Preliminary Outline: Downtown Planning Study

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"Downtown" is the heart of the city. From it extend arteries of communication extending into all parts of the region served by it. "Downtown" is the place in which the most important activities of the region take place. It is synonymous with the best the city has to offer in retail stores and shops, financial and professional services, eating and recreation places. Most of the important public administrative offices (city, county and federal) civic club activities, trade associations, meetings, conventions and Chamber of Commerce and other activities are located here. It is the area of the city's highest land values, the tallest buildings and the chief focus of pedestrian and automobile traffic. It is the site of the greatest concentration of day time workers and the principal meeting place of the leaders of business, professions and politics who meet each other in stores, offices, restaurants and clubs.

In recent years, potent forces have been operating to reduce the relative value and importance of the Central Business District. Among these are:

**Movement and Shifting of Population** - The central area of the city, once the location of residences, has lost population to areas more remote from the center. Areas outside the corporate area, considerably removed from the central core, have experienced a population growth greater than that within. The outward movement has complicated accessibility to the center.

**Technological Change** - A generation or more ago the Central Business District was served by street cars extending into the fringe areas of that time. Today the private automobile has become the principal carrier of people, affording people a high degree of flexibility in choosing places for living and shopping, and ways to spend leisure time. Electric power advances with time saving gadgets in the home automation and the telephone have changed the marketing habits of people releasing business and industry from the locational requirements that formerly dictated a central core location. The outward movement of population has given rise to a potent competitive force in the nature of the Neighborhood and Community Shopping Center and more recently, the Discount store.

**Changed attitude toward attractiveness and the Aesthetic** - People today are more conscious of the aesthetic than formerly. They will frequent areas that are appealing and attractive to the eye, offering a greater degree of harmony and beauty in development. The run-down, the obsolete, the substandard is revolting. The attitude that seeks openness, beauty and culture also seeks courtesy and a new spiritual renaissance.
In its ageing process, in a period of phenomenal city and county growth, the Central Business District of Jacksonville has experienced many changes for good and many for the bad. Compared with the Central Business Districts of many cities however, the central area of Jacksonville has fared well. There are problems, however, that must be studied and resolved before they become acute to the point of blighting the area as a whole. What, as an illustration, will be the disposition of the vacant shells of buildings and the obsolescent, dilapidated structures now dotting the central core area. In the midst of many structural improvements that have been made within the central area, one finds adverse conditions that are conducive to decay, vacancies and unkempt appearances. The decay will soon offset and infect the good unless rectified.

While there appears to be an ample supply of parking space available, its distribution is not what it should be and its cost is high. The off-street parking facility on the river front is a credit to the city, but area wise, it is not too effective north of Adams Street without the "Downtowner".

The area to be included in the study would be:

1. The Planning Area, consisting of a larger area extending possibly from Hogan Creek on the North and East to Lee Street on the West and Miami Road on the Southside.

2. The Central Business District— to consist of the area used by the U.S. Bureau of the Census in their survey of 1958, and

3. The Core— that area between Pearl and Ocean Streets and from Ashley Street to the river.

The Central Business district with its centralized core has grown and broadened out in the past 30 years. Its center has moved north westerly from the vicinity of Main and Forsyth Street to the vicinity of Laura–Hogan and Adams. This movement started with the erection of the George Washington Hotel, The Hildebrandt (First Federal Building) and the new Post Office. In an effort to retard this trend, the Lynch Building (American Heritage Life Insurance Building) and the Florida Theatre were built east of Main Street. In recent time, the State Office Building, the Masonic Headquarters and the new Library have been built east of Main Street. In the transformation that has taken place, Forsyth Street east of Laura Street lost its earlier prestige as the site of leading retail shops. Whereas, Bay Street had declined in quality, it is now on the return as the result of Sears Roebuck, Stockton, Whatley Davin and Co., and Atlantic Coast Line Buildings and enterprises.

A study of the central area would be divided generally into three major phases, (A) Research, (B) Analysis or Diagnosis, and (C) Development of Plans.

