulnerability to attack even more important than before. Another socialist mayor, Frank Zeidler, adopted a balanced approach to urban development, focusing on fringe development. Milwaukee's leaders addressed the housing shortage by planning whole satellite communities far away from the compact spaces of the inner city.

These policies failed, but were certainly not without significant impact. Urban policy was propelled into new territory and growth became a hotly contested issue between the city, its suburbs, and the neighboring unincorporated towns. Private land developers took advantage of city reformers' efforts to decentralize Milwaukee. The city's cheap provisions of water and sewer installations helped subsidize residential growth in annexed areas. Fears of congestion also shaped perceptions of the inner city. The city razed over 2,500 dilapidated homes in the late 1920's and early 1930's predating

the urban renewal efforts of the 1950's and 1960's. Meanwhile, annexation gave suburban communities otherwise different from one another in class a common cause against the city. Instead of planned decentralization, what emerged from 1920 to 1960 was a suburbanized and politically fragmented metropolis.

Perhaps it is not a coincidence that in the 1990's Milwaukee became a laboratory for the "New Urbanism" of John Norquist, who was elected mayor in 1988. New Urbanism is a design movement that promotes the creation of compact urban neighborhoods, mixed-use communities, and mass transit. Ironically, progressive and socialist reformers in the early twentieth century were reluctant urbanists. New Urbanists embrace mass transit; reluctant urbanists pinned their hopes on the automobile to spur decentralization. New Urbanists want to enhance density in city neighborhoods; reluctant urbanists tried to regulate land uses to eliminate dense neighborhoods. New Urbanists believe mixed land uses are vital elements of what makes a city work; reluctant urbanists sought uniformity in land uses, which they executed through the mechanism of zoning. Historical context remains important in understanding this juxtaposition; New Urbanists are trying to cultivate or even create growth and reluctant urbanists were trying to control rapid urbanization. Nonetheless, Norquist has gained a national reputation for encouraging this type of development in Milwaukee. Upon stepping down from the mayoralty in 2003, Norquist assumed the title of the president of the Congress for the New Urbanism, the movement's main institutional arm. In his book *The Wealth of Cities*, Norquist notes that mayors are trying to undo decades of policies that explicitly undermined American cities. He points out that Daniel Hoan's first speech as Mayor of Milwaukee in 1916 warned that congestion of the population was a "serious problem"

and the only way to correct it was a “spreading out of the population.”¹⁶ In short, New Urbanists are trying to cultivate in cities those conditions which reluctant urbanists sought to eliminate.

Had Hoan, Whitnall, and other political leaders merely wanted to create a less dense city, they succeeded. But many of these leaders were also socialists, and believed they were creating policies that would enhance economic parity and lessen the effects of industrial capitalism. They also sought to create a metropolitan government. Ironically, pure “free market” capitalism did not undermine the city as much as municipal mercantilism did. The annexation wars created a contest over the most valuable land and the varying uses of that land. By the 1950’s it was apparent that suburbanization had changed the region, as economic growth began bypassing Milwaukee yet continues unabated in many of the region’s suburbs. Milwaukee did not die as a result. Rather, it has become part of a larger metropolitan entity, and where surrounding communities often marginalize its impact.

America became a suburban nation in the twentieth century, both in its built environment and in its local governance. Neither was a coincidence or accident. Milwaukee’s metropolis fragmented not because it had reached a certain stage in the urban life cycle, but because its suburban residents desired it. The dense urban network characteristic of the industrial city was not replicated in the twentieth century, not because decentralization was inevitable, but because planners were reluctant urbanists. The qualities that made American cities “urban,” namely mixed land uses, grid street patterns, and compact development, seemed obsolete and dangerous. Through reluctant

¹⁶ John Norquist, *The Wealth of Cities: Revitalizing the Centers of American Life* (Reading, MA: Addison & Wesley, 1998) 105.

urbanism, two generations of policymakers tried to eliminate these qualities from Milwaukee.

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