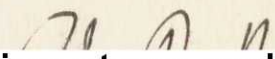


THE REPLANNING OF THE COMMERCIAL AND CIVIC

CENTER OF WILTON, NEW HAMPSHIRE

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
of Bachelor of Architecture at the
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

May 16, 1952

by  **Signature redacted**

John R. Myer

by _____

Dean Pietro Belluschi



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10 Remington St.
Cambridge, Mass.
May 16, 1952

Dean Pietro Belluschi
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Dear Dean Belluschi:

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Architecture, I submit the following thesis entitled "Replanning of Commercial and Civic Center of Wilton, New Hampshire".

Sincerely yours


Signature redacted

John R. Myer

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | <u>Page No.</u> |
|---|-----------------|
| Introduction and Brief Description of the Problem | 1 |
| Description of the Town | 4 |
| Description of the Site and Present Facilities. | 22 |
| Facilities to be Improved | 29 |
| Analysis of Problem | 36 |
| Bibliography. | 44 |

Charts

| | |
|---|--------|
| Spaces Relative to Services Required. | 27, 28 |
| Sectional Analysis of Site Planning | 43 |

I. INTRODUCTION

In the event that the town of Wilton, New Hampshire is considering several plans and the investment of a considerable sum of money to improve its own functioning, and that the state is building a highway to route through traffic around town, it seems a good opportunity to consider the replanning of its civic and commercial core.

Having accepted the major economic and social justifications of the small New England town, one can still discover possible deficiencies in both structures. The economic problem recently considered most critical was the inability of the town and small city to compete with the lower taxes and wages of the south. The factors which in the past contributed to this inability to compete were in part fixed, but such devices as the minimum wage law have tended to diminish the economic threat to New England's textile towns and cities; in fact, this law was an important factor in the determination of Wilton's textile mill to remain in Wilton. The Wilton businessmen presently believe that the economic-industrial future will be nearly stable with some tendency toward expansion of facilities and production in the present boom period. My chief interest here, however, is in the fact that there is and in all probability will continue to be light industry in the New England town in spite of the fact that there are some economic deficiencies which have been recently minimized.

The major social deficiency is the town's inability to compete with the city in providing tension, glamour, and cosmopolitan life. With the advent of cars, radio, movies, and television, the townsmen cannot miss coming in contact with these major events of cities and in result is less dependent on the social life of his neighbors. Such a defect combined with the apparently higher city wage carries the potential of the town's dissolution. These are not sufficient reasons to conclude that the New England town is doomed. The urban experiences of the townsman, if combined with the town social life of warmth and vitality, could be valuable rather than detrimental. It would seem valuable, therefore, to reinforce the vigor of town social life. It will be important in the future not because the individual must make the wintry choice of social intercourse or complete isolation, but because of the inherent excitement of living with a group of people.

At present, Wilton's commercial, civic, and governing functions are carried out along the length of its main street which provides: no particular center for meeting and discussion during the events of the day; no place for band concerts or outside meetings for ceremonial or political occasions; not enough parking, bus stop, or delivery truck area. The present street is gloomy and unusually dull. The planned site for the firehouse extension and town hall merely extends the linear quality of the town and is itself quite isolated from the other functions of the street. And finally, the through traffic uses the main street, thus dividing the homes from the stores and the factories from the stores.

The problem is this: to replan the town center providing the same facilities in approximately the same area, but taking advantage of the fine physical characteristics of the site, and adding an area which would give cause for people to meet each other whose quality would be the center of town. The economic consideration in the problem is not that which is acceptable to the town meeting (for the very idea might be unacceptable) but that which is within the approximate range of the town convinced in the value of the idea.

II. DESCRIPTION OF PERTINENT CHARACTERISTICS OF THE TOWN

Location and Physical Characteristics

The township of Wilton, county Hillsboro, spreads five miles square, on the first rise of hills as one travels from Nashua to Keene in southwestern New Hampshire. In the direction of Nashua, there lies a flat stretch of plain of rather sandy soil and scrub pine. To the west, in the direction of Keene, the land rises to form the glacier smoothed, pine covered Pack Mondadnock range which runs North and South.

Wilton's three communities: Wilton, Wilton Center, and West Wilton, cluster to the main road as it winds from the flats up over the mountains. The largest community, and also the most easterly, Wilton, is found at the junction of the valleys of the Souhegan River, running from the South, and of Stoney Brook flowing off the mountains to the West. From the valley floor, roughly a square mile in area, the hills rise sharply and are covered with a combination of granite, topsoil varying from six to fifteen inches, pin, spruce, hemlock, elm, maple, juniper, and other trees of the Northern Forest. It has been estimated that about thirty-five percent of the land has been cleared by farming and lumber operations. The community of Wilton Center is situated something over two miles to the West of Wilton and some three hundred feet higher on top of a hill. Still further west on the edge of one of the many granite bedded tributaries to the Souhegan is the cluster of houses known as West Wilton, From

West Wilton on the land rises steadily to the Pack Monadnock and Temple Mountains and the township line.

History

At one time in the town's history, Wilton Center had been the principal community in the township with several scattered settlements surrounding, among them Wilton and West Wilton. The main occupation of the inhabitants was subsistence with little export production; they relied upon themselves for almost everything, and only imported those things which would be completely impractical to make. Transportation had little to do with the formation or location of such a community: it was the factors that made for efficient farming and living that determined such formation and location. It was, then, at Wilton Center that a community had formed, where the topsoil was deepest and the hills less steep and less granite.

Some time later in the 1880's, a railroad was built through Wilton by a man named Whiting who wanted quick transportation for his milk to Boston. With the advent of the railroad came industry choosing the place both for the railroad and for the water. Aside from its more common usage as power, the water was also used for washing textiles. With this coming of industry came the people of Wilton Center and West Wilton, leaving those once bustling communities little more than shells.

Economy

The most important of the industries which combined employ upwards of thirteen hundred people in Wilton, is the Abott Textile mills and their Machine Shop for producing textile machinery. The business was started in Wilton in the late 1800's.

The only other major industry in town is the D. Whiting and Son's "shock" and milk crate factory which also carries on its own lumbering operations. As the textile company, it produces almost entirely for exports.

Now, there is also a small plant employing somewhere around sixty men, which is producing a board from sawdust and ground shaving by the use of high pressures and urea-formaldehydes. The process was originally developed in Wilton by a University of New Hampshire graduate chemist and the war-time manager of D. Whiting and Sons. I mention this company, not for its present economic role, for that is small, but rather for its economic potential which seems to be large.

