

East of Liberty: Reclaiming Main Street

by

Nathalie M. Westervelt

B.A., English
Carnegie Mellon University, 1999

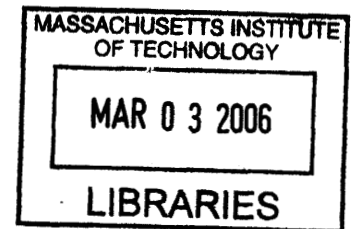
Submitted to the Department of Architecture in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Architecture

at the

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

February 2006

© 2006 Nathalie M. Westervelt
All rights reserved



The Author hereby grants permission to reproduce and to
distribute publicly paper and electronic copies of this thesis document
in whole or in part in any medium now known or hereafter created.

Signature of Author.....
Department of Architecture
January 20, 2006

Certified by.....
John P. De Monchaux
Professor of Architecture and Urban Planning
Thesis Supervisor

Accepted by.....
Ann Pendleton-Jullian
Associate Professor of Architecture
Chair, Department Committee on Graduate Students

ARCHIVES

Thesis Supervisor: John De Monchaux
Title: Professor of Architecture and Urban Planning

Reader: Nasser Rabbat
Title: Associate Professor and Aga Khan Professor of the History of
Islamic Architecture

Reader: Robert Cowherd
Title: Adjunct Professor of Architecture, Rhode Island School of
Design

East of Liberty: Reclaiming Main Street

by

Nathalie M. Westervelt

Submitted to the Department of Architecture
on January 20, 2006
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Architecture

Abstract

Although we were taught about the success of the Civil Rights movement in elementary school, it is undeniable that socioeconomic differences create community borders throughout the world. Specifically discussed here is East Liberty part of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania's "East End." Over a forty-five year period East Liberty has been disassociated from her neighbors and become an archipelago like many of Pittsburgh's neighborhoods. Since the sixties, when the first interventions were commissioned by David L. Lawrence's Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA), development reinforced already present socioeconomic barriers and people began to fear East Liberty, on the other side of the tracks from Shadyside.

3

Today, the URA no longer directly influences design, but oversees the federal funding that non profit Community Development Corporations (CDCs) receive for the commercial and residential development projects. Ironically, CDCs are comprised of real-estate brokers, not politicians, architects, nor planners.

Economically, East Liberty is improving if the big box stores make profits, then the land will generate revenue from taxes and its value will rise. If more developers and business owners take interest, the empty storefronts will fill. This process, however, should include a plan for the retention of the poorer residents who wish to remain in their homes.

The cost of economic success is the continual displacement of those who do not have any stake in where they live due to their dependence on the government. Displacement severs familial and community roots inhibiting the success of both. To paraphrase Lao-Tsu: a thing must take root in order to be nourished.

Thus this thesis addresses the necessity to create opportunity as well as architecture when planning the redesign of a poor community. To this end, this thesis proposes that in order to redevelop, the community must build from within. The proposal here is to plan a series of developments that will tie East Liberty into the East End. The first development is a Building Arts School capable of providing Bachelors

degrees in the Arts and the Sciences and dedicated to the education of the poor who live in the East End. In addition to creating a catalyst for urban and economic growth, this school provides a means to raise one's social status through education and marketable skills. With East Liberty as its campus, the school will provide much needed public space and a re-connection to the other side of the tracks inasmuch as it is one of a network of developments based upon the projected rise in traffic caused by the school, connecting bus hub and bridge to Shadyside.

The chosen site, a point along bus way, at a major bus stop, and in the periphery between three neighborhoods is optimal because the architecture acts as a gateway, a beacon and a connector. Providing a monumental continuity between inside and outside, this project is an initial urban intervention a chain of reactions that will reclaim the civic space of Penn Avenue, the Main Street of the East End and the opportunities that once were there.

4

East Liberty is an interesting case study because it shows the strata of abandonment and renewal common to many American post-industrial cities. It is a protagonist in the saga of the rise and fall of the railroad and steel industry. The latter undermining the economic base of Pittsburgh which may be recognized in the decayed urban fabric of lower class neighborhoods. East Liberty is one of many former urban centers fallen victim to the demise of inner city community at the rise of the suburb.

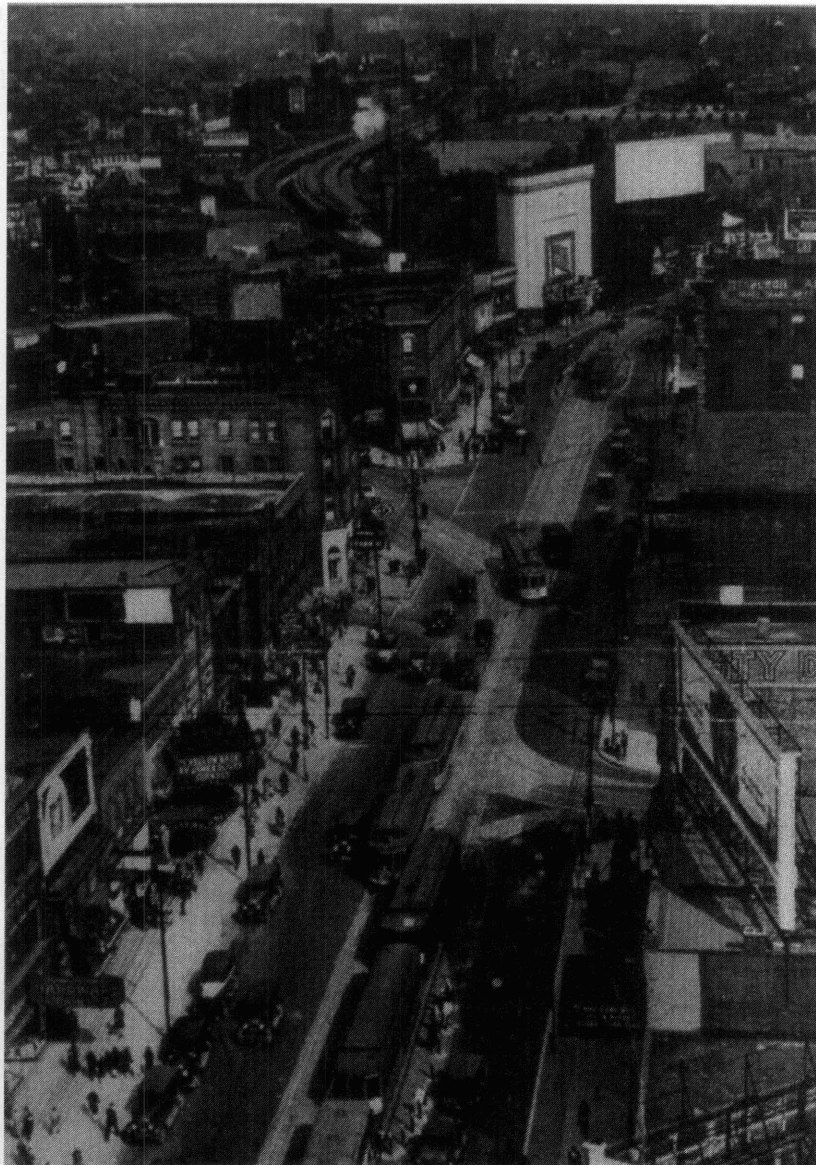
“Every theoretical explanation is
a reductor of intuition.”

Peter Hoeg, *Smilla's Sense of
Snow*

I appreciate all of the people in Pittsburgh who lent their time to answer my questions and discuss my work. Specifically, I would like to thank Ken Doyno for sharing with me his master plan and planning guidelines for East Liberty. In addition, a special thank you to Michelle Griffiths for her hospitality and counsel and to Myrna Zelenitz for giving me the job that brought me to East Liberty each day.

Thank you John De Monchaux, Nasser Rabbat, Robert Cowherd and Chris Dewart for taking a special interest in this project and treating it with a respect akin to a project of your own. I feel extremely fortunate to have been part of a collaborative that attempted the difficult task of providing an architectural and urban means of intervention that, in theory, would strengthen East Liberty's community and economy and provide a precedent for the development of other urban neighborhoods.

I love you Mom, Dad, Kev, Jeremy and Nicole, thank you for taking care of me.



Penn Avenue in East Liberty
circa 1930: the East End's Main
Street. Photograph from Carn-
egie Library of Pittsburgh Arch-
ives.

East of Liberty

“Our trouble is not ignorance, but inaction.”¹ Although we are aware that the poor in the United States are pushed to the edges of economic development, we are unable or unwilling to make changes that would allow them opportunity to secure their homes and have easier access to education and skills. While attending to the increase in land value and commercial projects developers in East Liberty, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania are ignoring the growth of the community of people initially targeted for outside assistance. Community Development Corporations well funded by public and private resources see rental properties, social security and welfare institutions as obstacles to economic redevelopment. Increased land ownership and attracting residents with higher incomes are essential ingredients the current master plan.

The marginalized are by description pushed to the periphery both economically and socially. Those who are unable to provide for themselves are by and large forgotten and overlooked. In 1983, *Human Rights in Urban Areas*, published by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization stated; “the tragedy of the poorest of the poor has always been that their story has never been told.”² Citing the subsidized housing policies in France, UNESCO concludes: “the right to housing thus seems to be reserved to individuals already able to provide certain guarantees [such as regular payments or promise of increased income in the future]. By contrast, those most crushed by destitution, who display the characteristic signs of dire poverty, are once again denied a right they might well claim as a matter of priority.”³

It is a utopian vision to believe that all families in the United States can have access to housing that they can afford. Ironically, in the essay by Langley Keyes and Diane DiPasquale on *Housing Policy for the 1990s*, Keyes wrote that the Rouse/Maxwell Report⁴ looks to the year 2000 as a time when all Americans should have access to “fit, livable, and affordable housing.”⁴

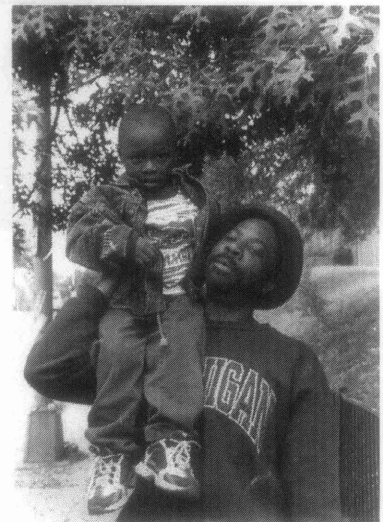
¹ xx Dale Carnegie

² 62 UNESCO

³ 68 UNESCO

⁴ 17 National Housing Task Force

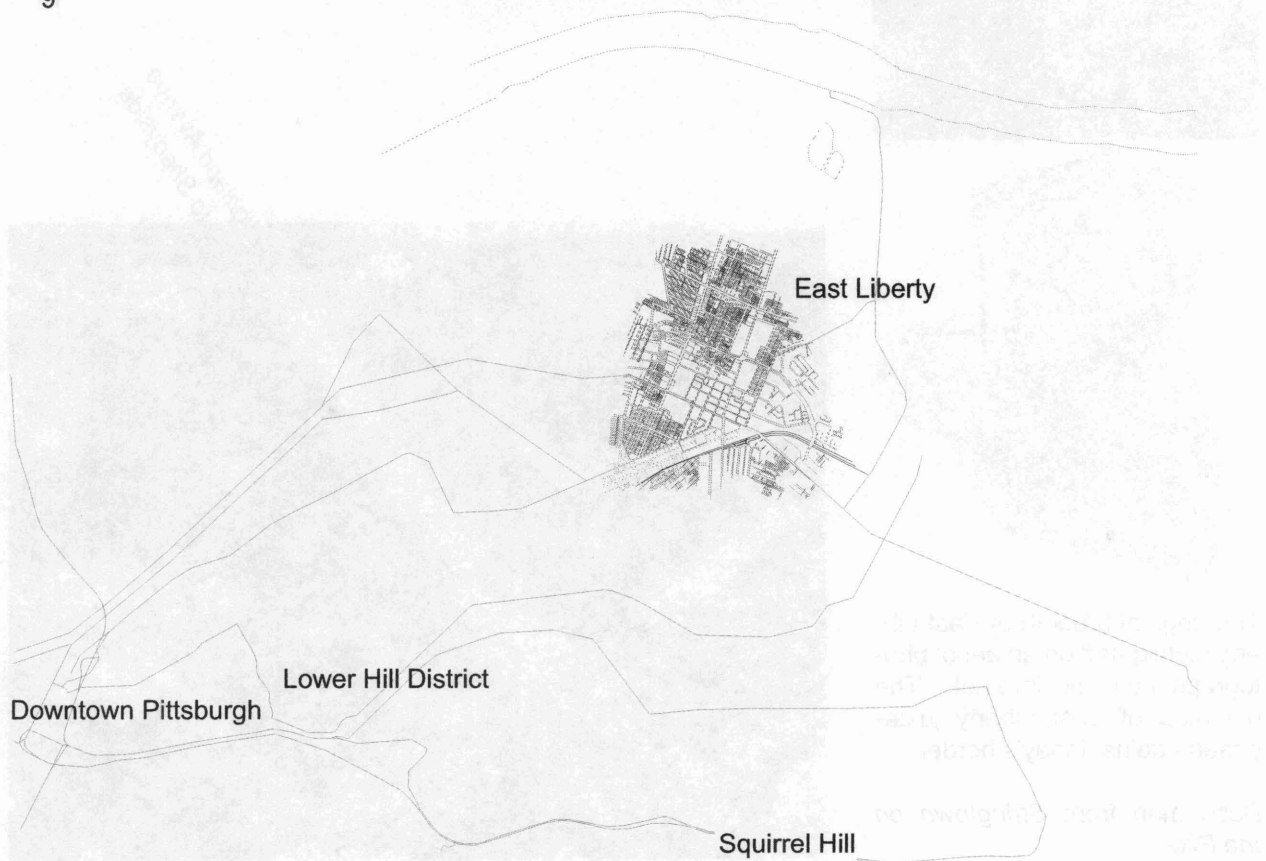
East Liberty residents. Photograph by Nathalie Westervelt 1999



⁵ no official date on the book neither on record nor on the book itself

East Liberty's history of renewal is like that of many other post-industrial northern cities in the United States; once a thriving moderately dense shopping and residential center, it began to decay and depopulate around the end of World War Two. By the sixties the Urban Redevelopment Authority of Pittsburgh, like many other development corporations of the time, was completing master plans that as in Le Corbusier's planning visions, would create a city for the automobile with wide streets and high-rises surrounded by expanses of lawn. Old buildings were demolished and replaced with automobile retail stores, and multi-storey affordable housing blocks were erected to house the poor.

