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B U F F A L O

REPORT ON THE CITY PLAN  
AND  
PUBLIC BUILDING SITES.

Prepared for the  
CITY PLANNING COMMITTEE  
by

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BUFFALO

REPORT ON THE CITY PLAN  
and  
PUBLIC BUILDING SITES.

I - SCOPE OF THE PLAN.

While the initial purpose of this report\* was to determine a comprehensive program for the construction of public buildings with recommendations as to their sites, it was realized at the outset of our study that an analysis of the traffic conditions would be a necessary step toward the fixing of building sites, so closely are the

\*Note.- The selection of sites for the grouping of public buildings was initiated by the referendum of November, 1920 -

"Shall the Council of the city of Buffalo, prior to the first day of September, 1922, adopt a plan for the location and grouping of the future public buildings of the city and thereupon proceed to carry out this plan?"

The vote of the people being affirmative, action became mandatory upon the Mayor and the Council.



locations of important civic buildings bound up with the city thoroughfares. It will be seen how, in fact, the comprehensive study of Buffalo's city planning needs has proved to be the key to the solution of the problem of public building sites.

To this end we collaborated closely with the staff of the City Planning Committee, reviewing its maps and surveys and all suggestions previously made, with regard to:-

- (a) Street extensions and widenings,
- (b) The areas of occupancy laid out for industry, business and residence,
- (c) Parks and water-front treatment and generally to correlate these suggestions with such major suggestions as we may have to make and to crystallize the whole into a comprehensive preliminary plan.

The scope of this work covers the planning of the City of Buffalo and its environs within what may be designated as a metropolitan area ex-

tending to Niagara Falls and far enough in every direction to define in general the highway system of the territory surrounding the City.

The recommendations submitted include, therefore, in addition to the actual building sites, some proposals of new traffic arteries related to the building sites and also recommendations as to several new traffic connections which in the course of our study became obviously essential to the city's proper development. The recommendations of the Railway Terminal Commission have been taken into consideration in this connection.

The report includes also, recommendations as to the development of the shores of Lake Erie and the Niagara River and suggestions as to the creation of parks and forest reserves outside of the city.

Accompanying this report is a series of pictorial views illustrating the public building

sites and presenting the architectural treatment appropriate to them; also views of the proposed lake front parks and a pictorial presentation of the frontier city suggesting a vision of Buffalo fifty years from now. The value of these views as a means of winning the interest and support of the citizens and of creating a broad view point of the city plan has been fully demonstrated.

## II - EXISTING TRAFFIC AND ECONOMIC CONDITIONS.

Immediately south of the present downtown center is a broad zone occupied by railway tracks, terminals and yards; and south of these are waterways and large industrial areas. All these have formed an obstacle to the expansion of commercial uses to the south, with the result that growth from the earliest times has been toward the north. A review of city maps of a generation or two ago is sufficient demonstration of this fact. Coupled with this obstacle to expansion toward the south, is

the attraction on the north of large areas more favorable for residence.

Toward the east are several railway lines and level topography favorable to industry, with large adjacent areas occupied by industrial housing. On the west the lake shore is monopolized by railroads, with small industries and much undeveloped land. Recreational possibilities of the lake frontage have not been realized.

As is generally the case in American cities, there are blighted areas adjacent to the business center, particularly toward the north east somewhat out of the immediate path of business growth.

Compared with other American cities, Buffalo has an unusually large number of radial arteries. It is in fact, a fan-shaped city. On the other hand, there is a lack of cross-town lines or circuits, connecting the radials. In theory, the tendency of such a condition is toward a congestion of traffic at the center, or point of convergence of the radials. Actually congestion exists in the



business center, as is shown by careful traffic counts and by traffic flow diagrams made by the Buffalo City Planning Committee and as is evident on personal observation. The fact that the radials penetrate to the very heart of the business center tends to concentrate the traffic at this point. A similar condition of traffic prevails in the city of Detroit, due to the convergence of several diagonals without means of circuiting the traffic around the congested point and in other cities of similar layout, where ordinary conditions of growth have been unaided by a good city plan.

In the outlying areas, particularly in the north-eastern, eastern and south-eastern industrial districts, there are not sufficient thoroughfares adequately to serve these districts.