Within three miles of the town and in the neighboring township of Milford, there has developed in the past years a rather large machine shop; although it was developed by two Wilton men, they have imported a certain amount of skilled labor from Connecticut. The business is presently successful and apparently will continue to be so.

Although the moving out of the textile company is not imminent, it presents a very real cause for alarm to the people, for in the

past three years another company, Textron, has moved out of the area leaving 3500 out of work temporarily and greatly increasing the number of available workers. The departure of the Abott Mills would undoubtedly leave the region in a very unsteady position despite the fact the town's economy is rather diversified. The minimum wage law, however, combined with the present uncertainty of the textile market, the existence of a very profitable section of the company which produces textile machinery and strong family ties to the town argue against a southern migration. At present, the town businessmen expect the textile and lumber industry to remain on par and the possibility of an expansion in the wood waste plastic plant and nearby machine shop.

The primary agricultural products besides the backyard gardens which almost all tend, are dairy and apple. The dairy, Hampshire Hills Farms, also owned by the Whiting family, has a herd of about 400 cows, is certified and turns out milk which is professed by Wiltonites to have the lowest bacteria count in New England. This and several other farms also produce apples on a small scale averaging three thousand trees per orchard.

The town's commercial section consists of twenty stores, three of which are chain stores, the rest owned within the town. Several of the store owners felt themselves to be losing money because of lack of parking area and the gloomy aspect of the store fronts. None felt the new road by passing the town to be dangerous to their economy. The owners of the shoe and dry goods stores expected no expansion in shopping demand or number of stores because of the extremely tight

housing conditions of the town. Only five percent of the shoppers walk to do their shopping. In the estimation of practically all the merchants, the fact is that the five percent do not own cars.

The supply lines that connect Wilton with the rest of the world and permit its export-import economy consist of the Wilton Railroad, now owned by Boston and Maine Railroad, and two trucking firms.

Of the 1300 man labor force, approximately 60 percent come from out of town.¹ The majority from towns within a ten mile radius, but a number do travel daily from Nashua and Lowell, Massachusetts. A good proportion of these out of town workers desired to move into the town, but were unable to do so because of the lack of existing housing and unbuilt developable land. The majority of workers are semi-skilled at factory jobs, but most of them, at one time or another, have farmed as well permitting a fortunate flexibility between occupations.

Population

In the past eleven years, Wilton's population has increased from 1700 to 1952 people, with the major increase occurring in the first eight years. Due to the war, the birth rate in the years 1942 and 1943, according to the school board census, dropped to less than 33 percent of the 1941 birthrate. Further investigation, however, shows a birthrate in 1944 at 125 percent of that 1941 figure and

1. Estimate by John K. Whiting, President of David Whiting and Sons.

that in the following years, there has been a continual increase.² Due to increased war time productivity and the increased wage scale, people were drawn in from the farms and the non-industrial communities of the region to work in the shops and factories. This group has remained in Wilton and continue with their jobs. The increase in population seems largely to be a result of these two factors.

In the past the people of Wilton were divided into two classes: the class of the business owner, factory and farm worker. More recently, however, there has developed a third class which may or may not be part of the owner class, and that is the retired businessmen who are from the cities and summer people. The primary basis of classification are the individual's background, education, interests and the people with whom he works. The people of the owner class have, in general, been to college, had a taste of life other than Wilton, and have been urban residents at some period in their lives. Their cultural tastes are theatre, books, perhaps art, and decidedly interior decoration; their political interests approach even a worldwide point of view, a point of view one would least expect to find in Wilton. Their activities consist largely of working on their own property, sports, and cocktail gatherings, parties, and dances at the town hall and grange. They choose their friends from people who have the same interests as themselves, and it is with these people that they spend most of their time.

2. Annual Reports of the Town Offices of Wilton, N. H.
Milford: The Cabinet Press, 1942-1952.

The group of summer people and retired business and professional men have had the same training as the owner class but may have broader or more unusual experiences in their lives. Depending upon the interests of the owner class, the people of these two classes may or may not find friends in each other. Both conditions exist.

The people of the working class have generally finished high school and with the exception of those who were in the armed services, have spent most of their lives in Wilton; a few, perhaps, have lived in the city, but not so many as to affect the general point of view of the group, or so long as to develop a separate cultural point of view for themselves. Their cultural tastes are movies, magazines, and interior decoration. Their political point of view hardly goes as far as the state legislature, although certain townspeople when asked showed complete disfavor with the Marshall Plan, or any other policy but that of isolationism; they showed a definite anti-British sentiment, blaming Britain for the United States' entry in the War. Some, when questioned, professed ignorance of the United Nations. The activities of the worker class are in the backyard garden, the car, the house; their meeting places are the drugstore, the dances in the townhall and the square dances at the grange.

Now that I have declared that the people of Wilton can be socially classified, I shall say that there is no class known as such in the community. Furthermore, these classes do not stand as clearly defined as above, for there are people who frequent the activities of both

classes, and there is, therefore, a definite fusing and overlapping at the theoretical division line. It is perhaps the factors of size and personal contact that help the factory owner group from being known as a class. If the group were larger, it could easily attain the name of class, but the word class in itself denotes a certain order of magnitude; and if the working people of the town did not know each person of this group by his first name, they might again know this group as a class. It is fact, however, that each person in this town knows and is familiar with at least every other family, if not with every person. The question of the "well-to-do" class, then, does not arise, because in Wilton it is the person who is wealthy and not the class. On the other hand, neither does the phrase "working class" or the word "masses" arise for the uses of such words by the owner class would bring on the feared name of snob and all manner of complications in their every day dealings with the working class.

There are three distinct racial groups in Wilton: French, Irish, and Swedish. Each group has something of a separate neighborhood except for the French who seem to be fairly evenly spread out through the town. The Swedes and the Irish also tend to find recreation in their own group, although the Swedes are far more ingrown in this respect than the Irish, for the Swedes hold their own dances, whereas the French and Irish go to the town dances. There does not seem to be any correlation between the type of industry and the ethnic group, but a definite correlation between the wage and the ethnic group.

The Irish are the most enterprising attaining almost every foreman position in town, filling all the Post Office and Highway Department positions. The French follow closely behind the Irish and even pass them in some private enterprises, such as log hauling. The Swedes are probably the lowest on the wage scale and show least desire for more responsible positions, but here again are exceptions for out of this Swedish group have come several secretaries. All of these ethnic groups are separated by at least two or three generations from their mother country, while the Irish probably average between three and four generations.