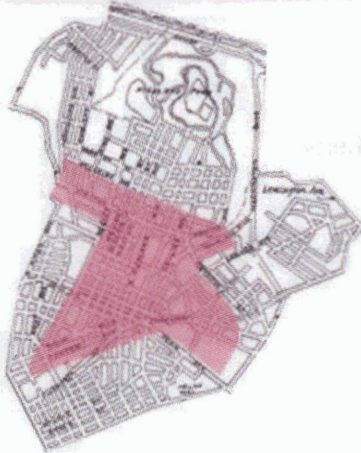
Much of East Liberty's early development is told in *Stringtown on the Pike*, a book that covers the history of the neighborhood up until the early sixties and tells its story up into the mid sixties or so.⁵ The area of East Liberty was considerably larger when it was granted to the British troops by the King of England: a vast grazing land that became the second commercial center of Pittsburgh, a train stop away from downtown.





In the beginnings of its development, rich families lived on the periphery of the commercial core and the Southern Border of East Liberty ran along Fifth Avenue. The rise in the residents' wealth coincided with the prosperity of the steel industry and the development of the Pennsylvania Railroad. At about the time *Stringtown on the Pike* was published, Pittsburgh was under her first concerted redevelopment.

Pittsburgh's "Renaissance" ends the story. The then latest architectural and urban face of the town was shown in photographs of low-income housing projects which were a monumental solution to the need to house low-income families who were evicted from the neighborhoods wiped out to erect Pittsburgh's new monuments: the Gateway Center office buildings, Point State Park, and the Pittsburgh Igloo. Until that time, the area had been self-developed, under the auspices of private investors and community members. As Pittsburgh has lost economic momentum, with the end of World War Two, and the rise of the suburb, East Liberty has lost its status as the "Second Downtown of Pittsburgh."



The original breadth of East Liberty highlighted on an aerial photograph from the internet. The old map of East Liberty juxtaposed against today's border.

Base map from *Stringtown on the Pike*.





Penn Avenue before 1900. Photograph from *Stringtown on the Pike*.

11



Penn and Highland Avenues at night circa 1970. Photograph from Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh Archives.

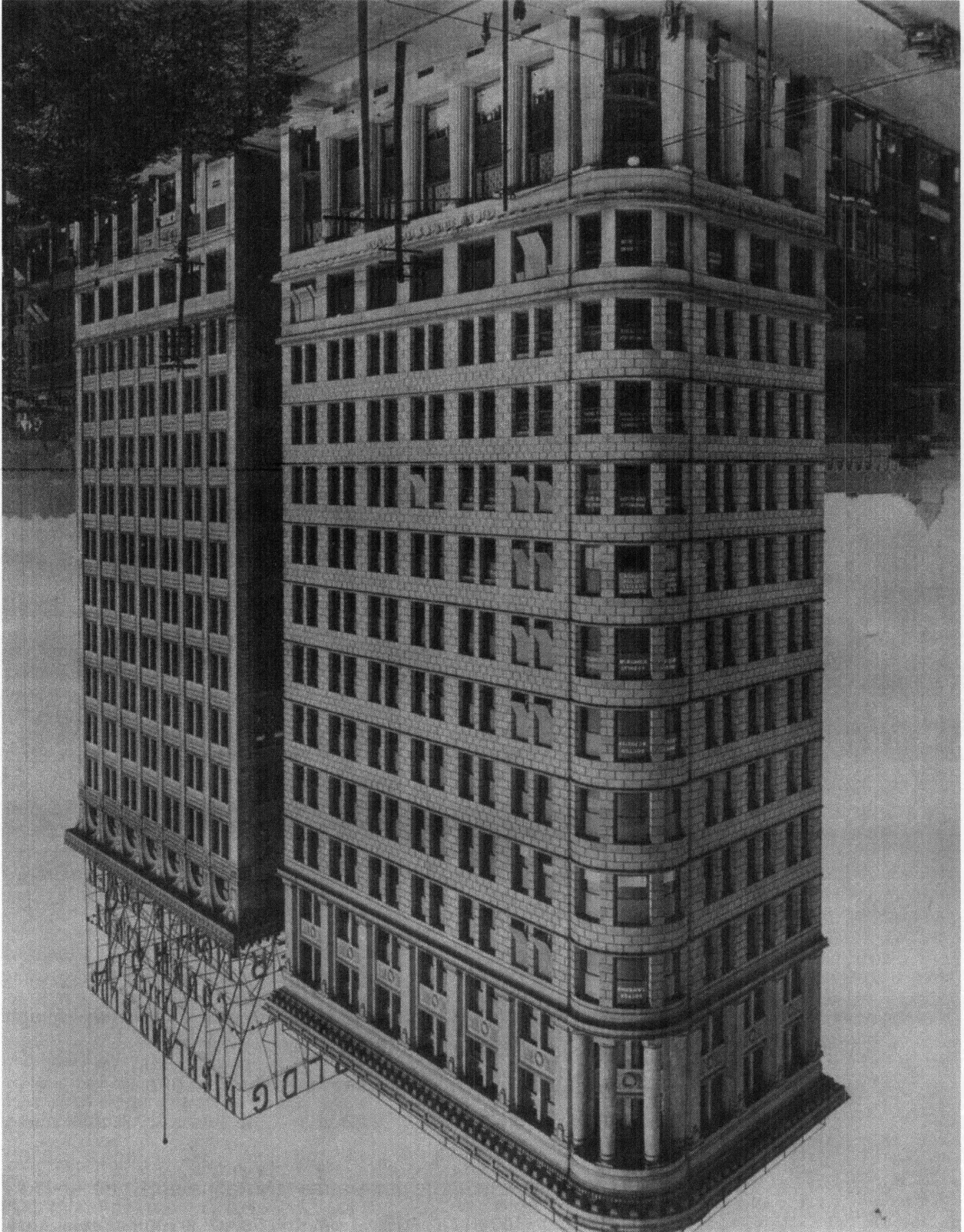


Penn Avenue towards downtown circa 1930. Photograph from Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh Archives.

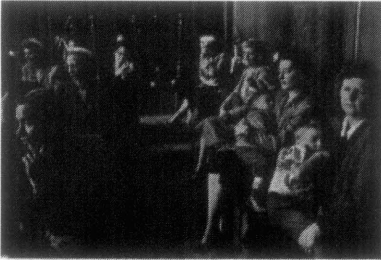
Henry Hornbostel's Liberty Theater was demolished in accordance with the 1966 plan. Photograph from *Stringtown on the Pike*.



The East End Savings and Trust company was destroyed in a fire. The Highland Building, however, remains. Photograph from *Stringtown on the Pike*



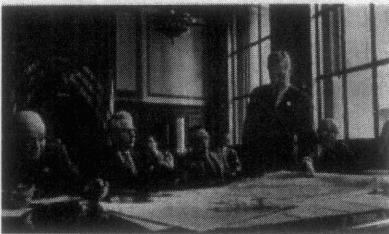
The "Renaissance" of downtown Pittsburgh necessitated the eviction and clearance of a large tract of what was seen as decaying land in the Lower Hill District of Pittsburgh. The area was culturally rich and the community within had the potential to achieve economic prosperity, but housing conditions were overcrowded and often unsafe. The negative psychological effects upon this displaced community is chronicled and analyzed in *Root Shock*, by psychiatrist Mindy Thompson Fullilove. Her studies of the Lower Hill District in Pittsburgh confirm that displaced families suffer the loss of identity and self-esteem due to the abrupt eviction of their community.



When a PLAN IS DISCUSSED BY KEENLY INTERESTED PARTICIPANTS.

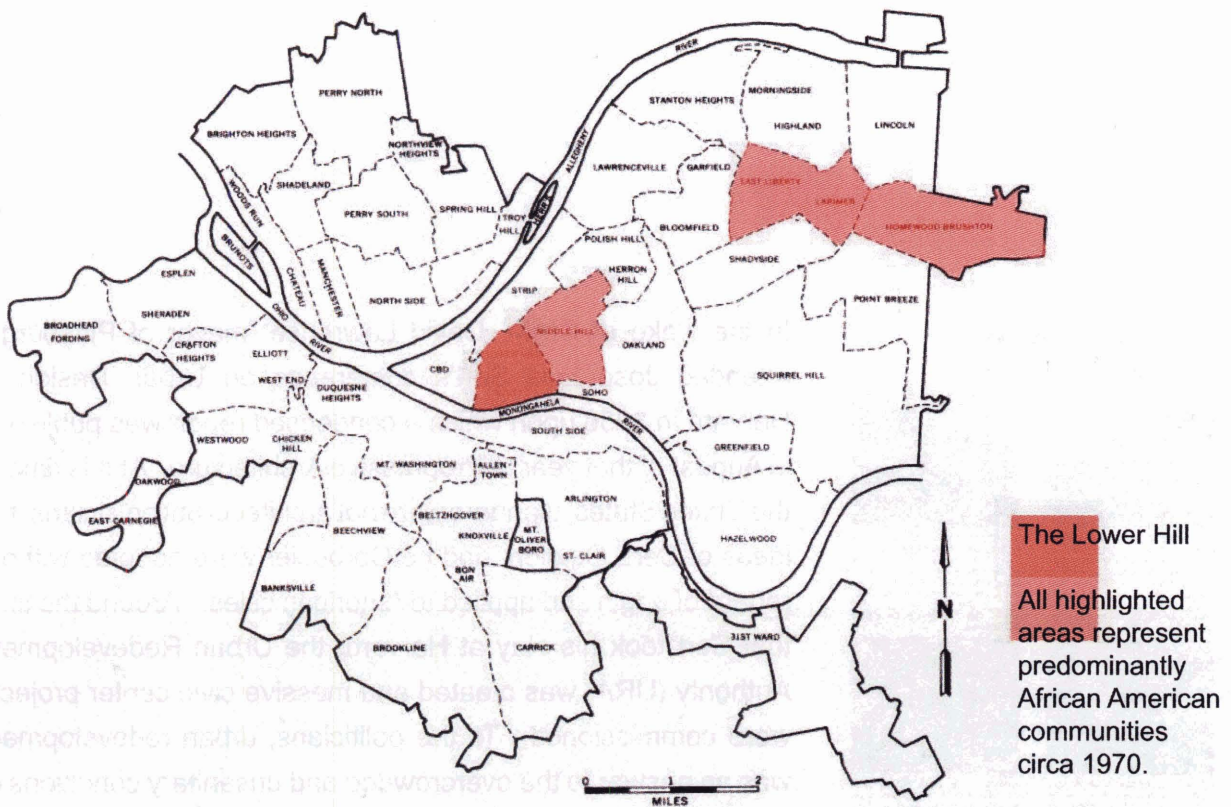


LADIES IN THE AUDIENCE FOLLOW THE PROCEEDINGS.



the URA and attendees at the Hearing for the development of the Lower Hill.

Photographs from *Pittsburgh: The Story of an American City*.



15

"From 1930 to 1970, at least two-thirds of the black population of Pittsburgh was concentrated in three areas, namely the communities of the Hill District, Homewood Brushton, and East Liberty."⁶

Base Map from *Afro-Americans in Pittsburgh: The Residential Segregation of a People*

Displacement affected, according to Fullilove to approximately 1,600 Black neighborhoods in the United States. Perhaps this is why, in the sixties, it became a common belief among the African Americans living in cities throughout the United States that "Urban renewal means Negro removal." Before the revitalization project of the late fifties, according to Fullilove, the African-American community had been hard hit by overcrowding due to new arrivals and a loss of unskilled jobs. She believes that, "given the versatility of the Civil Rights Movement, and the strength of the ghetto communities, it is possible that they could have solved all of these problems and more, but what happened next was an enormous setback, one that threw the homeward journey completely off course. What happened next was Urban Renewal."⁷

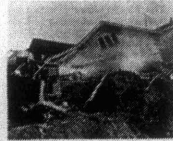
⁶ 7 Darden

⁷ 6 Fullilove

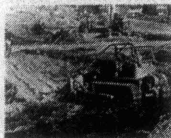
**How to Raze A House in
Only Four Easy Lessons**



CONTRACTOR PREPARES HOUSE FOR DESTRUCTION—The first step in the house wrecking technique displayed by the District 7 crews as they clear the area for the new freeway by Lake Union in Seattle is shown above. The contractor strikes a cable through the house and attaches it to a medium size bulldozer.



ANOTHER HOUSE TUMBLES IN THE NAME OF PROGRESS—The second step in the house wrecking technique is simple enough. The bulldozer simply pulls until the house comes tumbling down. Next, the bulldozer punches and pushes the fallen house until it is broken down into small pieces.



SPECIAL BULLDOZER BLADE AIDS IN JOB—Step three in the house wrecking job is handled by the bulldozer again, as a special blade is attached in order to pick up the debris. Much of this is burned right on the spot in order to facilitate the job.



DOZER ALSO HANDLES THE FOURTH AND FINAL STEP—With the bulldozer still in charge, the area is cleaned up. The basement excavation is filled in and the lot is smoothed over. It all looks so easy when man and machine team up to clear the way for the new freeway.