The survey maps prepared by the City Planning Committee have been useful in revealing the existing deficiencies in through streets.

### III - THE CIRCUIT TRAFFIC WAY.

As a means of relieving traffic congestion at the business center it is recommended that a circuit traffic way be provided reaching entirely around the center. Such a circuit will serve as a detour for traffic not destined for the center and also as a means of turning from congested streets into those less congested.

Before reaching a final recommendation as to the location of the Circuit, several alternative locations were drawn up and carefully considered. Among these are the existing streets or succession of streets passing around the business center. These are Carolina, Tupper and Pine Streets and the parallel system made up of Virginia, Edward, Goodell, Spruce and Cedar Streets. These are comparatively

\*Note.- The Circuit has been appropriately named the "Concourse".

Narrow streets. To make them of effective width to serve the purpose intended would require such a greater width that many valuable corner properties would have to be removed at great expense. The route selected lies midway in the long blocks between these streets. Here instead of valuable corners being destroyed new valuable corner properties would be created and new frontages formed. A considerable part of the Circuit passes through blighted areas, particularly that on the north east sector between Genesee and William Streets. This route offers the line of least resistance, there being no serious obstacles in its path.

Toward the west the Circuit will extend across the Erie Canal into the proposed water front park, and toward the south it would extend to Division Street, connecting with Chicago and Louisiana Streets and serving in this way the south side freight terminals and industrial areas and connecting with Ohio Street and the Harbor Turnpike.

The circuit will have a total width of 200 feet and as at present planned will include a central road-

way and two lateral service drives. There will be wide spaces for shade trees and promenades at the sides, thus giving to the avenue the character of a mall or boulevard. In order to insure success it is necessary to make the circuit more than a street of ordinary width. It should attract traffic to its wide, well paved and shaded roadways, and should encourage fine development of its adjacent properties with public institutions, hotels, clubs, business and apartment buildings\*.

\*Note.- The following division of the 200 foot width is recommended; in the center a main roadway 60 feet wide; on either side a park space 30 feet wide planted with a double row of trees; then a roadway 27 feet wide to serve the abutting properties and next to the property lines a walk 13 feet wide; total 200 feet. This arrangement will afford a fine vista in the central roadway; between each double line of trees, which will form a minor vistas, there will be wide promenades. Since the lateral roadways will serve for access to the properties and for parking of vehicles along the curbs, the central roadway will be left clear for the uninterrupted movement of traffic.



Commercial trucking will not be permitted on the new circuit which will be restricted to light and rapidly moving traffic such as passenger vehicles. The parallel streets, Caroline - Tupper - Pine, and Virginia - Edward - Goodell - Spruce - Cedar Streets will serve diagonally the needs of trucking, especially since these streets penetrate well into the freight terminal areas.

It may be confidently expected that a circuit located and designed as above described will serve to relieve congestion in the heart of Buffalo. Considered as a detour around the center, the actual distance traversed from Main Street at Edwards Street to Division Street at Louisiana Street is shorter by the proposed circuit than via the congested center; there are fewer street intersections with their inevitable delays.

There is no doubt that a considerable portion of this traffic would circuit around rather than add to the congestion of the center. Other benefits of the proposed circuit would be the expansion of the

business district, spreading itself over the area enclosed by the circuit; the improvement in real estate values with corresponding increase in value of assessable properties; and the forming of a definite boundary between Commercial and residential districts as an aid to zoning. Also, the formation of most desirable sites for public building groups as described in the following pages.

Financially considered, the project possesses the advantage of passing through property, with few exceptions, of comparatively low or depreciated values; the expected benefits to be conferred on the adjacent properties are so great that the major cost of the project can be met by assessments for local benefits. In support of this argument reference is made to similar improvements in other cities, particularly to the Michigan Avenue extension in Chicago. Although the cost of the improvement is \$16,000,000. the values of the improved frontage increased carrying from two fold to sixteen times its former value, and the assessed valuation of the property in the region benefited, it is estimated has been

increased by \$100,000,000. Considered as an investment by the City, the interest on the bonds and their retirement is more than covered by the taxes on increased values.