(A) Research— This study phase would utilize disciplines of various kinds. It would bring together information and data from diverse sources, relating primarily to the Central Business District. Much of this material is now available, in one form or another, in different places. Its location and acquisition is a job that would be readily assigned to individuals representative of various agencies of Government, trade bodies, or otherwise. Following are the categories of basic information essential to the study and development of plans:
1. Preparation of a map of the Central Business District showing core and surrounding secondary area, divided into lots at a scale of 400 feet equal 1 inch. Land uses to be shown on such map in suitable colors. Maps would also be used to illustrate other data.

2. Land Uses study to ascertain amount of land used by the various classifications of uses.

3. Study of building permits to ascertain dates of new construction and major alterations since 1955. This study confined to core area only.

4. Inventory of all activities within area - retail, offices, services, etc., with indications as to length of tenure.

5. Indication on map of building heights.

6. Retail sales experience.

7. Number of employees in each activity and amount of floor space in square feet utilized by each activity.

8. Assessed Valuation - land and improvements of each parcel of property within the core area.


10. Inventory of all parking spaces, public and private including curb side spaces.


12. Age of buildings, current structural conditions, extent of vacancies, especially above ground floor.

13. Attitudes of people on services - appearances.


15. Consideration of Regional influences.

As the data is assembled, it can be analyzed and coordinated and from it final conclusions and plans of action defined.

The time involved will depend on rate at which information can be assembled and procured. The cost of such an operation should be between $5,000.00 and $10,000.00
The second meeting of the newly organized "Task Force" of the Downtown Council was called to order by Chairman Hendry who briefly reviewed the discussions at the first "brain storming" meeting which revealed planning for Downtown was URGENT and steps should be made to prepare such plans for ACTION.

The Chairman reported meeting again Monday, April 19, with George Simmons, Marvin Hill and Dave Cooley for the purpose of discussing the immediate needs, realizing such a city plan for Jacksonville was long overdue and that the thinking should be pointed to immediate action. It was agreed that through the facilities of the City, Area Planning Board and private individuals, such a plan could be obtained in a short time. With this conclusion in mind, he asked George Simmons to summarize plan suggested.

Mr. Simmons reported meeting again with Marvin Hill for the purpose of determining value of city-wide plan in relation to core area and agreed this downtown area could not wait until the completion of the overall plan, but rather to attack core area now, arrive at conclusions, embracing design features and delineating areas of long range planning. He felt first on the list was related to attitudes, a fault found in a recent newspaper report on the part of downtown merchants, Chamber of Commerce and people in general. Need for meeting with property owners with lackadasical attitudes, particularly in absentee ownership; the plan would show them what could be done to build, clean-up or demolish. Additionally, adequate parking as well as easy parking, auto and traffic studies, the ease to get in and out of town rather than the many one way areas and improper marked exits from a core area. He stressed the importance of the attitude of local architects in keeping with project recently designed for the Southside area. It was interesting to note that major re-habilitation of the core area is currently being done by the many churches in the Downtown area.

The Chairman stated the need to enlist the help of everyone to keep costs at a minimum and estimated $5,000 to $10,000 for the program with George Simmons heading up the work with completion in three to four months. This would include inventory of the traffic problem, parking, sales areas, Main Street, etc. It was hoped the City might be interested in lending financial assistance here. At the present time no consideration is given to Federal Government - Urban Renewal in this program.

Each member of this committee has been asked to submit their recommendations for what is needed immediately as well as long-range and the same questionnaire has been sent to the Board of Directors for their help. All of these, when received, will become a part of the overall plan with as much consideration given as possible and this program presented at the next meeting of this committee on Friday, May 7, after which it will be given to the Board of Directors for the Downtown Council approval.

Next meeting set for 4:00 P.M. Friday May 7, 1965 - Hotel Seminole, at which time an outline of the Organization and Planning Study along with estimate of cost will be presented for review and approval.

Meeting adjourned.