Image from an Internet search on "Urban Renewal"

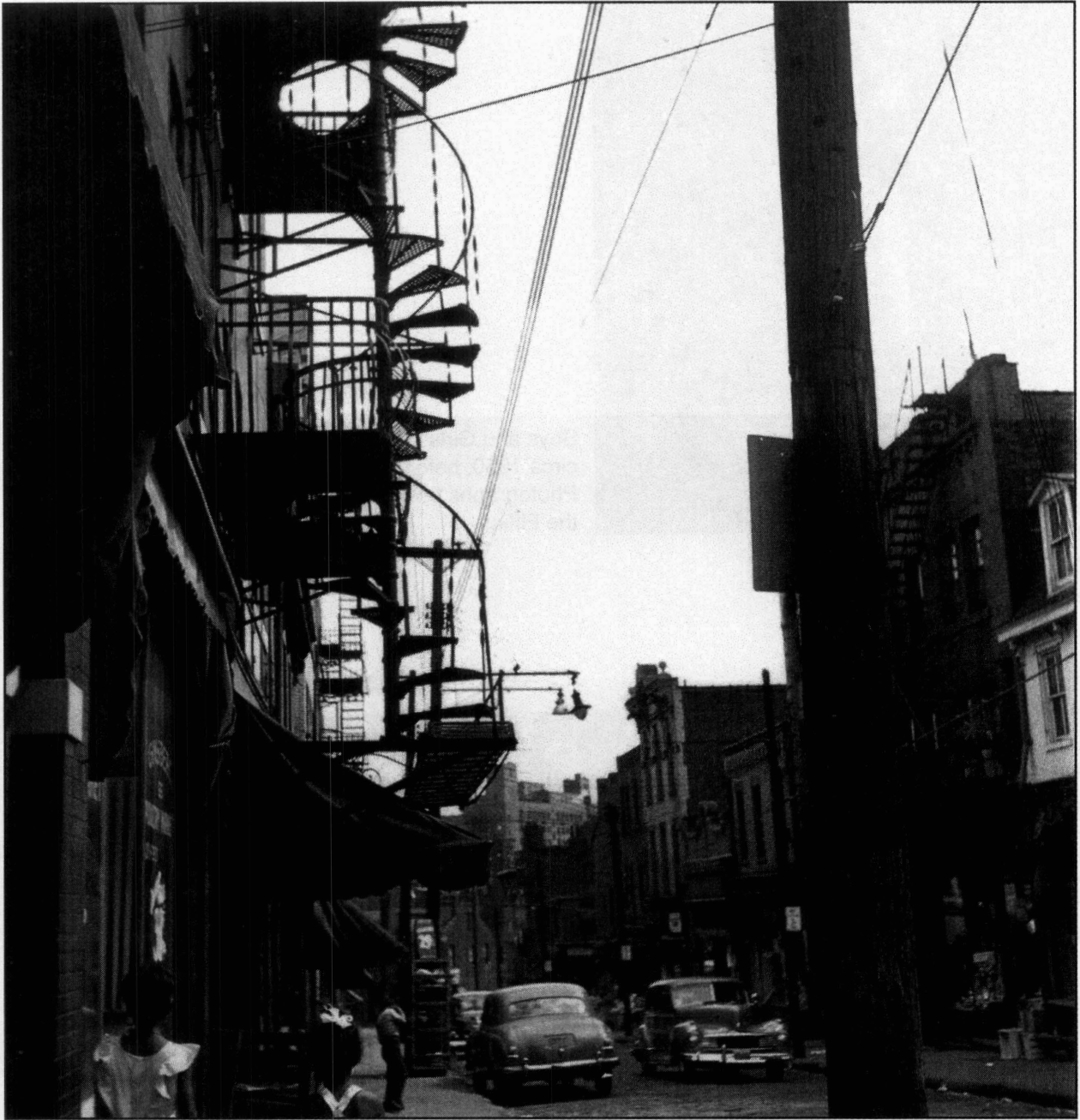
⁸ 380 Mallgrave

⁹ 103 PA August 1956



The Lower Hill before (left) and after (right) Urban Renewal.

In the wake of CIAM, David Lawrence, mayor of Pittsburgh, attended Jose Luis Sert's conference on Urban Design at Harvard in 1956 upon which a condensed report was published in August of that year in *Progressive Architecture*. At this time in the United States, planners were not architects but politicians, the ideas of Sert, Geidion, and Le Corbusier were adopted without regard of origin and applied to American cities.⁸ Around the time that Sert took his stay at Harvard, the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) was created and massive civic center projects were commissioned. To the politicians, urban redevelopment was an answer to the overcrowded and unsanitary conditions of the slums, and an attempt to create an attractive civic center to rejuvenate the down town.



Back Alley in the Lower Hill circa 1955 before demolition.
Photograph from *Witness to the Fifties*



Boys and Girls in the Lower Hill
circa 1950, before demolition.
Photographs from Witness to
the Fifties



Of the project, Lawrence said, "In my judgment, the redevelopment of the Lower Hill – a giant bite from the core of the city – will be the greatest of our Pittsburgh projects."¹⁰

"Demolition began in 1956, displacing 1551 (mostly Negro) families and 413 businesses. The \$22 million, domed Civic Arena with retractable roof opened in 1961."¹¹

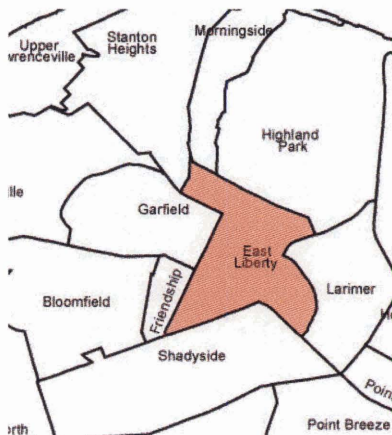


Moving day in the Lower Hill, 1955. Photographs from Witness to the Fifties

¹⁰ 106 PA August 1956

¹¹ 131 Lubove

¹² ibid



Base map from *A Social Study of Pittsburgh*

After Redevelopment, one URA official "acknowledged that the Lower Hill renewal project worsened segregation elsewhere."¹² This conclusion is in concurrence with Melvin D. Williams, a sociologist who documented the decline of Belmar, a middle-class community (on the other side of Larimer) where he had grown up. He studied the reasons why it had been negatively affected by the displacement of lower-income families from the Lower Hill.

He found that the massive displacement of one community to another causes residents to take flight because of the deterioration of the urban fabric that resulted from overcrowding and poverty. Businesses closed and the middle class families who had created the neighborhood left.

The post-war era posed an extra challenge of a large demand for housing. Thus the displacement of so many families from the Lower Hill encumbered an already overcrowded housing market. Large housing blocks and apartment towers, like those constructed in East Liberty were one answer to this need.

The cycle of urban decay, removal of blighted slums, and attempted revitalization and creation of urban centers is familiar to American cities. It is an omnipresent tragedy that seems inevitable, thus is often ignored. It seems lessons of what happened to the community in the Lower Hill District have not been learned and the words of Mumford have not been heard.

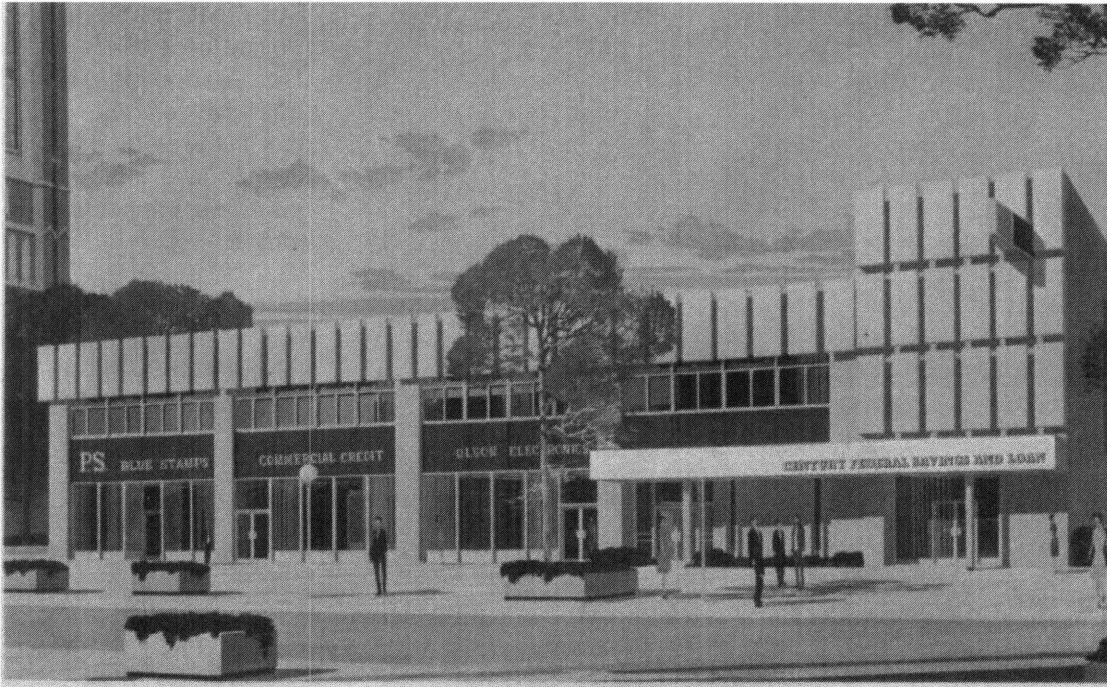
The proposal for redevelopment of East Liberty, written by the URA in June 1966 states, "beginning in 1967, the conversion of Penn Avenue, Highland Avenue and Broad Street to shopping malls will commence with the result that East Liberty will become an even greater attraction for shoppers and people seeking entertainment."

Pittsburghers can remember shopping, going to movies and eating in East Liberty in the seventies while the pedestrian mall was new. It was, however, under-populated at night; coupled with an increase in crime, the streets seemed unsafe.

20

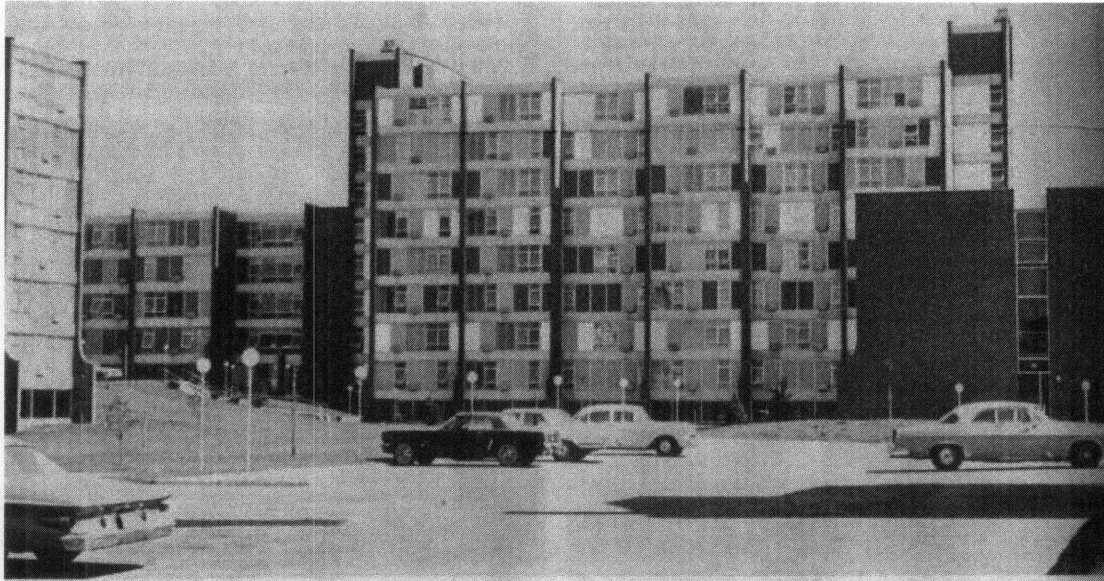


Pedestrian Mall in East Liberty
Photograph by Lou Malkin 1974



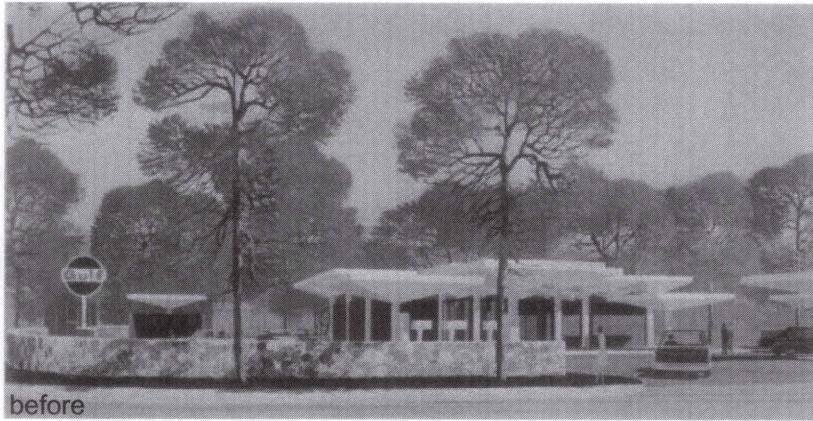
Century Federal Plaza at 5916 Penn Avenue, is the home of the old East End Federal, now renamed Century Federal Savings and Loan.

21



The beautiful Pennley Park Apartments, North, were one of the first tangible signs of a new look of redevelopment in East Liberty. Photo by Dick Plummer.

Projects that still exist in East Liberty today. Images from the *First Annual Yearbook; Pittsburgh Chapter; the American Institute of Architects*, 1970



The streets that were blocked to provide park space for the high rise apartments created vast urban wastelands. The plan to gear the area for the automobile has left two lots with dormant gas tanks, impeding their development.

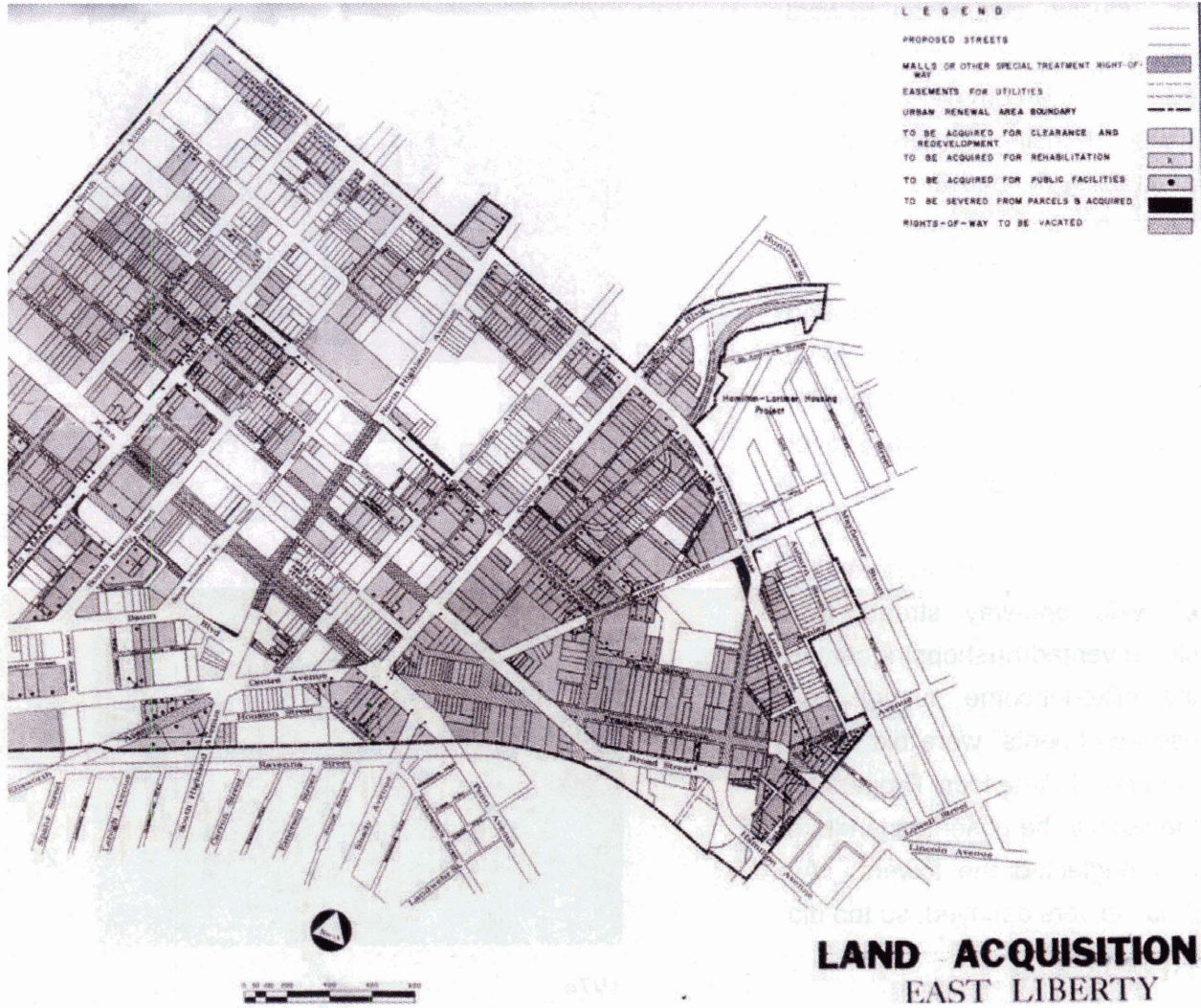
To the right an image from the *First Annual Yearbook; Pittsburgh Chapter; the American Institute of Architects, 1970.*

By the eighties, the commuter rail was transformed into the Martin Luther King, Jr. Bus Way and cargo line, and all but one street connection were severed between East Liberty all neighborhoods to the South. Today many avoid the neighborhood because of fear. This unsuccessful pedestrian mall created a void where there was to be spectacle.

