

One of the few original ideas coming out of the recent elections was the "voice for the neighborhoods" campaign by Jack Gibson, candidate for City Council District Five. Gibson called for "neighborhood self-determination when consistent with citywide policies" and advocated neighborhood councils to bridge the gap between citizens and their councillors. As a professional planner, Gibson criticized the City Council for favoring "a policy of suburban growth and development at any cost" at the expense of established neighborhoods.

What if we tried to bring our old neighborhoods back to life? How would we be better off?

District Five, for example, has about fifteen old neighborhoods: Klondyke, Madison Heights, Annesdale, Vollintine, Evergreen, Idlewild, Lenox, Orange Mound, Binghamton, Chickasaw Gardens, Buntyn, Normal, Galloway, Highland Heights, and Berclair. Some existed as separate towns east of the Memphis city limits, and some grew out of subdivisions that were quickly annexed as the city grew. All have their own histories and character, yet they have lost their identities because they no longer have the power to decide their own destinies.

Neighborhoods in Memphis have been disenfranchised by the seven City Council districts, which are little more than arbitrary mosaics made of fragments from old neighborhoods. These districts are unified by nothing more than a dotted line on a map, and composed of too many people to allow for any consensus or communication between citizens and their elected representatives. The rapport possible between council members and their constituents is about zero.

What if we worked to restore our neighborhoods their old unity and found representatives from each for a neighborhood council to meet regularly with its district councilman?

Real neighborhoods do a good deal for themselves. At their best, neighborhoods give a sense of

center city

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URBAN FEDERALISM

BY DAVID BOWMAN

place, a locale, in this fast-homogenizing nation. Neighborhoods can also be safe and comfortable, when people know each other and recognize unusual occurrences that may signal crimes being committed. The old-fashioned habit of sitting on porches and watching the street offers the safest kind of neighborhood. Crime has become our number-one concern, in part, because we have lost a neighborly concern for each other.

Neighborhoods also offer a chance for concensus. They are small enough for old-fashioned town meetings, and unified enough to feel the same way about a particular issue. Their active existence also serves as a check on the power of the city, county, or other governmental units. The city may want to run an expressway through their neighborhood, or locate a landfill for dumping garbage near their school playground. If the residents there have no sense of their neighborhood, and no feeling about their power to organize opposition or suggest alternatives, then many terrible things will happen to them every year.

A few neighborhood groups in Memphis are vital and active right now. The Vollintine-Evergreen Community Association has been the principal agent in building a racially balanced neighborhood. The Annesdale Civic Association has fought successfully to control trucking terminals in their neighborhoods. And the New Chicago Democratic

Club has gone all the way to Washington to remedy a sewage-laden drainage ditch called Cypress Creek. But most neighborhoods are politically powerless.

Once, our neighborhoods were unified by a school and a commercial area where all essential services were within walking distance. Normal, for example, still has grocery stores, banks, movies, gas stations, restaurants, libraries, and a post office clustered within a quarter-mile. Binghamton, at Broad and Hollywood, was once a suburban town which of necessity had all its own essential services; most are still there. But with the rise of the automobile, the old organically-grown neighborhood centers have been allowed to wither away; they were unable to withstand the competitive threats of the chain-store shopping centers and the franchise-gulch commercial strips accessed mostly by autos.

The rise of the planner has also been a deterrent to neighborhoods. Ebenezer Howard (in England) and Clarence Perry (in the United States) created "neighborhood planning" in places like Radburn, New Jersey, and Riverside, Illinois. But in the 1930's, the "Chicago school" of planners, led by Reginald Isaacs, developed the doctrine that "neighborhoods were instruments of segregation" of all kinds, hence "neighborhoods" became "ghettos." Urban Renewal, passed into law during the Truman Administration, helped carry out an anti-neighborhood policy. The wholesale destruction of neighborhoods in Memphis is still visible around Beale and the Medical Center areas.

To this day, many liberal whites still associate neighborhoods with racism. They don't see how "We'll let you live on our street" may be just as offensive to blacks as anything overtly racist; the underlying assumption is that where the whites live is better than living in a black neighborhood. How many whites tell blacks, "We want to live on your street"?

To this day, too, planning is still done in units larger than neighborhoods, and development of expressways, office parks, medical centers, and large residential complexes is still imposed over the old neighborhood patterns and is still indifferent to neighborhood residents. Fortunately, Memphis has nothing in its history like Chicago, which built its new University of Illinois campus by leveling a

large Greek neighborhood.

Occasionally, in Memphis, a neighborhood pulls itself back together, as Hein Park did over the proposal to turn North Parkway into I-40, or wills itself into being, like Central Gardens, an area of nice old houses waking up to problems and deciding it ought to pull itself together as a neighborhood. Its latest success is in being re-zoned for single-family living.

Central Gardens residents know that city solutions differ with neighborhood solutions. The city may want a wide multi-lane thoroughfare, but the neighborhood probably needs the cul-de-sac, bike ways, pedestrian crossings, and other obstacles to high-speed traffic. The city may fight crime with bright streetlights and high-powered patrol cars, but the neighborhood must rely on simple security measures and organized watchfulness, because the criminal is usually gone by the time the police car arrives. The city may insist on busing school children to maintain racial quotas in every school, while residents may believe that "happiness is walking to your neighborhood school."

Such problems have no easy solutions. But as of now there is no real way for citizens and city government to communicate on a reasonable and equal footing. Decisions from the top down are merely dictations. The ideal is to allow cities and neighborhoods to work together for the good of the community. This is possible when there are "voices from the neighborhoods"—voices that are heard and heeded.