Recreation

Briefly, the types of recreation found in Wilton are: out-of-doors; swimming, skiing, hunting and tennis; indoors: movies, dances, discussion groups, Grange, and Masonic Temple. Wiltonians also go to Nashua where they find a few nightspots and generally a wider selection of entertainment; in Nashua they also find for a few hours a change of scene and a slightly faster pace of living.

It is of value here to view the relative participation of the various social groups in the different types of recreation, for here is an index of the interests of those groups and of the social factors working on them.

Of the working class, the non-ethnic group either participate or watch swimming, hunting, basketball, skiing, dances at the town-hall and the square dances at the Grange, and the movies. The French

and Irish groups who seem to have similar tastes, participate in everything of the above with the exception of skiing. The Swedes participate in all that the French and Irish do with the two exceptions of the dances, for they hold their own in a neighboring town, and a somewhat smaller attendance of the movies. By and large, the working class goes to Nashua more frequently for entertainment than does the owner class.

The members of the owner class participate in or watch swimming, hunting, skiing, tennis, movies, and square dances, practically never attending the social dancing in the town hall when it existed (it has now stopped because of movies). These people also go to Boston for some particular cultural attractions.

The young people of the town have developed the habit of going to the neighboring towns for dances and Saturday night excitement in the summer as dances are infrequent in the town itself. The contact with the outside world by movies, radio and television and the increase in the number of cars available have at the same time developed the taste for more exciting social activity than the town presently presents and the opportunity for obtaining it. When the town Saturday night dances were in operation they were well subscribed to and if continued would be a great addition to the exuberance of the town.

From the description above, it becomes apparent that there are three separate and distinct social and cultural groups. The largest

group is that of the citizens, the French and the Irish. The second largest group is that of the owners, summer people, and professional people. The third and smallest group is that of the Swedes.

There is one activity, however, in which they all participate and that is, the combined social and economic function of daily shopping. Although most of the townspeople would not admit that the reason they want shopping daily was that it gave them opportunity to meet and talk with other people, discover what had been going on in the town since the night before or whenever it was that they saw this particular person last. If it were not for this social factor, my personal guess would be that their shopping habits would change considerably with a shopping frequency minimum of once or twice a week as in the non-social city markets. When the concept of town life is thought of, it is probably this activity which first comes to mind. It is here that the several groups have close social intercourse and have best opportunity for coming to know each other.

Social Factors

It would be well here to discuss and sum up the social factors that influence Wiltonians. These factors seem to be five in number, and unequal in value. The first and foremost is the institution of the family for it is the basic social group and the terms in which the Wiltonian thinks. The reasons for the importance of the family are: first, that it is an easy and efficient way to reproduction, sexual

satisfaction, and individual security; and second, that public opinion permits no other method to exist without stigma. In the case of the farmer, the utility reason is of high importance for it is by the members of this family that he is able to get his work done; if the family were more loose-jointed or non-existent, he would have a far more difficult time providing for himself or whoever was living with him at the time as he would have no means of getting free labor. This same necessity of family exists for the townspeople, although in lesser degree, but even if this necessity did not exist in some special case, the individual could not reproduce out of marriage without great social stigma.

Although there is a large amount of promiscuity among the teenagers and unmarried members of the town, there seems to be little among the married people. The divorce rate is in the order of magnitude of five in the last ten years. The lack of extra-marital sexual activity and the low divorce rate pay tribute to a highly organized family life and rather indirectly to the high promiscuity of the teen-age group, for sexual intercourse in this group is considered by the community, as a normal activity. The "sowing of wild oats" in the younger years seems to retard such a tendency later on although it is admitted that this is by no means the only factor conducive to a high degree of organization in the family.

The second social factor influencing Wiltonians is the high degree of primary relationships. As each person in town not only

knows each person he meets, but also is familiar with his intimate and private life, he tends to conform to the social standard so as not to jeopardize his standing in the town. This familiarity tends to produce a sense of common interest in the factories as there is no feeling that the manager or "capital" is trying to dupe them. Furthermore, it permits more individualized job placement: for example, a worker can go to his foreman, who is also probably his friend, and ask for a job transfer, a requisition which will at least receive attention. In result, there is little tension between capital and labor, little need for unions at present.

The third factor, that of race and culture, has already been discussed in the section on recreation, and the reasons for the existence of social and cultural groups pointed out.

The fourth factor is that of attitude and public opinion. For the sake of briefness, I shall classify them both under the heading of individual consciousness. The people of Wilton, as in many small towns, have developed a high resistance to change, extreme peculiarities in individuals, and the exceptional. Any person who has particularly individual characteristics is noticed and discussed by the townspeople; he has the choice of conformity or of being a social misfit. Despite the standard of uniformity set by the town for its people, there is placed a high valuation on individual independence of thought and action. It is for this reason that any person or group who tried to do some overall planning, even though it admittedly was beneficial

to the town, would meet strong resistance. This attitude seems at once arbitrary but when investigated further takes on a more solid aspect. These people have worked hard, have been careful and know the value of husbandry; in result, they are proud of their belongings, as were their fathers, and feel no need for modification or amelioration; it is their town to change if they should see fit. It is hard to evaluate the relative basic importance of these various social factors, but it is certain that that of public opinion and attitude is not the least.

The fifth factor and easily the one of least importance is the economic. The people of Wilton seem to pay very little attention to the amount of money a person has, unless that person spends it in rather a showy manner. The comment in that case usually is that the person doesn't "seem to know much about money".

Ecology

As we have already mentioned, the four or five communities that had been in the township of Wilton had centralized at the community now known as Wilton because of the industrial advantages to be had at that location. All during the nineteenth century and up to now, the town has continued to grow, building a massive town-hall, a station, four churches, several factories, and a good number of houses. There has been in the past decade a large influx of Boston people making permanent or semi-permanent homes in the hills around

Wilton. There has also been built the High-Mowing School which is a private boarding school of rather a plush and arty nature. There is, so to speak, a decentralization pattern in the township, but it is not Wilton's, for Wilton seems to be still centralizing; rather it is the decentralization of Boston and New York.