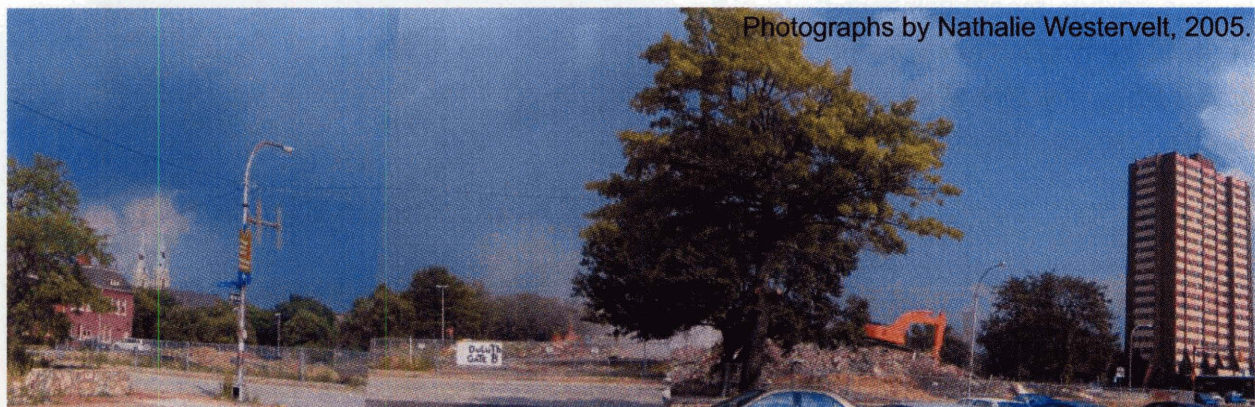
22

Once considered a solution, the housing towers of yester-year have been replaced by the mixture of single and multiple family units surrounding a park: suburbia in an urban setting. Two of the three housing towers constructed have been destroyed and the third is to follow.





The URA plan for East Liberty in 1966 blocked traffic in the core and the surrounding residential areas. The current plan reopens some of the streets that were demolished.



Photographs by Nathalie Westervelt, 2005.

The housing towers were located on the Eastern and Western edges of the commercial center. Those housing towers in all practicality defined the East and West borders of the isolated core, they were bookends to the once powerful neighborhood whose borders, as they have been defined architecturally, economically and socially over time, seem to ebb.

At the same time as the creation of wide one-way streets that circumvented the shopping center, the mixed-income "luxury high rise apartments" were bid out to Federated American Properties, the soon to be absentee landlord that neglected the towers. As those towers decayed, so too did East Liberty.

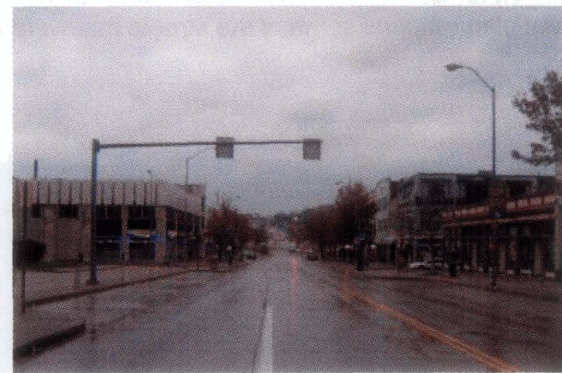
The separation of East Liberty from surrounding areas created a physical barrier that expressed a psychological barrier between East Liberty and her neighbors. Left unattached from Pittsburgh but by car or bus, many businesses in East Liberty failed because the poor community that lived there could not support them.



1935



1974



2005

Photographs from the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh Archives, Lou Malkin 1974, and Nathalie Westervelt, 2005.





The loss of skilled jobs coincided with the demise and later cessation of the steel industry in Pittsburgh. A majority of the steel mills closed in the early eighties. The effect in the economy is manifested in unsold lots and empty houses. According to a recent Pennsylvania Low Income Housing Report 15,000 properties in Pittsburgh are abandoned.

After the construction of the high rises and pedestrian mall, the URA worked with the East Liberty Quarter Chamber of Commerce (ELQCC) to influence development. Out of that alliance grew the non profit CDC that currently oversees the master plan of East Liberty as well as commercial and residential development. East Liberty Development, although not officially part of the URA anymore, is funded heavily by the URA.



Empty properties in East Liberty's commercial core



It is under ELDI's direction that the most recent projects have been built: the mixed-income development of New Pennely Place, the Home Depot and the Whole Foods. With URA's funds, they buy properties and turn them over to developers. The Home Depot and Whole Foods were coaxed to the East End with subsidies and promises of ample parking. As much as they can, ELDI buys individual properties to renovate. Two sizeable mixed-income housing blocks are part of the most recent master plan: one to the Northwest of the core called Mellon's Orchard by Edge Architecture and the Other by S&A Homes and Urban Design Associates to the Northeast.



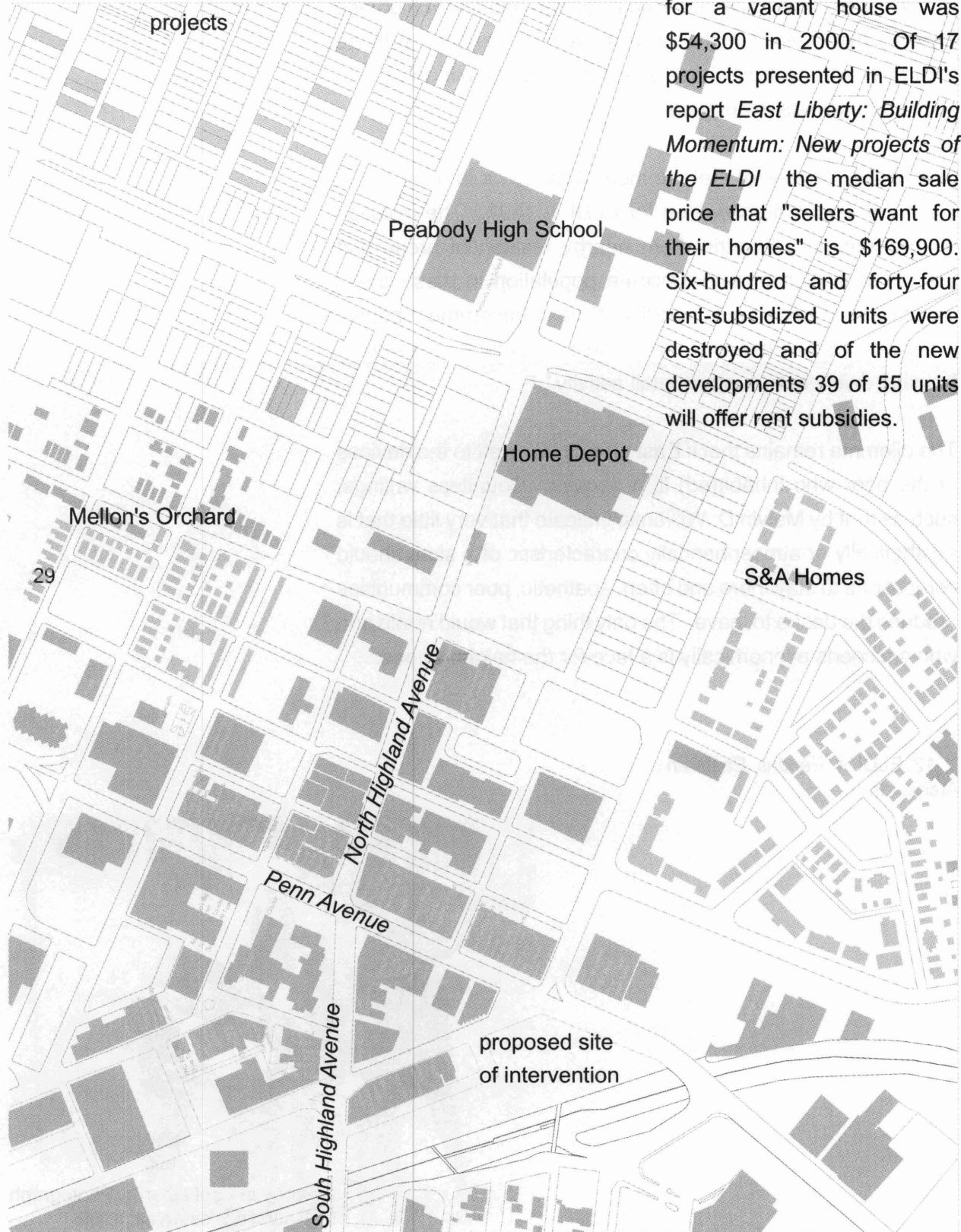
East Liberty's Home Depot on the periphery.

The residential projects will bring people closer to the commercial center, however, they are over three times more costly the median sale price for a vacant house in the 15206 zip code area in 2000.¹³



Whole Foods on the border of East Liberty and Shadyside.

Some of ELDI's
Individual Renovation
projects



¹³www.city-data.com:
according to the website,
the median sale price asked
for a vacant house was
\$54,300 in 2000. Of 17
projects presented in ELDI's
report *East Liberty: Building
Momentum: New projects of
the ELDI* the median sale
price that "sellers want for
their homes" is \$169,900.
Six-hundred and forty-four
rent-subsidized units were
destroyed and of the new
developments 39 of 55 units
will offer rent subsidies.

The up-front difference in cost between the new projects and the old properties in the area reveals that the availability of the new mixed-income housing units to the poor will be a fraction of the 644 units who displaced from when the apartment high rise towers have been completely destroyed. A minority of those who have moved from those apartment towers will be able to rent in the new developments.

The further demise of the commercial center is lamented in a vision for East Liberty written for ELDI in 1999: "The isolation of the commercial district from nearby residential areas and the concentration of a low-income population in these areas continue to undermine its viability. Cuts in government benefit programs will further limit disposable income of subsidized housing dwellers to support retail activity."¹⁴

The dilemma remains that if East Liberty were left to the devices of the poor who inhabit(ed) it, it decays. Countless writings, such as that by Melvin D. Williams, indicate that very little that is aesthetically or atmospherically characteristic of a slum should compel one to stay there and often, apathetic, poor communities produce the desire to leave. The only thing that would retain one who succeeds economically is a love for the neighborhood.

¹⁴ 12 ELDI + Perkins Eastman Architects



Children in East Liberty. Photograph by Nathalie Westervelt, 1999

Why slum-dwellers should stay in a slum by choice, after it is no longer economically necessary, has to do with the most personal content of their lives, in realms which planners and city designers can never directly reach and manipulate. The choice has much to do with the slum dwellers' personal attachments to other people, with the regard in which they believe they are held in the neighborhood, and with their sense of values as to what is of greater and what is of lesser importance in their lives.¹⁵

The paradox: if left alone, poor communities decay, but when developed with outside money and interests, the poor lose their homes and are further removed from their communities. This weakens the chance of the community to retain those citizens who have "raised themselves up by their bootstraps" and are now able to contribute to the development of the neighborhood.

East Liberty is struggling with its identity; considered a poor community that is crime ridden and poverty stricken, it is trying to assimilate into the middle and upper middle class residents to North and South. ELDI wants wealthier citizens to move into East Liberty and inspire its success. Another alternative, however, is to actively support the lower classes so that they become the middle classes. "Cities grow the middle class. But to keep it as it grows, to keep it as a stabilizing force in the form of a self-diversified population, means considering the city's people valuable and worth retaining, right where they are, before they become middle class."¹⁶

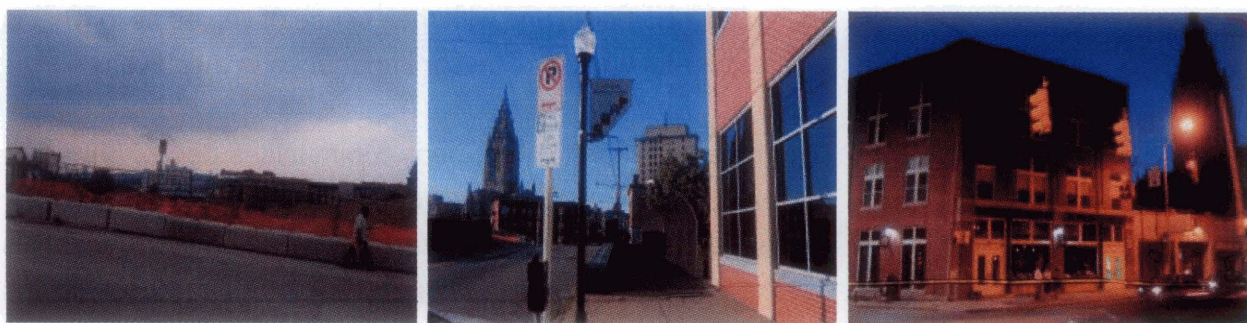
¹⁵ 134 Williams

¹⁶ ibid

ELDI faces the challenge that has been growing since the rise of the suburb; they are trying to re-market the East Liberty.

The most recent image campaign and goal for redevelopment is "East Liberty Town Square," By definition allowing East Liberty to continue to develop in a centralized plan even though it has been proven a folly.

In addition, the dilemma of economic sustainability versus community sustainability is present in both current and past systems for revitalizing urban areas. People who are in need of assistance, the communities who live in conditions that make it more difficult to survive, are displaced upon rebuilding of those areas.



South Highland Avenue leads into Shadyside, a predominantly rich area that is bleeding across the bridge in the form of a fine dining restaurant, yoga studio and decorators shops. In the center of the commercial district stands the East Liberty Presbyterian Church, a monument and mortuary for a Negley and a King.