The Mall Gazette

STOREFRONT HOUSING

BY CAROL COLETTA

Main Street, in the minds of many Memphians, is still the essence of downtown. Because of its declining importance in the regional retailing picture, many assume downtown's role as the city's center is fading. As Main Street goes, so goes down-

own.

That notion, however, is not altogether true. The redevelopment program now well under way will change the essential character of downtown Memphis. No longer will it be simply what we are too fond of calling it today, "the central business district." Rather, the goal of the Marcou-O'Leary plan is to complement and enhance that role by making downtown a vibrant, vital neighborhood. The downtown we are attempting to build must be a place not only to work and do business but to make a home, as well. Families must be able to live, worship, recreate, shop, and educate themselves and their children.

Under the redevelopment program, downtown will for the first time headquarter a viable conventions and tourism industry. Cook Convention Center, Mid-America Mall, Volunteer Park and the renovation of Beale Street will help make this new role for downtown possible.

The Marcou-O'Leary plan is a fixed but living document. It is changing as circumstances demand. The shortages and high costs of energy have changed the focus of downtown redevelopment from more parking places for more automobiles to new mass transit and pedestrian systems. If the new planning becomes reality, downtown will assume the role of a model laboratory for people and pedestrian spaces.

Downtown's retailing role is changing, too. No longer is downtown *the* shopping center but a shopping center which can, by reason of its location, naturally serve conventioners, tourists, Arkansans, and those Memphians living within the Parkways and in some cases even beyond. Of course, it has forever served and will continue to serve those who prefer shopping to be part of an experience involving interesting crowds, food and entertainment, not just shopping and loading.

Fortunately, Memphis' downtown retailing picture is brighter than many. We have strong department stores seemingly committed to remain downtown to anchor each end of our Main Street. Sales are picking up as mall construction progresses. And leasing activity is on the increase.

But all is not well. Out-of-town retailers looking for a place to expand their operations are for the most part interested in new space, often demanding

it be enclosed. After all, they are middle-aged Americans living in a throw-away society that puts great value on newness. Marcou-O'Leary recognizes this desire and programmed that new retailing space into the Promenade Gateway project.

But where does that leave Main Street and Mid-America Mall?

As for Main Street, I think Memphians can look to Brooklyn, New York for some direction in the future. Just as those people who inhabit the Brooklyn brownstones are affluent, highly educated, enthusiastic and venturesome, so, too, are Brooklyn's proprietors. For they are one and the same. Many highly specialized small businesses have sprung up there. Typically, *brownstoners* are finding that once their homes are beautiful and everything in sight has been completely organized, their energies can be channeled into actually making money. Businesses there serve as outlets for the long-time avocational interests of their founders. That is what makes for such an exciting variety of shops. And that is what makes Brooklyn a good neighborhood in which to live. Downtown Memphis will likely attract the same type residents—those willing to wrestle with the monumental problems of renovating vacant upper floor space for living. Certainly, Main Street's character will be enhanced if those residents choose to go a step further, as the *brownstoners* have, in making theirs a stimulating and complete neighborhood by opening small shops and gathering places. And Mid-America Mall? More than just a shopping center, it will serve as a common ground for all of us, of all means and persuasions, to meet daily; a place for us to meet people or merely to watch them, to go for a purpose or no purpose at all.

A neighborly place where people will bump into each other—that, I believe, is the essence of downtown.

FREE BABYSITTING

Calvary Episcopal Church and the Downtown Council have teamed to provide free babysitting service for downtown shoppers each Monday in December through Christmas. The church, located at the corner of Second and Adams, will house the service available from 9:30 a.m. until 3:00 p.m.

earthly delights

DOWNTOWN EXHIBITS

First National Bank Building (Lobby)

December—1976 Masters of Photography Exhibit*

National Bank of Commerce (Lobby)

December—Photography by Jones Lamb*

FILM

Lyceum Film Theatre

December 9—"A Midsummer Night's Dream"—First National Bank Auditorium
—7:30 p.m.

Images

December 7—"The Conformist"—
Southwestern—200 Clough Hall—8:00 p.m.

TOURS

Fontaine House

December 6—8—"Home for Christmas"—
11 a.m. till 8:00 p.m.—lunch by reservation
—call 276-6474 for more information

THEATER

Circuit Playhouse Theatre II

December 5-28—"Aesop, A Musical Fable"—
Fridays, Saturdays & Sundays—8:30 p.m.

Southwestern Singers

December 4—7—"The Fantastics"—
Southwestern's Hardie Auditorium—
8:00 p.m.

LECTURES—REVIEWS—DIALOGUE

The American Issues Forum

December 9—"The Government: The Growth of Bureaucracy"—discussion led by Sister Mary Ann Guthrie, Dominican Sister—First National Bank Auditorium—12:15 p.m.*
December 11—"The Government: The Growth of Bureaucracy"—Cossitt-Goodwyn Library—12:15 p.m.*

MUSIC

Calvary Church Christmas Concerts

December 8—Sam Batt Owens, Organist & Choirmaster at Grace-St. Luke's Church—
12:05—12:20 p.m.*

*FREE

Center city

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Serving from 11:30 to 1:15
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MENU FOR DECEMBER 4 – DECEMBER 15

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 4

Fried Chicken, Lima Beans, Squash, Rolls

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 5

Fish Crispies, Tater Tots, Slaw, Rolls

MONDAY, DECEMBER 8

Roast Beef, Whipped Potatoes, Green Beans, Rolls

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 9

Beef Stew, Salad, Cornbread

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 10

Spaghetti, Cole Slaw, French Bread

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 11

Fried Chicken, Rice & Gravy, Green Beans, Rolls

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 12

Fish Crispies, Tater Tots, Mixed Vegetables, Rolls

MONDAY, DECEMBER 15

Steak w/gravy, Whipped Potatoes, Green Beans, Rolls