There are two ethnic living groups, the Irish and the Swedes in Wilton. The Irish live in well kept houses, set in well kept lawns located in the east or poorer end of town. Farther east live the Swedes in "Hog Row", a group of row houses built by D. Whiting and Sons in the late 1800's. This group of houses is fairly well separated from the rest of town and has its own grocery store and gas station. The houses are extremely shabby and rundown, as they face the street and are only six feet from it and as the railroad tracks cut right behind the houses, there is little hope of improving them except in tearing them down.

Finally, there is a large demand for more housing in the surroundings of the town but of rather a high standard and low cost; a high standard for the reason that in the past these people have become used to well built, well designed houses of a reasonable spaciousness and can still find these, with some difficulty, in the surrounding non-industrialized towns. The cost, however, must be low to be commensurate with the workers' wages. In result of the fact that there is no longer much easily developed land near the town and that presently construction costs are high, it is not

probable that there will be any important additions to the housing of the town unless there are radical changes in housing prices.

Utilities and Services

Briefly, Wilton supplies its citizens with water, road upkeep, a fire department, a library, a cemetery, aid along with state and county aid for its poor, a district nurse and schools. The total value of taxes collected in 1948 amounted to over a hundred thousand dollars; the town received state aid for schools, poor, certain highway improvements, and the district nurse. The services are carried out efficiently and promptly by almost a quarter of the town's population. Electricity, the main source of power today is supplied by the New Hampshire Electric Light and Power Company.

Government

The legislative body is the town meeting which meets usually once a year. It is the institution which perhaps best typifies the traits, beliefs, and values of the townspeople. In the first place, it gives each the opportunity to speak and by this can feel resentment if their particular desire is not discussed or moved. Secondly, it places responsibility directly upon everyone and by the same token makes each equally masters of the community. This characteristic appears particularly gratifying to the desire for independence. Thirdly, it has developed the tradition of being both forum to decide the passing of laws and the spending of funds

and theatre where the actors and their roles, well known, are received with a poker faced joviality. Although its efficiency as a legislative body is often reduced by the excesses of theatre and independence something very suitable to contemporary life is gained in the way of community effort and meeting. The town meeting is a strong, clear symbol of its life.

The town executive body is the Board of Selectmen which is elected annually at the Town Meeting. The selectmen who are three in number, have to assess property and insure that the various town services are carried out correctly.

The judiciary body of the town is the Municipal Court presided over by one man who is both justice and clerk. The extent of the courts activity is judging and fining infractions of motor vehicle, game laws, and the like.

Conclusion

At the moment, then, it appears that the lumber and textile industries will remain stable, that there is the possibility of expansion in both the machine shop and wood waste plastic fields and that the town's dairies will continue at the same size as they have been in the past.

Despite the fact that the town's industries will either continue at present capacity or expand and that 60 percent of the Town's labor force does not live in the township, it is not expected that the number of people living in the town will increase to any

great extent; the town merchants believe the cost of building new houses to be too great to compete with the available existing houses in surrounding towns. In result, unless there is a radical change in housing prices, it is expected the retail capacity of stores will remain nearly constant.

Although the social fabric of the town is strong and well knit, it is apparently deficient in two respects: one, that the Swedish group looks to another town's Swedish group for majority of its social activity; and two, that the social events of the week-ends are without vitality and often not at all. The result of this is that the town young, having tasted more active life in other towns and via radio, movies, and television, finding cars more readily available, they look elsewhere for their entertainment. For the present, the exodus results in less vitality. In the future, it conceivably could result in the most intelligent and enterprising of the youth looking elsewhere for a place to live.

The marriage of the Swedish and the other ethnic groups to the town and each other is in all likelihood a question of time and contact. The solution to the second problem is clearly to create the tradition of a social event or group of social events of a dramatic and vital character.

III. SITE FACILITIES

Physical Characteristics of Site

The location of the present site of the commercial and civic functions of the town is excellent in relation to both homes and factories. There are a few sections of the town's dwellings that lie outside the radius of an eight minute walk; factories lie within the radius of a five minute walk. The dwelling sections of the town are in general composed of detached houses of the white-clapboard-frame-construction type, lawns, tarred roads and elm and maple trees. The factories in view of the site are of the early New England style: brick, flat-roofed, flat-arched windows with white frames set in, of a pleasing, straight forward character. The D. Whiting Company "lumber shuck" factory lets a certain amount of smoke out on the town, but there are attempts being made at present to control this.

The site itself runs longitudinally in a southeast-northwest direction on the northeast side of the Souhegan River. At a distance of 180 feet from the river bank the ground rises sharply 20 feet to a plateau where most of the town's houses are and after a distance, 700 feet, rises continually to a height of 400 feet. On the other side of the river after short plateau the land rises steeply again to form Abbott Hill. The ground directly under the site and swelling plateau is thought to be a deposit of glacial sand covered with 12 or so inches of topsoil. Apparently the

drainage is good and the water table low. For the basements of the present stores are always dry. The railroad defines the southern edge of the site and crosses the river about a third along its 840 foot length on a large steel trestle. The river itself is broad, rather shallow and fast flowing; its maximum flood level occurred during the 1938 hurricane when it rose 13 feet or just below the floor level of the present store basements.

The approximate total area of the site is 131,000 square feet with 36,000 square feet taken up by the main street leaving 95,000 square feet for present stores and unused land between the backs of the stores and the river.

During the winter the wind comes down the valley of Stoney Brook which runs to the northwest and at present finds no hinderance in passing down the main street. In summer the reverse is generally true with the wind coming up the Souhegan Valley from the southeast. The sun bears early on the site in the morning, but the evening sun is cut off from the site well before sundown by the bulk of Abbott Hill, both summer and winter.

Present Facilities on the Site

The present facilities found on the site are: the town hall, firehouse, station not in use and owned separately from the railroad, post office and jail, one garage, one gas station, and 21 stores, three of which are vacant, and parking for sixty-five cars.

The town hall, as the photographs will tell, is not at all in keeping with the unselfconscious New England architecture and is a building of great pomposity and gloom inside as well as out. The main hall works poorly both as a movie theatre and as a place for town meetings; the banquet room is a low, narrow room with high windows at one end; the boyscouts' room has little place for storage and no access to workshops or large outside space in which to work. It is planned at present to expand the firehouse from two to four places and in this way fire truck Number 1 can be taken out of the town hall. The town clerk's police and selectmen's room works well enough but has little pleasing about it. The public toilets are in the town hall. The town maintains a janitor to clean and watch the building.