A business adjacent to the proposed site. Photograph by Nathalie Westervelt, 2005

Rooted ness

According to Fullilove, to not allow a community to take root is to damage its identity for three generations. Jane Jacobs's description of her neighborhood exemplifies a healthy urban neighborhood. The ideal situation when neighborhoods protect children and when the streets have eyes, citizens feel safe to walk at night, resulting in a healthy urban fabric. Jacobs states that architects and planners cannot achieve this urbanity alone, that instead, it is the complex of human patterns that makes something a successful urban neighborhood.

East Liberty needs to include the poor community in her wealth and gain. This requires allowing the poor space for themselves within a network of amenities, attractions and places to congregate. In Williams's words to: "neither [equitably distribute natural resources nor accept the expressive lifestyles of slum dwellers] in a world destined for economic retrenchments is to further isolate them from this society."¹⁷

33

The retention of East Liberty's residents is further supported again, by Jane Jacobs who wrote: "un slumming hinges, paradoxically, on the retention of a very considerable art of a slum population within a slum."¹⁸ The presence of social security and humanitarian organizations is just as important if not more than, the Home Depot and the Whole Foods. It is argued, correctly, that social security institutions bring the value of land down. This, however, is an obstacle that could be surmounted by allowing social security organizations to improve their image with facilities designed to be attractive places; places of pride. East Liberty Development Incorporated wrote in their mission statement: "too many social services within a small area (both in and adjacent to 'East Liberty Town Square') create a negative perception."¹⁹ This is true, but as history has proven: perceptions change drastically in the wake of information, understanding and rebuilding.

¹⁷ 134 Williams

¹⁸ 282 Jacobs

¹⁹ 34 Semple Brown Architects and ELDI

It is ideal to establish a system to communicate with the masses of East Liberty's community about urban and architectural changes as well as the money that will fund that redevelopment. Projects supported by the government are rarely decided upon by the communities that receive them. The government has transferred the responsibility of this democratic communication to Community Development Organizations like ELDI who have taken the responsibility to combat urban decay from out of their hands. ELDI holds informational community meetings.

Distrust, however, fosters apathy and the community is scantily represented at these meetings. In addition, community stakeholders are by definition those who are economically invested in the area whether by land title or enterprise. Those who are on the fringe of society are not considered stakeholders for they hold no stake. Often the poor feel powerless in these discussions and without a voice, they are invariably displaced.

One of the three project towers in East Liberty remains. Upon the destruction of the housing towers, East Liberty has truly rid themselves of urban symbols of poverty and is now more open to the city. The story about the destruction of the second tower, East Mall, was told an article in *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* written on July 17, 2005. East Mall once sat over Penn Avenue and the byline for its existence was the title of the article by Diana Nelson Jones: "What urban planners vilified, people once called home."²⁰

Three-hundred families were relocated from the two towers that have been demolished. Jones interviewed Julia Foster, who lived in East Mall: "It was my first experience in apartment living and there area a number of positive things," she said. "There was day care downstairs... We had a tenant council that met with management to try to maintain a quality of life. We had a community room that people used. We had a mix of the community, young people waiting to buy homes, retirees, teenagers."²¹

²⁰ A-1 Jones

²¹ *ibid*

Photograph by Nathalie Westervelt, 2005



²² ibid

²³ 6 Williams

²⁴ A-1 Jones

East Mall, however, decayed in the '90s and Julia Foster moved out. According to Jones, the displaced who hope for new East Liberty homes live in a holding pattern: construction of housing begins next month and continues in phases through 2007.

In this article, Rob Stephany of ELDI reinforced the importance of home ownership. Jones quoted Stephany on this point, "If nobody owns anything there's no accountability. Private owners have motivation to make these places livable."²²

Althea Sims, who lived in East Mall believes something contrary to this statement. In her article, Jones wrote: [she] said that many people in East Mall made their units live-able. Pride obviously is possible under less than ideal conditions. There are those who can "pull themselves up from their bootstraps." These individuals gain strength through stable communities. Williams wrote the memorable line "there are many that are from the ghetto, but not of the ghetto."²³ And in the words of Althea Sims:

35

"One thing I want everyone to know is that not everyone that lived in East Mall were crack heads and welfare queen mothers... There were a lot of good people who led quiet lives."²⁴ Without money, however, the quality of being good is not rewarded by a stable home. The complication in an approach that ignores those on the fringe worsens urban and social problems.

Urban renewal, the creation of the Civic Center in Downtown Pittsburgh, elimination of land deemed blighted and subsequent displacement of communities living in economically subsidized housing seem to have been mistakes. The dynamism of East Liberty's boundary has, to a large extent, been caused by racial and economic boundaries: unseen, yet manifested in urban form. Of many, this is about one neighborhood in an American city that has been stigmatized by race and poverty.



36



Photographs of Penn Avenue,
East Liberty's Main Street
before and after the busway
was built. From *Pittsburgh,
Then and Now*

East Liberty Rising²⁵

Empty storefronts, abandoned churches, desolate gas stations and littered fields grace the commercial core of East Liberty. Penn Circle is a four lane, one way road that circumvents the business core and creates a disruption of traffic flow the East and West. Until recently, the aforementioned East Mall hovered over Penn Avenue like a tombstone at the end of a Main Street. Penn Avenue was reopened in the eighties to bus traffic, then, finally, to all traffic.



37

History has taught architects and urban planners to analyze the life patterns of the residents of an area and plan a cohesive intervention for the people of an area such that each project builds on one another and provides a system for resident retention and planning for the projects yet to come.

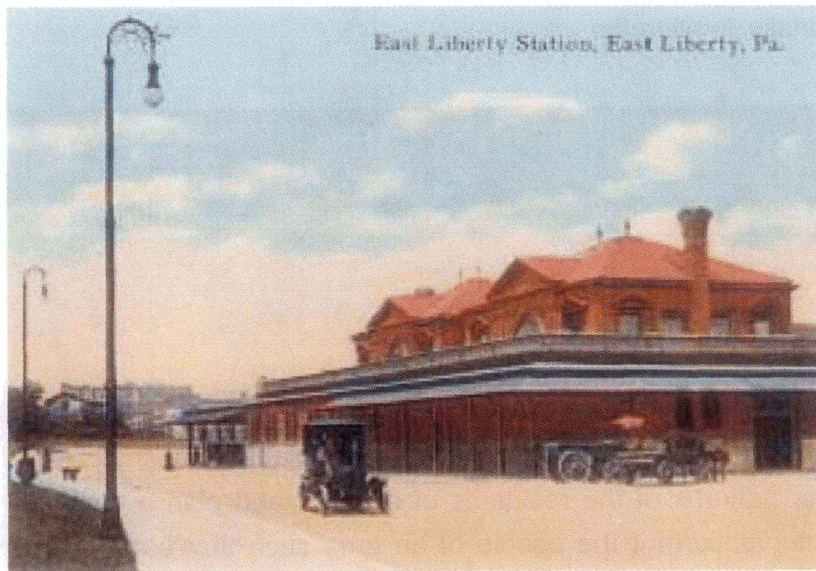
With isolation as the primary urban ill in East Liberty, the project first and foremost, on an urban scale will reclaim Main Street in through a patching of the urban fabric and reclaim the dream of prosperity that underlies the notion of America.

Instead a centralized plan, East Liberty would benefit by a plan that would further link East Liberty to the East End. "The problem with Pittsburgh," said Justin Strong, owner of East Liberty's Shadow Lounge, "is that there are too many neighborhoods. I prefer the term East End." Stitching together the borders and connecting resources between neighborhoods would allow for intertwined economic prosperity thus reinforcing Pittsburgh as a city. East Liberty needs to assess what piece of Pittsburgh it needs to be in order to be a healthy part of a successful economy.

The bus stop today.
Photograph by Nathalie
Westervelt, 2005

²⁵ In 1966, the URA wrote that like the phoenix, East Liberty would rise from the ashes.

James Van Trump, a deceased lifetime resident of East Liberty wrote: "It was the Pennsylvania railroad, chartered in 1846, that changed East Liberty from a small village on the eastern marches of Pittsburgh into an important section of the city."²⁶ And of the many buildings that were built during the prosperous times. "One of the most prominent was the East Liberty Train Station."²⁷ The station, once a landmark and a destination, fell into decay about a decade before it was demolished in 1963.



38

The bus stop is still called East Liberty Station, yet has no physical "station" attached to it. Two pedestrian bridges provide access to the sunken bus way and connect East Liberty to Shadyside. Another pedestrian Bridge has been planned. In a July 2005 article in *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* entitled "Walk this Way: Bridging the gap between Shadyside and East Liberty, it stated:

"The 14-foot-wide bridge, funded with \$1 million from the state Department of Transportation and aesthetically enhanced by a \$50,000 grant from Heinz Endowments, will physically mark a solidarity between two neighborhoods. The bridge will lead to the new \$29 million Eastside shopping center, which will feature Starbucks, Walgreens and a specialty wine and spirits store as well as other shops and offices."²⁸

Photograph from Internet.

²⁶ 251 Van Trump

²⁷ *ibid*

²⁸ July 8, 2005 Editorial in *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*

Therefore the wealthy across the bus way are connected to part of the periphery, further development along that edge could link the big box retail stores to the bus way and to the wealthy as well as the poor.

The express bus way facilitates a fifteen minute commute to downtown that on another bus line, could take twice or three times that amount of time.

This thesis proposes a new East Liberty Station that would link to the aforementioned developments via a path that meanders through a college dedicated to the education of the poorer residents of East Liberty. The school and the bus stop would part of the commuter's daily routine as much as the Starbucks, Whole Foods, or Social Security Office.

Flows of human traffic are encompassed by the project and where interior and exterior meet, public space emerges that facilitates these flows and encourages congregation. This provides new access and amenities for the poor as well as the rich. The flows of human traffic become the spectacle and the places for gathering lie in between this spectacle of daily life.

The new Walgreens and specialty liquor store.
Photograph by Nathalie Westervelt, 2005



Big Box Retail and the need for Civic Space

Pittsburgh's monumental civic center in the late fifties to the seventies has not been ultimately successful. It seems that the ambition to create monumental civic centers failed, and the project of civic center of recent times has shifted from the public realm to the private: Home Depot and Whole Foods are the new attractions and without money, there seems no where to congregate. As the experiment of the pedestrian mall failed, attitudes towards public space darkened and the form of East Liberty's commercial center has, over the years become more isolated. It is with the destruction of the housing tower that the flow between East Liberty and her neighbors has begun to be restored.

Six years ago, East Liberty had a bad reputation and it didn't seem that within five-years-time it would be on the path to gentrification. At ELDI board meetings, the main topic of discussion was about lighting parking lots so that church-goers would feel safe at night, and the purchase of the empty parking lots depending on whether or not the Parking Authority would sell. The teams of cars that used to park near the rail line had dwindled to a tenth of the capacity of those lots. Now, those who park there were not catching the rail line, but the bus to go to their workplaces. The Parking Authority often rented the lots to shuttle companies who deliver workers to their downtown jobs via the expressway. The result is a patchwork of building and lot that creates a discontinuity, lessens the opportunity of derive and creates an unsettling experience of walking in a place that seems made for automobiles.

40

ELDI's projects have made a positive impact on East Liberty, but none grapple with a lack of public space in the area. Paul Brecht, a member of the ELQCC, and a member of East Liberty's community for over twenty-five years does not desire the creation of public space, because, to him, public space means loitering space, and it is exactly that sort of congregating that scares neighbors.

Brecht's fear of loitering recalls the story of the MOVE organization and its impact on public space in Philadelphia. Under the teachings of one man, members of MOVE tried to reach purity through acting as close to the accordance of nature as possible. Their actions were extreme: including natural childbirth followed by the licking of the baby and eating the umbilical cord, outlawing soap and burying their feces.²⁹ It did not take long for the neighbors of members of the MOVE organization to complain.

Years of increasing trouble with police and neighbors in... [an] area of West Philadelphia ended in a gun battle in August 1978 in which one policeman was killed and nine MOVE members arrested and eventually sentenced to jail terms.³⁰

One of these members was journalist Mumia Abu Jamal who maintained support of MOVE in a letter written from prison in 1995. The rest of the group moved to a middle-class neighborhood on Osage Avenue in Cobbs Creek area of Philadelphia. In May of 1984, they began to protest their comrades' capture verbally with the aid of a loudspeaker often regardless of the time of day. Then, as when Parisians lifted cobblestones from the ground to create barricades and secure their neighborhoods, MOVE pulled up the ground and created a fortress buttressed with dung. Although the neighbors were upset, it took until the next spring for the city to react, try to evict the MOVE members and arrest the leaders. Unfortunately, that was not what happened, instead MOVE members held their ground. In dirty torn clothing twelve MOVE members and six children defended themselves against "10,000 rounds of ammunition, tear gas and explosives" but that "failed to break down the heavily fortified MOVE house."

At 5:27 pm the Police bomb unit dropped a bomb on the house and the ensuing fire was allowed to spread. When the full damage was assessed the next day, it was found that 11 had died in the MOVE house, of whom five were children, and 250 neighborhood residents were homeless. Only one MOVE member and one child had survived the inferno.³¹

²⁹ <http://religiousmovements.lib.virginia.edu/nrms/Move.html>

³⁰ <http://library.temple.edu/collections/urbana/psic-01.htm>,
URBAN ARCHIVES
Philadelphia Special
Investigation Commission,
"MOVE Commission"
Acc. 669 Records, 1978-
1986. 29 cubic feet. Part 1:
Background, Organization,
Series I - II

³¹ *ibid*

As a result of the incident, Philadelphia identified and planned removal of architectural elements that encouraged gathering (such as the stoop). And public space was rendered bare of human scale elements of comfort.

Without a catalyzing civic spirit and retaining residents, it seems that the big box retail stores could, in place of the high rise housing towers, become the next scapegoat for the blight thirty years hence. The repetition of rapid demolition and reconstruction make it seem as though old tactics remain unchanged.

The movement of the late sixties, to rebuild the entire core of East Liberty resulted in failure. It is to this end that development companies must rethink strategies that overhaul the urban fabric of a community and retain architecture that is sound. The reconstruction of East Liberty of the past has destroyed some of the character that made it an attraction in its heyday: with six theaters, mansions and bustling shops.

Although the area may be under development, subsidies given to large corporations like Home Depot (constructed where the Sears once stood) and Whole Foods encouraged companies to locate contrary to market research. This creates the possibility of failure due to an artificially created economy of new businesses and homes.

42

Many drive to East Liberty and commute from there due to its efficiency of travel towards downtown. The commercial core consists of churches, a few clothing retailers, restaurants, record and clothing shops, wig stores, beauty parlors and barbershops, many human assistance programs, a liquor store, a few bars, a library, a pizzeria, a dingy old diner where locals play the numbers,³ a renovated baroque theater, and a CVS. Amenities for the middle class, however, are few: Starbucks will be the first coffee shop. The stores reflect the income of the residents.