#### IV - PUBLIC BUILDING SITES.

Before reaching a conclusion regarding the location of public buildings it would be well to establish a policy as to whether the buildings should all be in one group or in several groups or centers. A prejudice has existed in this country in favor of placing all the public buildings in one group. There is no European precedent for this idea. In fact the plans of European cities show their public buildings somewhat distributed in several or many centers, which, particularly in Paris, are co-related so as to produce a comprehensive architectural scheme. It is our belief that no absolute rule should apply but that in each city the question should be settled

on its own merits. In a small city or village it is evident that sites for three or four buildings could be conveniently arranged in a comparatively small area where the public functions fit naturally together. In a large city the case is different. There is no sound reason why the administrative buildings should be adjacent to a convention hall or the latter next to a public library. On the contrary convenience might require the separation of these elements because the location which would suit the administration center where the city's business is transacted might be ill suited to the needs of an art or library center or even a convention hall. Also, the administration buildings in a large city would be of such size or number that they would by themselves form an effective architectural group and this would be true of buildings for public instruction such as the library and Art Museum. There is the perhaps insurmountable difficulty of finding a single area of sufficient size to include all the public buildings required for a large city. Then



there is also to be considered the frequent condition that the topographical or sociological features of a large city may be such that a single center would not please a large majority of the citizens, in which case a distribution into two or more centers would be more agreeable and more likely of meeting success.

Applied to the conditions in Buffalo, the considerations above outlined indicate that the distribution into several centers rather than concentration of public buildings into one center is more desirable and more feasible. No single site can be found where all the public buildings naturally belong. The Niagara Square sites are desirable for municipal administration buildings, but undesirable for buildings of educational or recreational purposes. Sites somewhat removed from the center are desirable for the latter but not for the former. It would be difficult, moreover, to discover a site for one center which would satisfy all sections of the City, since Main Street marks a line of division of interest. It is impossible to escape the necessity of producing a

location plan which shall unify rather than divide civic interest.

City Hall Group

Included in the City Administration group should be provision for a building for public activities and a State Building. The Niagara Square location is desirable for this group for these reasons:

1. It is well located for conduct of the City's business, being at the focus of many radial arteries and being adjacent to the central business district.
2. A future subway rapid-transit terminus or loop would be located in or near Niagara Square.
3. It is adjacent to the present County Administration and Court Houses and jail. A removal to a distant site would mean the abandonment of a large investment.
4. The development of this site would tend

- to maintain property values in the lower downtown section and to restore values which have already depreciated. The preservation of the original town site of New Amsterdam has historic interest.
5. Niagara Square presents an opportunity for a splendid architectural grouping.
  6. Ample space for future expansion is available.

It is proposed to place the City Hall, which should be the dominating building of the group, on the axis of Court Street on the western side of the Square. This half of the square should be enlarged so as to provide much greater space for traffic and for parking and, at the same time, to gain a more dignified architectural setting. The City Hall is to be set back to the line of Elmwood Avenue and is to be flanked by two subordinate buildings, one which preferably toward the south adjacent to County Hall, may be a future Hall of Records; the other a State building where the local state offices may be housed.

It should be observed that the property west of the square could be acquired at much less expense than that on any other side; in fact, if left to itself only a cheaper class of buildings or eyesores could be expected to develop on the western side. While the enlarged western half of Niagara Square will be unified by means of a formal building group with the City Hall dominating, the eastern half of the square, framed with various commercial buildings will form a fitting approach to the City Hall.

Another reason which contributes to the strength of Niagara Square as the proper location for the City Hall group is the prospect that the Union Passenger Terminal will be located along the Terrace at the foot of Delaware Avenue. The Terrace will form a traffic plaza in front of the Terminal and extending to the north west as far as the rear of City Hall will serve to tie all parts of the group into a unified architectural composition.

It is also recommended that the site of the present Public Library on the axis of Court



Street on the eastern side of Washington Street be retained for a public building, such as a new Public Library. In this way Court Street will form a vista with the City Hall and Public Library at opposite ends.

#### Other Public Building Groups.

It is recommended that several other public building sites be established in connection with the proposed Circuit. The sites recommended are at the turns of the circuit traffic way, one of which is at Elmwood Avenue, the other near Genesee Street. At the former a Music Hall is suggested with such subordinate buildings as may be attracted to this group. The latter site is intended for a Municipal Convention Hall. In both cases the main buildings will be located so that their

principal facades will appear at the end of the vistas of the new circuit:

Since all the radial arteries intersect the Circuit traffic-way, the Public buildings located as above recommended would be easily accessible from all parts of the City; also a future rapid transit system would bring passengers near these sites.