The firehouse is a sound and attractive colonial frame building which contains presently two garages, a room for the meeting and training of the volunteer firemen, and a hose-drying tower. It is planned to expand it's two garages into the next lot, recently acquired by the town.

The railroad station is a sound, brick and trussed-timber building which was used as a restaurant after the passenger trains stopped running fifteen years ago. As a restaurant it was not a success which was probably the result of mediocre management and a building and location in which one would not care to stop for long. At present, it is owned by a member of the town and it is planned to turn it into a town medical clinic. As parking is available around it and as it is

centrally located to the town it seems well sited as a clinic. However, a certain amount of planting and care of the area would make it far more attractive.

The jail, post office building is situated in the store block. The post office receives its mail from the Boston and Maine bus which makes deliveries twice a day. The bus system is used for the town people. The jail is below the post office and the stairs down to it are considered dangerous for town's policemen because it is thought by the townspeople that any fast thinking criminal could throw the policeman over his head and down the stairs, making his escape. The jail contains two cells and a lavatory; it is rarely in use, two or three times a year, but still necessary. It would be a more workable arrangement if the jail were adjacent to the police office.

The one garage on the main street is presently moving a quarter of a mile down the road due to public pressure and overcrowding. Although the garage created a nuisance by noise, dirt and overcrowding, the gas station at the end of the street is a benefit to the shopper as the car can be tended to while the owner is shopping. The gas station is extremely clean and neat, creates no nuisance and should be included in the scheme for the center.

At present, there are twenty-one store buildings on the street, three of which have been vacant for fifteen years. There is another which has had the record of being sometimes vacant, a variety store

and a jewelry store and always in a marginal condition. The only restaurant at the moment (besides the diner at the edge of town), is a small one of a gloomy nature. There is, however, a real need for a good restaurant for people will drive sixteen miles to eat out and always complain of the lack of a good eating place in Wilton.

Delivery of goods and pick-up of waste is done principally through the fronts of the stores although some trash is burned behind the stores. The parking of trucks in front of stores takes necessary car parking space, conflicts with both pedestrian traffic on the sidewalk and thru traffic on the street. It would be far more workable condition to have these three types of traffic separated.

See Chart 1 for areas and frontages of these buildings and their relation to service and traffic.

CHART NO. 1

SPACES RELATIVE TO SERVICE

| <u>Spaces Requiring No Delivery</u> | <u>Frontage</u> | <u>Depth</u> | <u>Area Of 1st Floor</u> | <u>Use Of Basement</u> | <u>Total Area</u> | <u>Total Area Present Frontage</u> |
|--|-----------------|--------------|------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|--|
| Town Offices | 20 ft. | | | | 750 ' | |
| Banquet Room and Kitchen | 15 | | | | 1250 | |
| Police Offices | 15 | | | | 200 | |
| Jail | | | | | 500 | |
| Law Offices | 30 | 30 ft. | 900 ' | | 900 | |
| Bank | 40 | 60 | 2400 | 1600 ' | 4000 | |
| Insurance, Real Estate & Western Union | 20 | 50 | 1000 | | 1000 | |
| Barber Shop | 20 | 40 | 800 | | 800 | |
| Total | 160 ft. | | | | 8400 ft. | 52.5 ft. |

Spaces Requiring
Proximity to Bus Stop

| | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|---------------|--------|--------|-------|-------------|---------------|
| Post Office | 30 ft. | 50 ft. | 1500 ' | | 1500 ' | |
| Drug Store (also Truck Delivery) | 20 | 60 | 1200 | 600 ' | 1800 | |
| | 15 | 40 | 600 | | 600 | |
| Total | 65 ft. | | | | 3900 | 60 ft. |

CHART NO. 2

SPACES RELATIVE TO SERVICE

| Spaces Requiring <u>Direct Truck Delivery</u> | <u>Frontage</u> | <u>Depth</u> | <u>Area Of 1st Floor</u> | <u>Use Of Basement</u> | <u>Total Area Present</u> | <u>Total Area Frontage</u> |
|--|-----------------|--------------|--------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|
| Dry Goods | 25 ft. | 55 ft. | 1380 ' | 700 ' | 2080 ' | |
| Men's Clothes | 25 | 55 | 1380 | | 1380 | |
| Shoestore | 12 | 35 | 600 | 200 | 800 | |
| Hardware | 50 | 40 | 2000 | 2000 | 4000 | |
| Red & White | 40 | 40 | 1600 | 800 | 2400 | |
| First National | 30 | 55 | 1650 | 1000 | 2650 | |
| Clover Farm Stores | 15 | 40 | 600 | 400 | 1000 | |
| Stanton's Groceries | 30 | 50 | 1500 | 800 | 2300 | |
| Groceries & Patent Drugs | 20 | 40 | 800 | | 800 | |
| Lunch Counter | 20 | 40 | 800 | 200 | 1000 | |
| Restaurant | 15 | 40 | 600 | 300 | 900 | |
| Total | 282 ft. | | | | 19610 ' | 69 ft. |

Area Requiring Vehicular Delivery

| | | | | | | |
|--------------|----------------|--|--|--|----------------|---------------|
| Bus | 65 | | | | 3900 | |
| Truck | 282 | | | | 19610 | |
| Total | 347 ft. | | | | 23510 ' | 68 ft. |

Interior Space Required for Whole Center

| | | | | | | |
|--------------------|----------------|--|--|--|----------------|--|
| Non-Delivery Space | 160 | | | | 8400 | |
| Delivery Space | 347 | | | | 23510 | |
| Total | 507 ft. | | | | 31910 ' | |

IV. FACILITIES TO BE IMPROVED

As an economic analysis of the number of stores that the town could support in a new commercial center would be too lengthy and too academic for an architectural thesis, I will assume the number and size of the stores as they now stand as being sufficient with several modifications. The restaurant, if it is to play sufficiently its role of attraction to the center should be increased in size, a size that evidently is common in the medium range and therefore would seem to have economic advantage over other sizes is in the order of magnitude of 1800 square feet¹ to 2000 square feet. The grocery store that was noted as marginal, which also houses the family that lives in it, would be very unlikely to survive with an increase in rent of 4 percent to 6 percent² of sales. For this reason, I am not including it in the project. It could, however, be included if the developing group felt optimistic of its chances or if the owner was a "hold out" in the plotage of the land. The three stores which have been vacant for the last fifteen years shall also not be included in the project on the basis of the initial assumption of this section.