Recent additions to East Liberty, however, are geared towards middle and upper middle class Pittsburghers. Nonetheless, five years ago East Liberty was left to be the area for the unwanted

³²A Gambling tradition that has long existed in Pittsburgh

in Pittsburgh society: a ghetto, slum... "Social Security Row."

The census provides data that allows the mapping of the constituents of East Liberty. One finds that with the exception of the housing towers, few people actually live in the center of East Liberty. Those who do live near the Commercial Center also use the bus way as their primary means of transportation. An overlaid mapping of income levels reveal that the surrounding areas, although depressed, represent the type of mixed income community that ELDI desires.



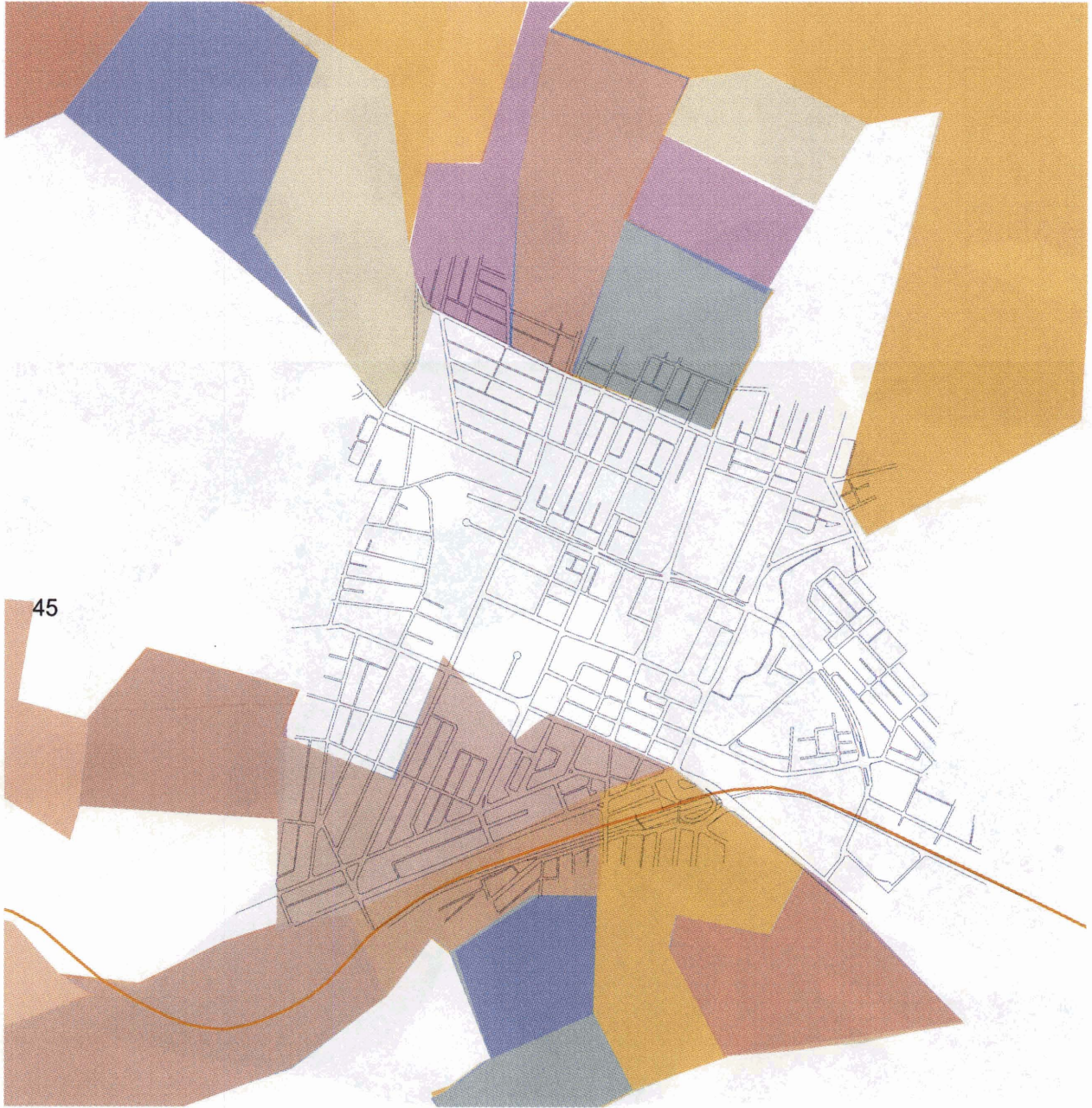
Beyond the development of residences, there must be amenities to support those who live there as well as something that would attract people for neighboring communities and strengthens the economic resolve of the community already present.

The architectural solution and program of the gateway to East Liberty must encompass all the things that she lacks and connect architecturally and socially two communities that have been divided for forty years. The census, an impartial set of data, reveals the realities of the community and allows a silent communities to be heard a chance to root the current resident. The census becomes the source of data that represents, as much as possible, the unconscious will of the residents in East Liberty.

We have seldom systematically examined, from an anthropological perspective (for example, long-term participant observation), the patterns of human behavior and concomitant that create slums, neglected shelters, and urban blight)...We need to investigate further the how and why of people's response or failure to respond, to housing and neighborhood rehabilitation and maintenance, and to consequently learn something about the nature of human beings living in urban blight. The project would be about people. It would seek ways and means of contributing to the welfare and well being of the people described.³³

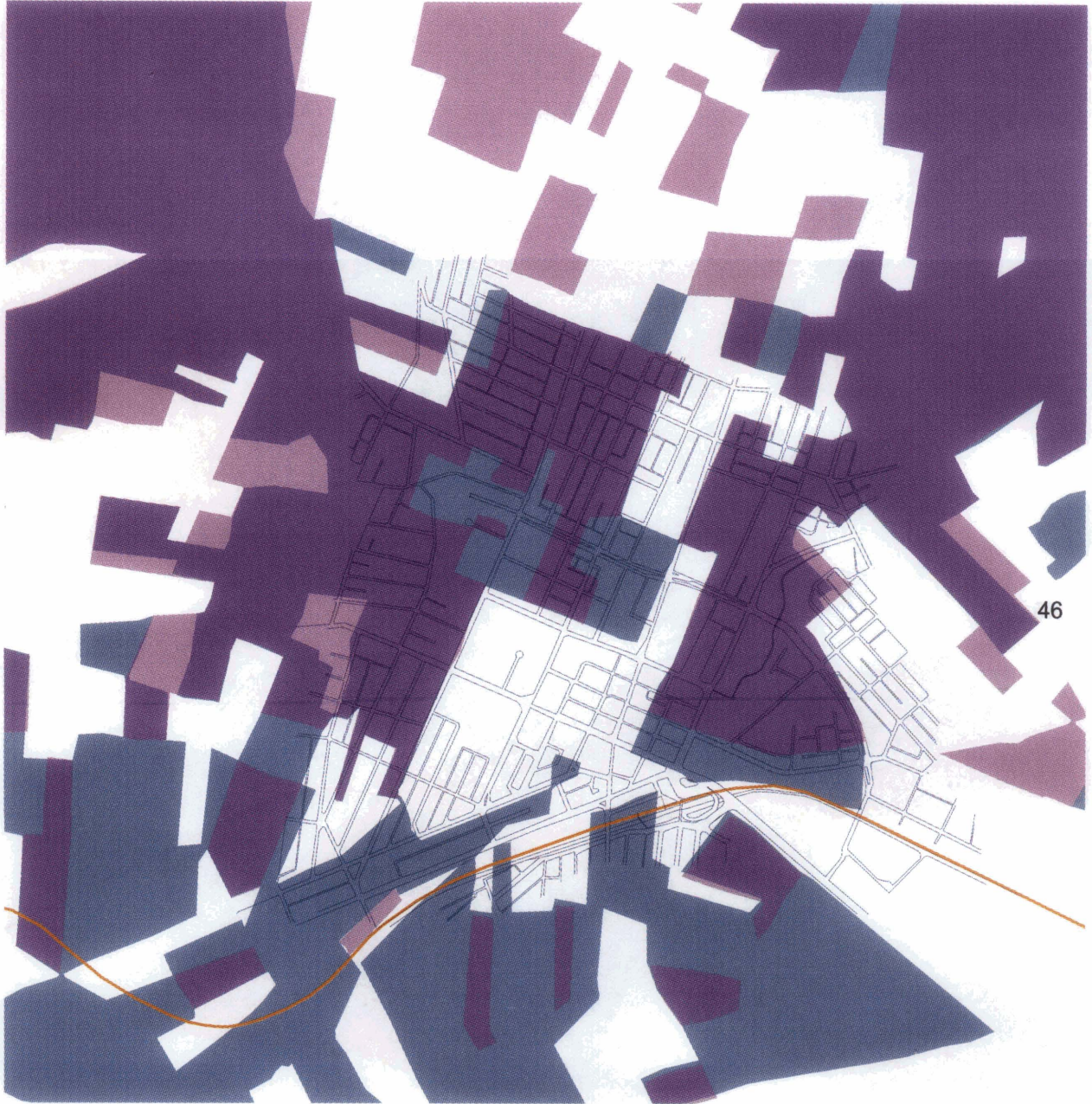
44

An intervention at the scale of the big box can provide public as well as private space: a space for loitering and learning. If East Liberty is to be redesigned, it should be redesigned as a self aware organism that knowing its functional role in the city of Pittsburgh which is pulling its resources to attract young people to come to and stay in Pittsburgh. The project therefore, is on the scale of the city; responds to the current proliferation of big box retail stores on the periphery of East Liberty's core by proposing a lateral monumentality.



45

High amount of population makes between 0 and 15 thousand dollars American* (pink), between 15 and 35 thousand dollars* (cyan), between 35 and 50 thousand dollars* (purple), between 50 and 75 thousand dollars* (orange), between 75 and 100 thousand dollars (in green).



High percent of people 0 to 18 years of age (in purple).
High percent of people 18 years old and above (in blue).



47

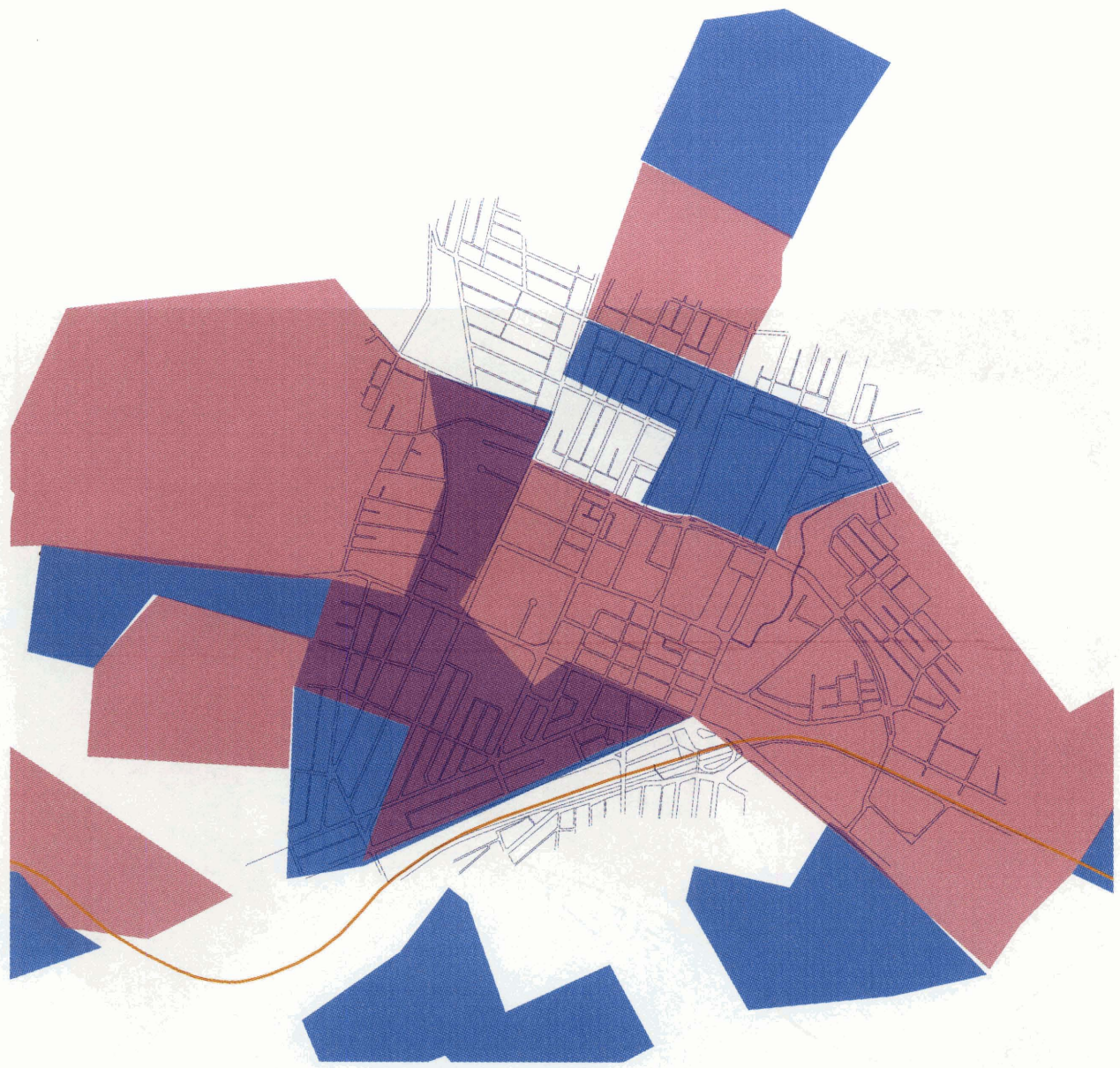
High percent of renter occupied housing (in peach).
High percent of annual housing expenditure (in blue).

Copyright © 2000 by the University of Chicago Press
All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America.