\*Note.- In the typical checker board plan of American Cities it is extremely rare that an opportunity occurs to place a public building on the axis of a main thoroughfare. In addressing the recent meeting to promote a regional plan for New York City, Elihu Root said, "Did it ever occur to you that in the City of New York we never approach anything that is beautiful and noble? We are always going by such things. There are many great and noble buildings, noble works of art, but we are always passing by them. You have to turn your head to see them. In the one city of America that had a plan, in the city for which Washington secured the advantage of that sense of design in which the French are so superior, in the person of L'Enfant, wherever you go you have before your eyes something noble and beautiful. Here the fine things are by-products, they are sideshows!"

In the Buffalo Plan all of the principal public buildings are located on the center lines of main thoroughfares and are effectively "approached".

## V - MAJOR STREETS.

The adoption of a major street plan for the City of Buffalo is recommended for the following reasons:

- 1 - It provides a comprehensive means for transportation routes throughout the City, serving all sections.
- 2 - It is an essential step in the preparation of a sound zoning plan.
- 3 - By classifying the streets it is possible to determine the amount and kind of traffic each street will be called upon to bear and by this means to determine the proper width and character of pavement. This classification will serve to eliminate waste in paving residential streets with roadways of excessive widths.

In the next decade a population of 100,000 may reasonably be expected to be added to the City

of Buffalo. The increase in population of the Metropolitan area will be correspondingly great. It has been shown that the street traffic in large cities increases twice as fast as the population increases. Accordingly when Buffalo shall have added 50% to its population its traffic will have doubled. The capacity of downtown streets will soon reach a point of saturation. Increased traffic capacity will in the near future become an urgent necessity.

It is evident that a measure of permanent relief should be undertaken. As a matter of fact the downtown streets are of normal width. Widening of streets would be a operation of great expense without a corresponding benefit. It is also a fact that while certain streets are congested, others are not carrying their share of traffic. The circuit traffic way, previously recommended, is designed to function as an equalizer of traffic in the downtown area.

As a feature of the major street plan, the circuit traffic way is regarded as the most essential.

The survey and studies of main thoroughfares prepared by the engineer of the City Planning Committee of the Council have been of great usefulness in the making of this report. Several of their recommendations are incorporated in the major street plan.

Other proposals, developed in the preparation of this report and in conference with the City Plan Committee, include, besides the circuit traffic way, the following:

Connect the end of "The Terrace" at Court Street with intersection of Virginia and College Streets. This will form an additional approach from the north to the downtown district which will be very useful because it will lead via The Terrace directly to the proposed passenger terminal, passing around the congested business center instead of through it. Northward it will connect by means of College and Wadsworth Streets with Richmond Avenue, and also with Fourteenth Street; thence northerly with a diagonal cut through two blocks with



Grant Street, and Military Road.

Connect the intersection of Massachusetts Avenue and Niagara Street with the intersection of Albany Street and West Avenue.

Extend Ellicott Street at its present terminus northeasterly to the corner of Michigan Avenue and Utica Street in order to form a continuous thoroughfare of Ellicott Street.

Extend Jefferson Avenue from its intersection with Main Street through the corner of Forest Lawn Cemetery to the circle on Humboldt Parkway. This will make a continuous thoroughfare of Jefferson Avenue and Parkside Avenue.

Extend Humboldt Parkway westerly from the Circle along the northern edge of Delaware Park to Delaware Avenue.

Form a marginal street along the northern side of Delaware Park.

Extend Cherry Street northeasterly to High Street forming a street parallel with Genesee Street. Cherry Street will form an axial approach to the

proposed Convention Hall.

Form a marginal Street generally parallel with the New York Central Railroad and using portions of existing streets as shown on the plan. This will form a most useful artery for trucking as it connects the industrial zone along the railroads with the freight terminals. It will serve to divert trucking around the central business area.

Extend North Street easterly to connect with Best Street and Walden Avenue. This will form a complete cross-town thoroughfare, with its western terminus via Porter Avenue in the "Front" and the proposed Lakeside Parks.