The town offices were felt by the town clerk to be adequate in size. At present, the selectmen meet in the town clerk's office, but for the sake of privacy in these meetings, it seems better to provide

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1. Robert M. Lillibridge, "Shopping Centers in Urban Redevelopment", Land Economics, XXIV (February, 1948), p. 148-149.
 2. They pay no rent presently.

a separate room adjacent to the town clerk's office. This meeting room should also be large enough for the school board meetings and the meetings of merchants in the administration of the whole project. With such an arrangement the town clerk's office could be somewhat reduced in size but the total of police office, town clerk's office and meeting room would be somewhat larger than the present total of town office and meeting room.

Despite the infrequency of use the police chief felt a two-cell jail to be necessary. There seems no reason to provide a kitchen for the jail as either the drug store or restaurant could cater to the infrequent prisoners.

Although the banquet room is presently in the town hall, there does not appear to be any need for such a relationship in the future. In fact, if it could be arranged administratively, it would be far better to have the banquet room attached to the restaurant; this would reduce the cost of an additional kitchen and increase the type of service and usability of the banquet room. Furthermore, it would give the restaurant manager greater flexibility than he would otherwise have in that he could expand his dining space into the banquet room on non-banquet days. Such use, no matter how profitable would be second in priority to the banquet use, the infrequent town banquets having priority over private banquets. Although banquets are infrequent at present in Wilton, it is expected that the new and more usable facilities would develop the private banquet trade that is considered

so profitable in most communities. The room would be maintained by the restaurant, owned by the town and rented to the restaurant when the restaurant should find need for it.

As delivery is of little difficulty, with the oil burner type of furnace, the heating space could be located either with the office spaces or with the high volume delivery, spaces such as grocery stores. It should permit the incineration of waste.

The public lavatories should be included in the town office group for ease of location by strangers and have entry as the police office, semi-sheltered from the main public space.

The movie theatre presently is in the town hall meeting room which seats approximately 350 in folding chairs. There are movies five nights a week with reasonably good attendance. The theatre must presently compete with the plush seats and the usually newer movies of theatres which are five, twelve, and sixteen miles away; the drive of sixteen miles is considered a little long but twelve is usually quite acceptable to the townspeople. It is, however, more expensive and more effort to drive to the theatre twelve miles than none. If the Wilton movie theatre was pleasant, had comfortable seats and up-to-date movies, it could compete for its audiences with far greater success. The minimum economic size of movie theatre is considered to be on the order of 500³ to 600⁴ seats which require to

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3. Time Saver Standards, New York: F. W. Dodge Corp., 1950, p. 331.
 4. Community Builders Council, Shopping Centers, 1944, p. 9.

support a community of some 800 families or about three thousand people. Wilton is in the center of a group of communities which together do total more than 1500 people and which have no movie theatres. It would seem, therefore, that a movie theatre could show a profit. Television, however, has come to town; if the majority of the townspeople buy television sets, as many already have, the money spent will come directly out of movie income, for to a great extent the two are clearly substitutable. There is, therefore, a question as to whether a theatre could survive solely on its own income. There are, however, three other factors that enter into the argument.

The first, that a good restaurant combined with movie theatre are a combination which do not exist anywhere in the region and would for that reason be able to draw its audience from a radius of sixteen to seventeen miles; such a television-owning audience although perhaps not providing any larger audience would certainly provide a more dependable one due to the fact that the area drawn upon in the second case is ten times larger than in the first case of the communities directly around Wilton.

Secondly, the group of merchants or the developing agent might well be interested (and willing to underwrite certain losses), in the theatre merely as another facility in the center to which people would travel. Although such people might well not buy in the stores on such trips to the movies, they would have become psychologically oriented more in this center's direction than otherwise; the combination of theatre and restaurant would separate even more strongly along

these lines as has already been shown.

Thirdly, the town needs a place for its town meetings. Although the school auditorium could well be used for town meetings, it is not in the center where the other governing agencies are, where the records are kept, where all the other public adult life of the community occurs. I do not feel that one can argue that "We must bring this to the center to stand as a physical symbol of government"; I do feel that the meeting's popularity, activity, and vigor would be a loss if separated away from the center of all the other activities. Also to a small extent, it would tend to confuse the clarity of the two town foci; the school focus and the town focus.

For the above three reasons, I feel that with the proper operational and financing approach the theatre could be financially possible. It is, therefore, included in the program with a capacity of 600 seats, small stage lavatories, box office, and projection room.

The parking necessary at the moment for the maximum condition of town meetings, etc. is approximately 95 cars⁵. The usual busy period around midday runs up to 50 and 60 cars which is the main street's present capacity. There should be provision for these 85 cars with an additional capacity of fifteen to twenty for thru traffic as a result of the greater appeal of the new center.

5. Police chief keeps talley of number of cars parked.

In result of the fact that housing conditions may change radically and that in the future houses may be built with much reduced development and construction costs, the size of the community may increase greatly and the need develop for a larger commercial center. The project should, therefore, permit the possibility of future expansion of 50 percent of the present commercial capacity and parking space.

The center as a whole should supply a focus for the town. It should be strong by its nature and in its relation to the areas of work and home for it is by social convention presently and by tradition the most important institution in the town. The real strength of such a center should come from the social patterns created in it. For example, perhaps the most important opportunity that the center could offer the individual would be that of letting him appear as a social being in the center while, as everybody can see, he has very good other reasons for being there. There is a tradition of both fable and fact of the Yankee explaining his first desires as only secondary effects, and with good reason, for much of his puritan tradition of self effacement and work conflicts with the very natural desires of sociability and pleasure. It is, therefore, important to give the townsman cause for seeing and joining in the "public circus". The pattern that the townsman could logically follow during the day should permit him to satisfy his curiosity as to the "goings-ons" in the whole public area, meet and talk to the

people, be seen and without there being any question of his doing otherwise. Similarly, in the evening, the drug store, restaurant and movie theatre can provide cause for social intercourse as well as band concerts and dances. The planning of the center, then, should not be based solely on efficiency of merchandising and pedestrian walking distance, but rather from the point of view of extending the shoppers' walk throughout the area.

The total visual impression of the center should be one of unity and calm. Its scale at once expressive of the individuals' importance but its total order expressive of the larger concept of "town". The architectural tradition of the region is one of simplicity and directness of means, combined with the certain quiet formality of the New England colonial house. The tradition of materials are granite, wood, tar, white and red paint, grass lawns, elm and maple trees. The center should continue such traditions to the extent that the center is clearly a growth of the town.