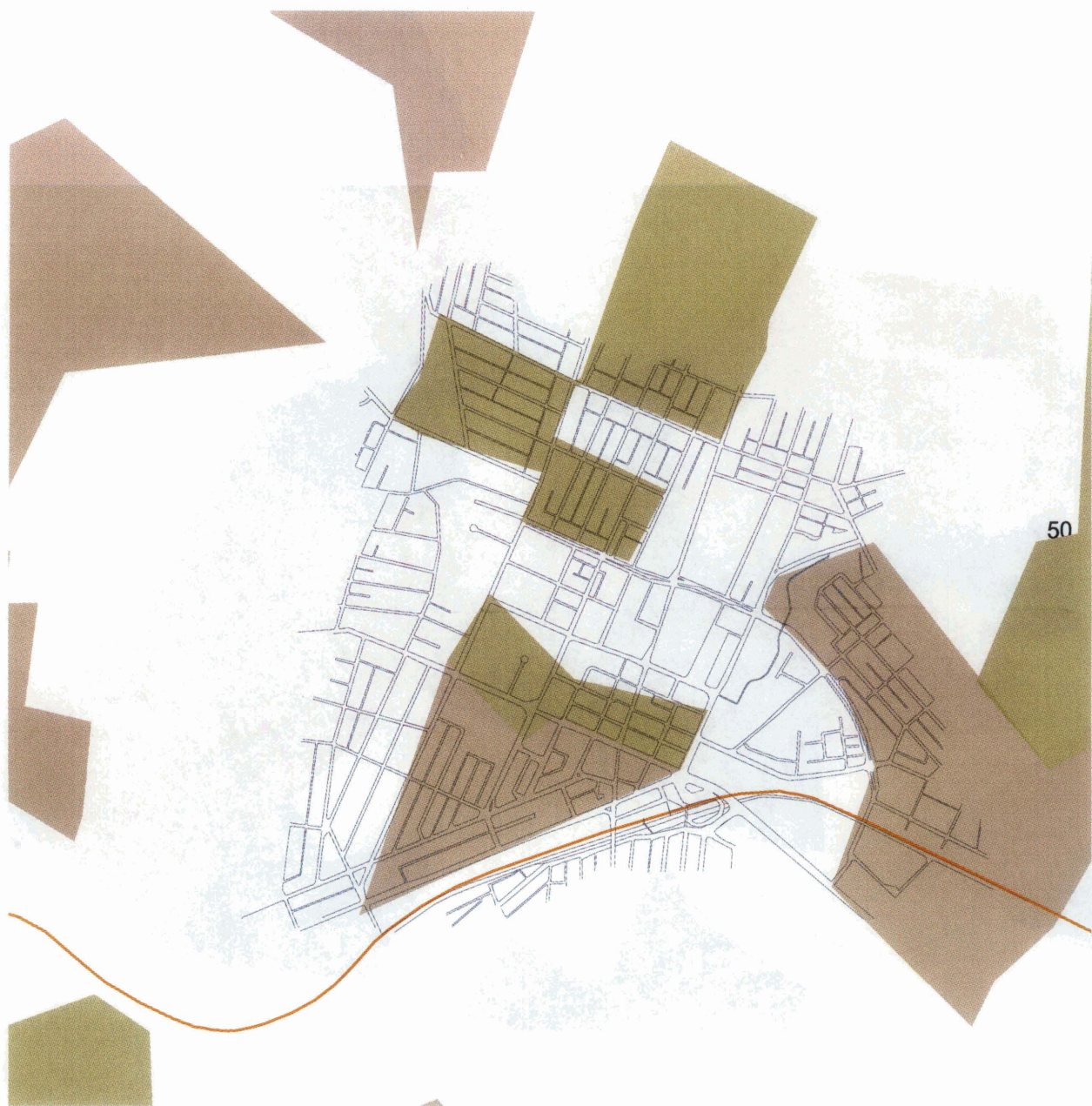


High percentages of Males (in beige)
High percentages of Females (in mauve).

High percentages of Males (in beige)
High percentages of Females (in mauve).



High percent of population uses the bus (in blue).
High percent of rental units(in purple).



High percentages of people are unemployed (in green).
High percentages of retirees (in warm gray).

(50)

Reclaiming Main Street

The scale of the initial intervention is large, and is seen as a catalyst for further intervention. This thesis proposes a move away from the concept of centrality proposed by the current master plan's 'East Liberty Town Square.' Instead of a "Town within a City," East Liberty should focus on reconnecting to the city and contribute to the vitality of the East End.

The Urban Periphery: proposing links between already existing centers instead of the creation of center itself.

The strong East West flows of traffic and commercial fabric indicate that removing the high rise tower that blocked the major thoroughfare, Penn Avenue was an essential step to re-link the East Liberty to the West. In addition, the proposed housing projects will bring more residences to the commercial core which according to the census had very few residents aside from those in the project towers.

51

High densities of persons fifteen to thirty years old, high unemployment rates, and high densities of the population that take public transportation culminated at a point across the street from the site. The bus stop on site will be redesigned into a bus hub and the Southeast tip of Penn circle, notorious for its aimless fabric of wide streets and parking lots will be repaired.

The bus stop shelter will pay homage to East Liberty Station by being a place of congregation and shelter. The plinth that supports the bus stop will bridge the bus way so that Shadyside is even further connected to East Liberty.

The shop spaces built surrounding to the bus stop are imagined to contain amenities that would be supported by the increase in traffic created by the Building Arts School that hovers above the bus stop and protrudes into the storefronts.

The project is a push towards monumentality for everyman. In response to the big box retail projects surrounding it, the school

does not use height, but linearity to establish its presence and import. In the shadow of the remaining high rise tower, it responds to those housing projects of the past with an educational project aimed at helping the same constituents that the apartment towers were supposed to aid.

In addition to providing Bachelors of Arts and Sciences degree programs, a degree from this university would be verified by a council of the trade unions and would subsidize years of required apprenticeship.

The school is not without precedent and universities have long built monuments to education. Campuses like Rhode Island School of Design and Ohio State actively integrate into their host cities. The universities become an urban connector and tangible community link to further education.

In this spirit, the Building Arts School is the first of a series of urban connectors. The soon-to-be closed public high school would be integrated as part of the program. Like Cranbrook, primary schools could become part of the system of magnet schools in Pittsburgh. The children who chose to go to this high school would be prepared for and use the facilities of the college because it is within walking distance of the college and across the street from the Home Depot.

52

Bunker Hill Community College, is an example of a university successfully operating on a transit stop. The bus stop is an untapped, yet essential link to the rest of Pittsburgh. Thus the entrance of the school and the bus stop would have a favorable effect on one another.

The school on axis with the old project housing tower proposed here to be student housing. In addition, Pittsburgh has latent building technology skills that could be further exploited (esp. bricklaying, ironwork and installation art). The proximity of the Pittsburgh Center for the Arts, Pittsburgh Filmmakers and Carnegie Mellon University, all within five miles of East Liberty, would further support the school because of its ability to become

a node in a network of Artisans. The school will hold collective knowledge of the building arts as represented by the collective of the trade unions.

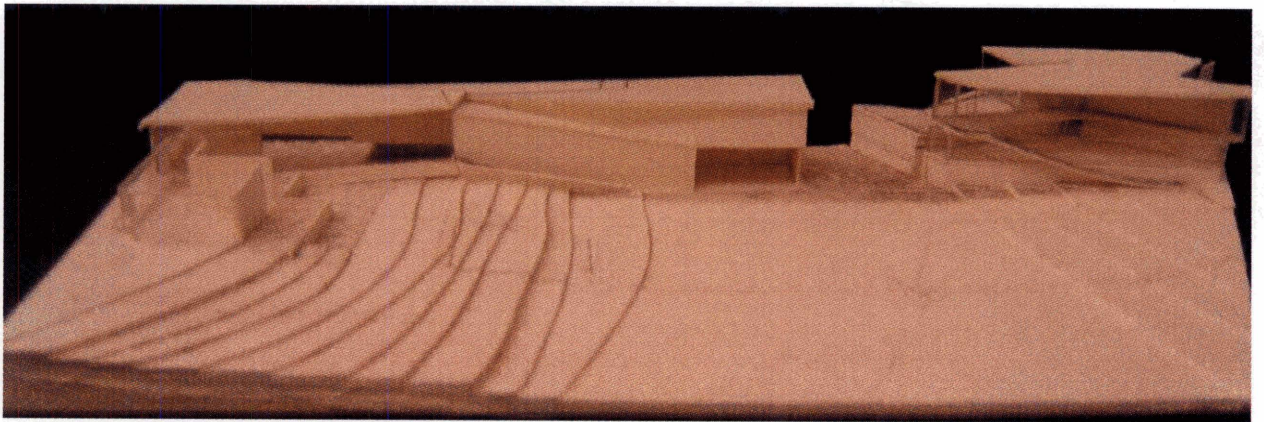
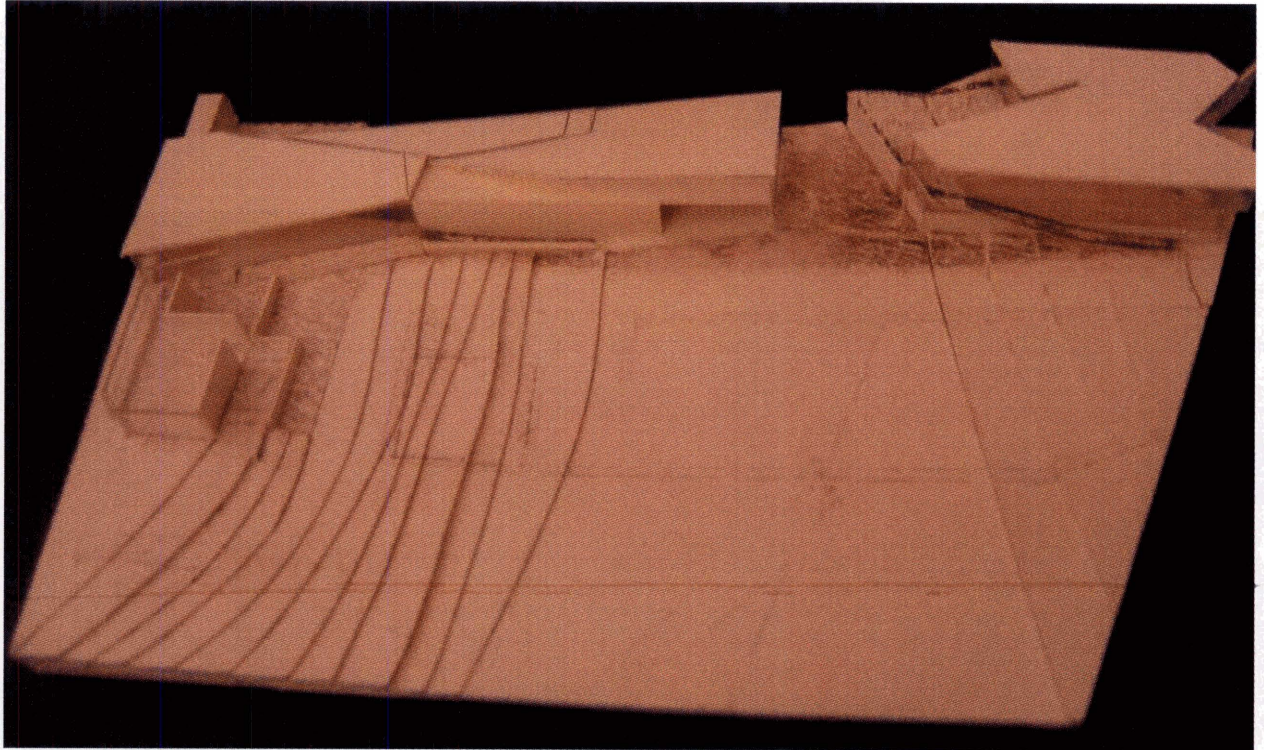
This would further formalize education in the trade unions; create opportunities for cross-specialization and innovation both technically and artistically. It may as well further standards while providing impetus for variances across the country. Finally as it pertains to East Liberty's need to pull herself out of economic instability and provide a root for the community. The school is a place where all adults may obtain a degree that would raise the economic and social status of him or her. It provides opportunities for its graduates as well as the journeyman.

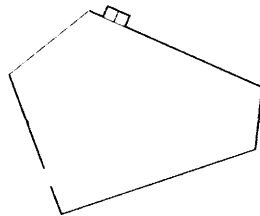
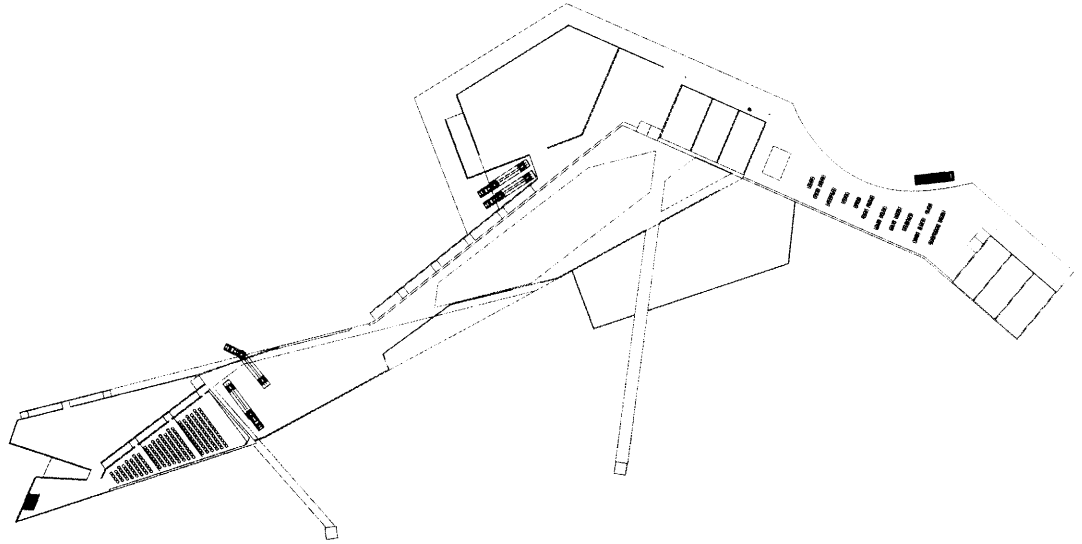
Pittsburgh's trade unions are scattered across the county. Housing all of the allied building trades would facilitate interaction. Further integration could allow for a powerful infusion of the allied trades and produce new art and technology. The different disciplines could share equipment and program. Liberty would be given to the students to explore the artistry of each field with innovation and an artistic spirit. The practical skills would benefit from an inclusion of intelligence to each others trades. **Drafting, drawing, sculpting, ironwork, sheet metal construction, carpentry and bricklaying** will be combined with the latest of digital fabrication and computer technology such that the school does not reside in nostalgia for the old, but takes the building arts to a new technical and artistic level of innovation. The classroom is thus a place of learning and a place of invention.