Extend Hamburg Avenue through three blocks to connect with Jefferson Avenue, forming a continuous artery. Also connect Jefferson Avenue at the Stadium by means of an easy curve with North Street so as to form of this system a complete outer circuit, generally parallel with the proposed circuit traffic way.

In the outlying areas there is need of crosstown lines, that is to say, of streets connecting the system of radials. As these portions of the city develop, the need of connections between them will become increasingly important. Their importance will develop as the means of connection between the industries and the housing areas.

At the north, connect Taunton Avenue with Minnesota Avenue by means of a new street paralleling the railroads, as shown on the plan.

Extend Kehr Street, Dutton Street north passing the City Hospital to connect it with Holden Street and extend these streets south through one block to connect with Sobieski - Warren Street, thence connecting with the proposed traffic route paralleling the New York Central Railroad.

Extend Hertel Avenue southeasterly across Main Street to connect with Manhattan Street, forming with Wyoming Street and Moselle Street a continuous circuit. Continued southward via Miller

Street and Krupp Street (extended through to William Street) and Babcock Street which in turn should be extended across the Buffalo River to Abby Street at the Abbott Road, this circuit would terminate in South Park.

Remove the break in Tifft Street by means of the short diagonal as shown on the plan.

Extend Amherst Street eastward from Main Street to connect with the portion of Amherst Street east of the Railroad forming a continuous east and west crosstown line.

Extend Bailey Avenue from Seneca Street northward across the Buffalo River; connect Bailey Avenue at Abbott Road with Hopkins Street.

Extend Bailey Avenue from the turn directly south across the Buffalo River to connect with Leamington Street and South Park Avenue; also in a southeasterly direction with Frank Avenue and Fields Avenue.

Examination of the survey map reveals that the existing crosstown streets in the outlying parts generally are interrupted and do not serve as through

streets. The recommendations above listed show how these can be made permanently useful by means of connections which are very short compared with the length of existing routes and at an expense insignificant compared with their great usefulness.

#### VI - THE LAKE FRONT PARKS AND FOREST RESERVES.

The western terminus of the Circuit will be in a new lake front park which is to include the City water front lands extending from Georgia Street north to Porter Avenue, nearly a mile in length and containing about 120 acres. This, in fact, will form an extension of Buffalo's only water front park, the Front, and will be made accessible from the eastern part of the City by means of the new circuit as well as by North Avenue.

The Michigan Central Railroad, in passing through the edge of the Park, will be partially depressed. The old Erie Canal is to be retained and used for pleasure boats and launches, similar



to the lagoon in Lincoln Park, Chicago.

In addition to the proposed Lake Front Park it is recommended that two island parks be established east of the break waters, using the break waters to form the western shores of the island. A channel of about 600 feet in width will be left between the islands and the mainland for the passage of ships. The northern island should be connected with the mainland by means of a bridge located on a line with Porter Avenue. The area of the two islands would be somewhat greater than the city water front lands.

A driveway should be extended northward from the northern island using the causeway between the Niagara River and the Ship Canal. Passing under the proposed bridge at Massachusetts Avenue, the driveway will connect with the proposed Squaw Island Park, to contain about 100 acres. The aggregate acreage of the proposed water front parks is approximately 350 acres in addition to the existing "Front".

Following the example of some of the larger cities, it is recommended, that Forest Reserves be established for the City of Buffalo. Desirable locations are indicated on the Highway Plan. These include areas in Erie County adjacent to Buffalo along Eighteen Mile Creek, Ellicott Creek, Cazenovia Creek and on the wooded hillsides, which would make suitable parks of this nature. These lands should be acquired while they are still cheap before they are exploited for other purposes. As a system of outlying parks they will prove to be a real investment with many returns in public health and recreation, and attract both home-seekers and tourists. They will lessen the evils of the city.

\*Note.- With an approximate total park area of 1200 acres and a population of 500,000, there is one acre for 415 of population, compared with the generally accepted ideal of one acre for 100 population. In other cities the ratio is London, 450 per acre; Paris, 554 per acre; New York 689 per acre; Philadelphia, 332 per acre; Boston 207 per acre; Baltimore 241 per acre; Rochester 133 per acre; Chicago 554 per acre, plus 22,000 acres of forest preserves, making the ratio 385 per acre. Kansas City leads with 86 per acre.