V. ANALYSIS OF PROBLEM

In the most general terms, the center is to be an interruption or pause in the flow of a great variety of functions. People pass through the area going to and returning from work, through-town traffic passes the site (it is not heavy traffic), people come to buy and leave; two rivers converge and flow on down the valley at the edge of the site; during the winter the northwest wind blows down the valley, and finally the site opens itself to the sun and the southwest. One essential quality of center is that of activity and this can be most effectively achieved by interrupting these various flows that have to do with Wilton life and including as many as possible in the center. For example, if the through-town-driver is completely separated from the center, the loss will be threefold: one, to the driver who misses the sudden high density activity of the center; and two, to the townspeople who desire a center of activity and miss that which has always been contributed by through traffic; and three, the economic loss to the town, if the driver does not stop to buy their wares. Thus, the center should interrupt and combine functions which are not combined in any other area of the town for both the functional need of their being combined and the activity that results from such combination.

The second important factor in the problem is that the site is extremely limited in area — approximately 95,000 square feet, where the store and civic functions have an approximate area of

35,000 square feet. If a 1.5 to 1 parking ratio is needed, then a one level solution permits only 8,000 square feet of pedestrian area or completely insufficient to create the pedestrian spaces of such a center. The obvious answer is to double up functions vertically. For simplicity and reasons of limited space, it seemed better to have all the store functions on one level and not to divide the pedestrian areas between two levels. In result, the majority of the parking could go on the roof of the stores with certain small parking areas for through traffic provided at street level if the store roof, street level should be different.

The third important factor lies in the manner in which through traffic is handled in relation to access of homes to center and factories to center. At present, the through highway divides the homes from the pedestrian shopping area and creates not only a hazard for pedestrians and particularly children going to the stores, but also something of a psychological barrier between the homes and the center. The optimism, it seems, would be to have no important separate function between these two principally pedestrian areas. At the same time the present system turns its back to the river which is a very pleasant and active thing, to the sun which is an extremely important quantity in the winter, and finally, to the principal space of the valley which is important to the expansive space characteristic of the center. Another problem which the present sectional solution does not solve is that of the separation of the pedestrian and delivery

functions and the parking and delivery functions, and the through traffic and delivery functions.

The remaining sectional possibilities of the site will now be discussed. Solution "A" (see chart III) closely participates in the activity of the river, opens to the sun and is well protected from the wind; permits the planning separation of through traffic, delivery, parking and pedestrian space and provides store space all on one level which the present solution does not permit. What it does not do is this: it does not permit truck delivery or refuse pickup on the same level as the stores which is a major disadvantage; or permit the pedestrian to travel from house to center without crossing the road; it does not present a very welcoming appearance to through traffic. In fact, it turns its back on the activity of the through traffic; and finally, the fact of the railroad bridge being so large in scale and close over the people's heads seems forbidding and unnecessary.

Solution B presents all the advantages of Solution A, while correcting some of the disadvantages as it more closely relates through traffic to center and permits the use of underpass from homes to center. It is no longer under the railroad bridge. It does not, however, correct the problem of vertical movement of supplies and refuse and at the same time creates a rather arbitrary hump in the through road where it goes over the stores and a very tight traffic condition at either end of the site.

Solution C is not purely a sectional solution, for the functions requiring truck delivery form a U at either end with the non-delivery functions forming the base of the U against the hill. This solution takes advantage of the spaciousness of the valley, has good orientation, makes a better windbreak than solution B. It separates pedestrian, parking, delivery, and through traffic; permits direct pedestrian access from homes to center, and the horizontal movement of goods and refuse, permits store space all on one level and the alleviation of bad traffic conditions at either end of the site. It develops a good relationship between through traffic and center which the previous solutions have not done. Finally there is one principal advantage of this solution over the others in that it develops a non-linear result out of an initially lineal condition. The principal disadvantage of the solution is that it does not permit development of the river as part of the site but, in fact, that might never be desirable with the mass of the railroad bridge overhead. Solution C does, however, partake of the river in much the same way that M.I.T.'s "Great Court" exists without seeing the river but being absolutely dependent on its existence.

There is one more solution of some merit and that is, Solution D which has a delivery alley between stores and hill, with the alley either covered or uncovered. The principal difficulty with this solution is that it requires two roads in the width of the site rather than one road, thus reducing the usable pedestrian area

considerably and makes for a rather tight planning condition width-wise. A second problem that develops and one that might be partially alleviated architecturally is that it provides a space in the alley which would have the tendency to be unkept gathering dirt and garbage, due to its out of the way character and the unpleasantness of its space. Although it would seem to be a clearer solution than C as far as services go, when actually studied in plan with reference to the areas actually requiring truck service, it gives no more flexibility in this respect than solution C.

The result of the above analysis seems to find solution C with the greatest advantage and this is the one chosen. It would be well to mention here, one disadvantage which all roof parking solutions entail and that is the one of customers carrying packages up one floor, but this problem has the possible solution of a small verticle conveyor to carry the bulk packages.

The functions in the center are grouped on the basis of the principle shopper, the women who buy either before noon or in the middle of the afternoon after work. The grocery stores are grouped together to permit the principal comparison shopping that goes on in the town and not require the shopper to go any distance between stores with large bundles. At the other end of the center with the bus serviced facilities, the drug store, post office, and newspaper store are the men's clothing and hardware stores. Such a location of the post office and newstand will give the shopper the opportunity and

cause to walk throughout the public area and make a social event out of the daily shopping.

The walk in front of the stores is covered for the reason that if time is to be spent meeting and talking while shopping, it should be able to be done in both good weather and bad without discomfort.

The location of the restaurant is based as is the drug store, on its prominence in relation to through road in order to attract the through traffic to the center.

The town offices have been treated in the same manner in which they are thought of in the town, that is, they are just another series of offices to do the town's business and do not require any monumentality to carry out their function.

The movie theatre and town meeting hall has been placed above the center on the hill. It was not placed on the same level as the stores as it was relatively a large building and would present too many of the blank walls so feared by merchants. Its placement on the hill would require the removal of one house but would not increase the cost of land for the reason that such land would have to be bought in any case, for the protection of the center from private, haphazard developers. The theatre is placed to form one side of a square whose purpose it is to closely relate the living area to the center, and it is from this square that the main entry descends to place of the center.

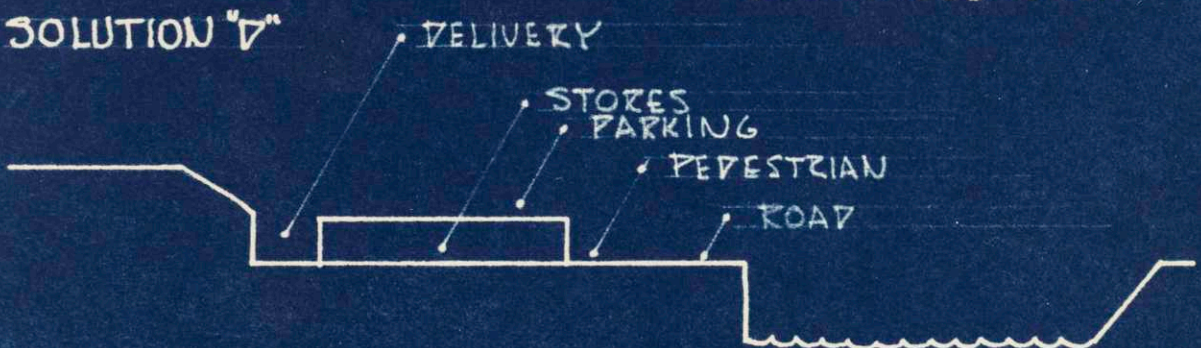
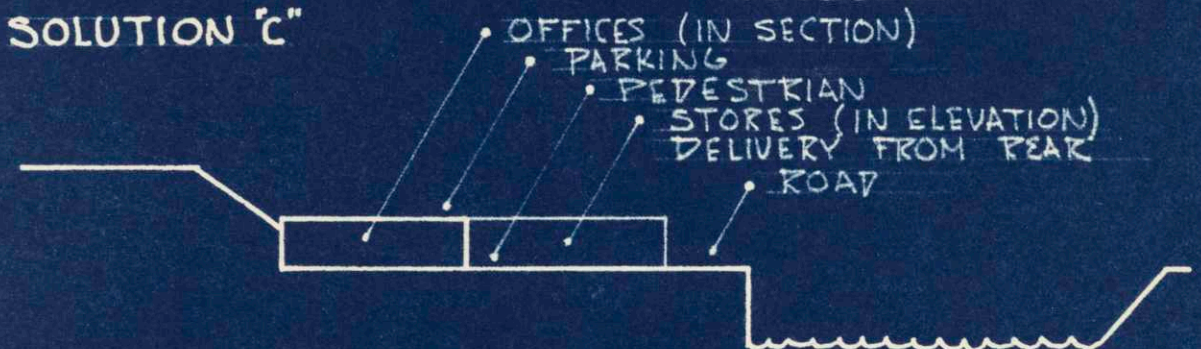
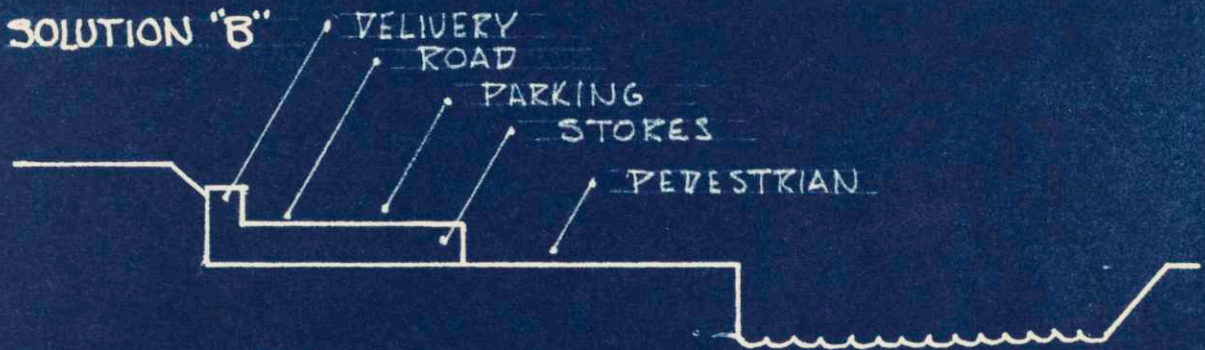
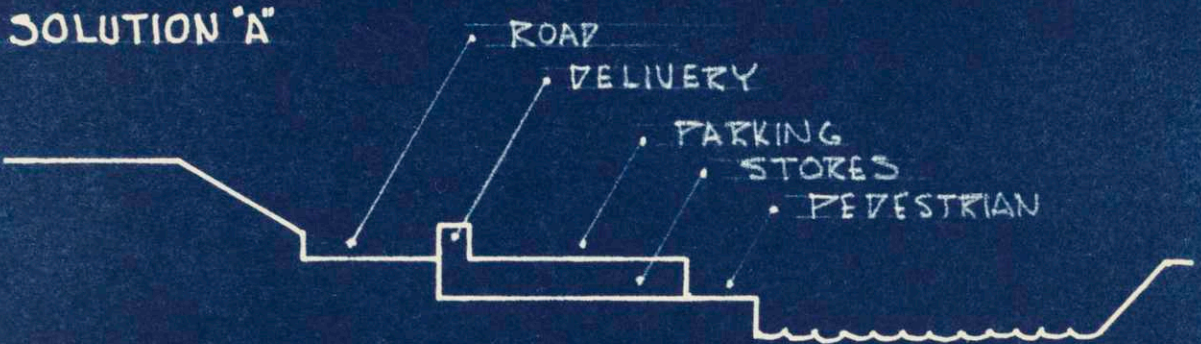
Another principal feature provided is a tent which could be raised over the main plaza on summer Saturday afternoons for the

Saturday night dances traditional in the Town Hall before the advent of movies. The raising of the canopy would be the sign that a dance was to be held in the evening. Music would be played from the bandstand on the plaza beside the tent; drinks would be served by the drugstore directly off the plaza.

The general construction of the building is flat slab for the reason of its greater depth for vertical acoustical isolation and its economy for relatively heavy loads, such as parking, over other systems of concrete slab. The columns are fireproofed steel sections. No drop panels are necessary and column capitols, although a slightly cheaper method of construction are dispensed with for flexibility of space under the roof slab. The determining factor in the construction was that of cost in order that the project be as near reality of the problem as possible.

The above has been only a brief discussion of the problems and principles involved in planning the center. The presentation is relied upon to give a more complete and detailed account.

CHART # 3 TYPES OF SECTIONS



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