"In a knowledge-based economy, colleges and universities will be the factories of the 21st century. They are the primary source of "knowledge workers"- the smart, creative, and skilled people forming the foundation of successful companies. Given the increasing importance of colleges and universities to the fiscal health of the United States and to its future role in the global economy, it is time for academic institutions to consider ending their reliance on campus designs derived from medieval times [600 year dominance of the campus quadrangle in collegiate life needs to be reconsidered]."³⁴

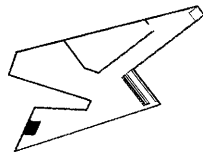
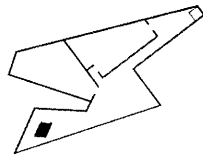


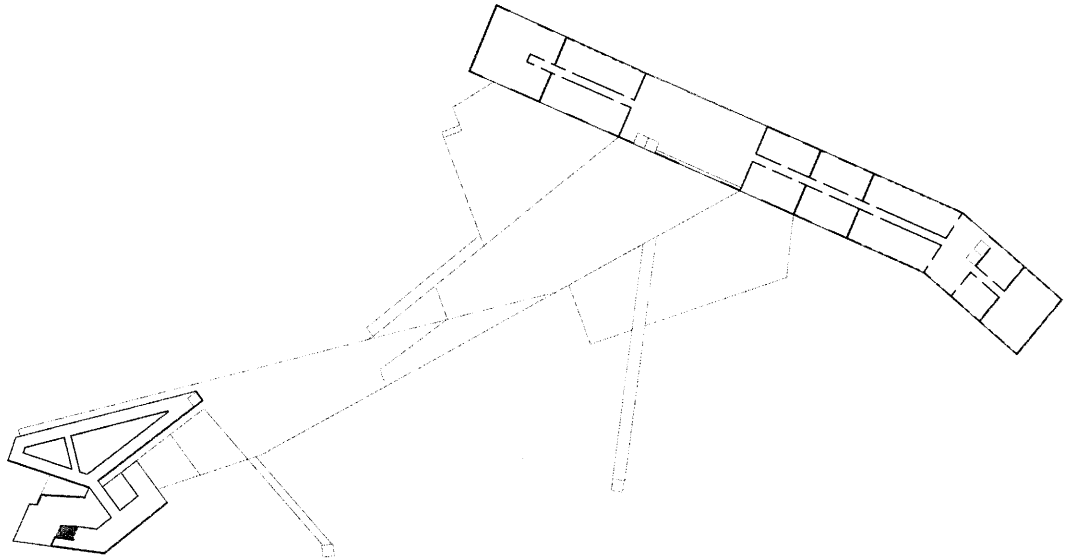
Designed to capture traffic and funnel it through a public space that meanders through the private campus, this Building Arts School is a neighborhood and economic connector.



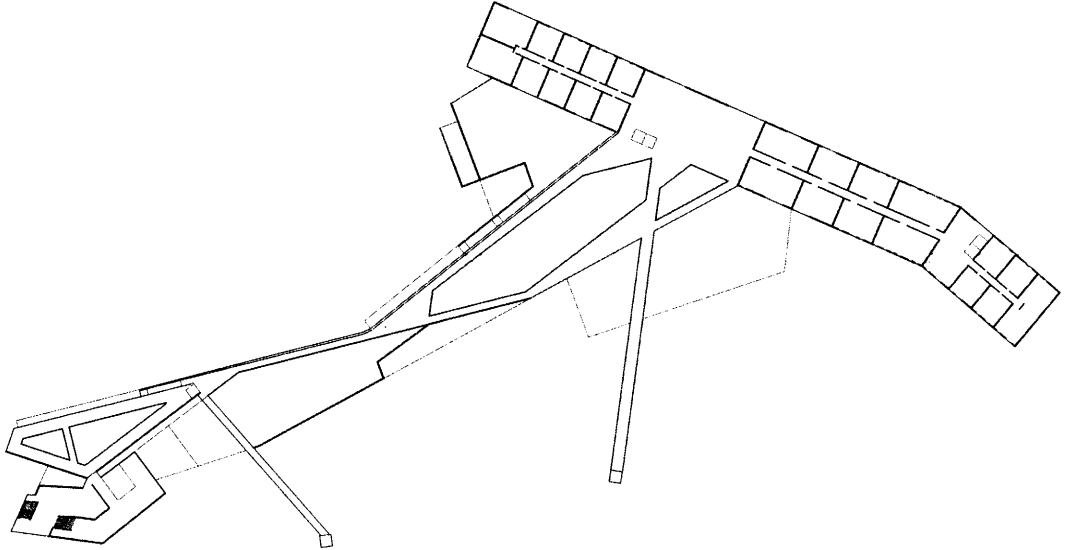


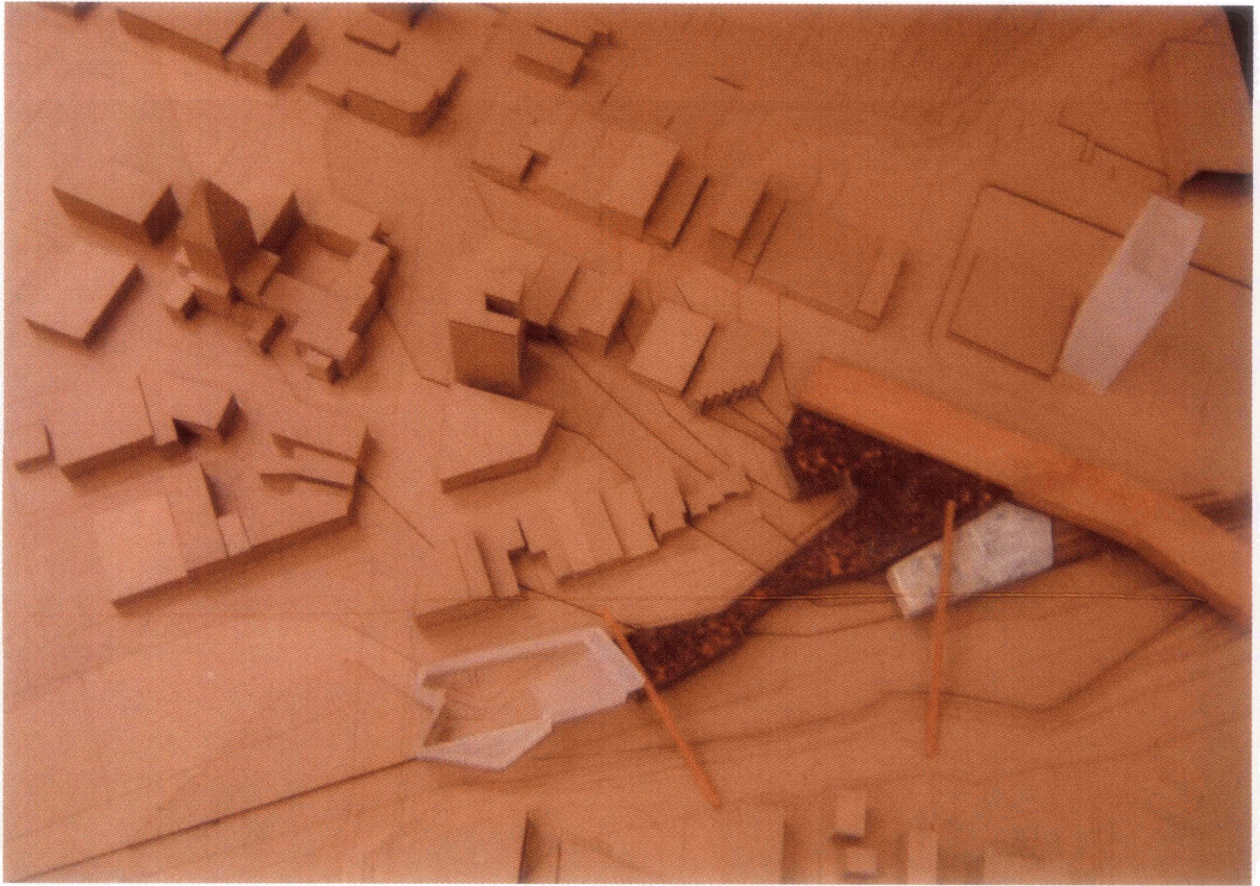
58

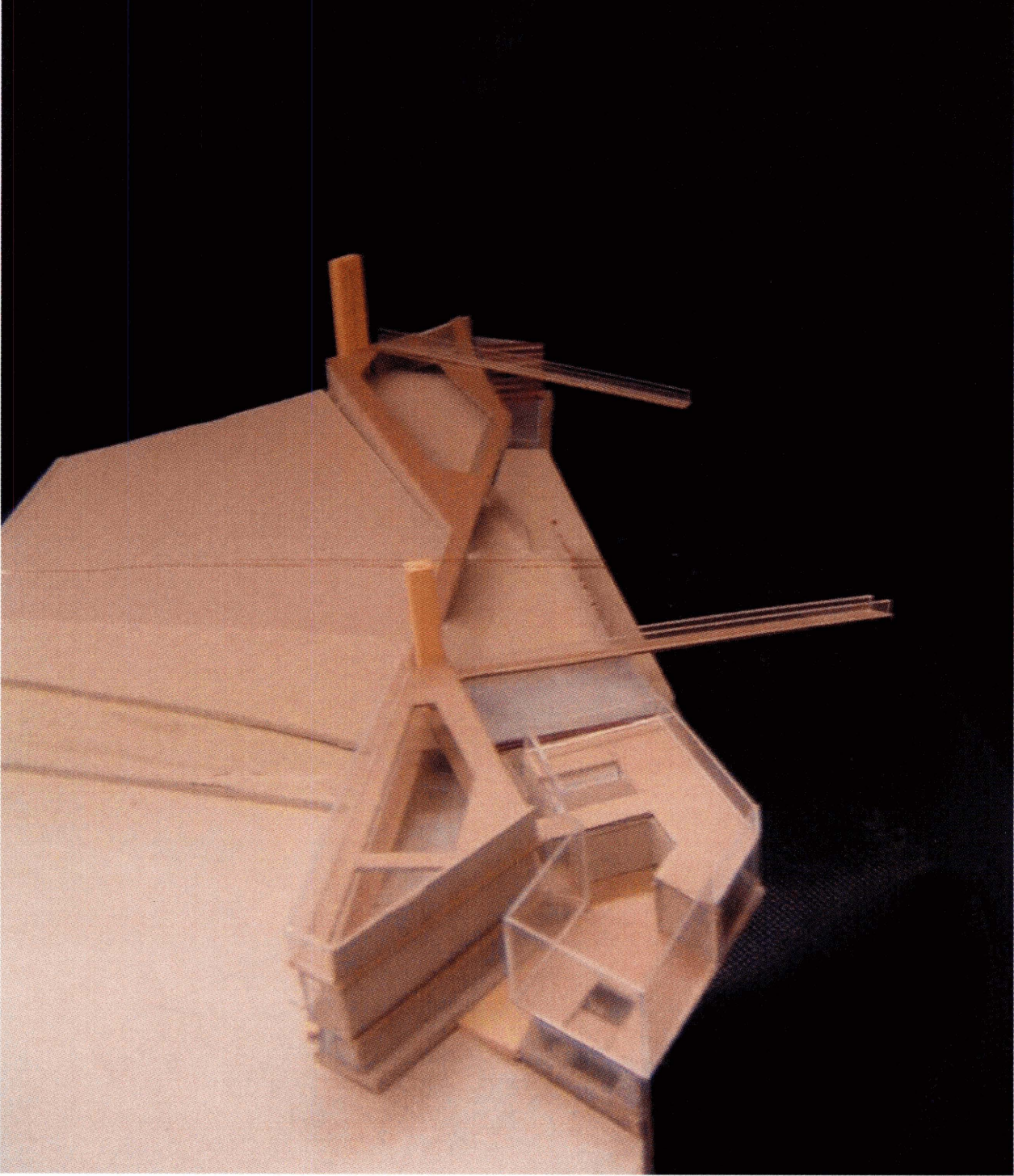


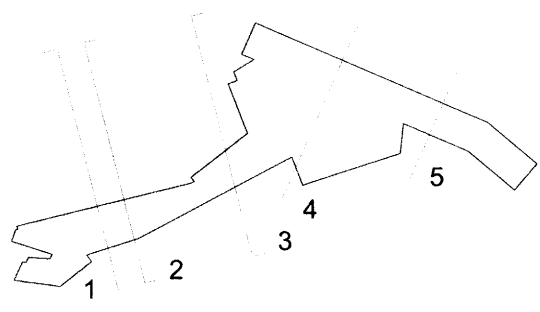


59

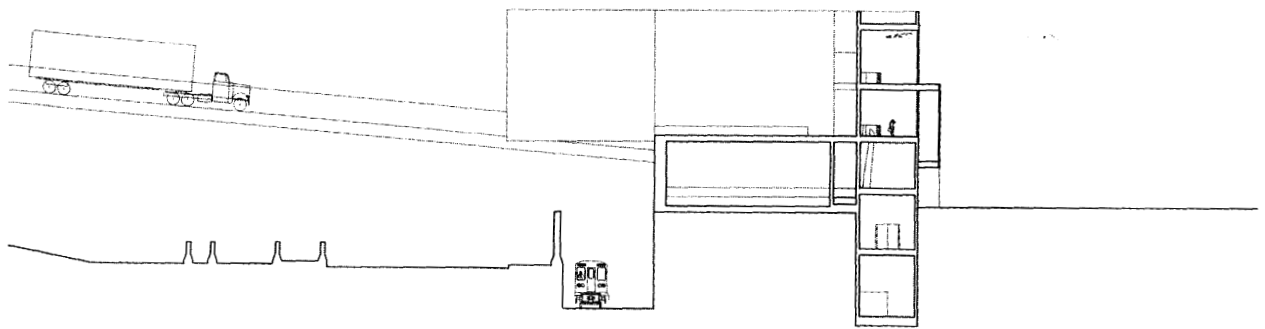


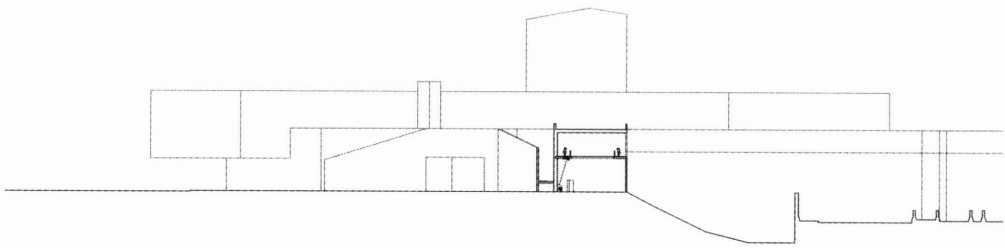




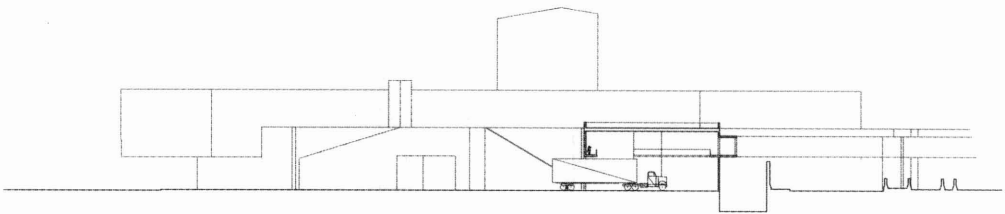


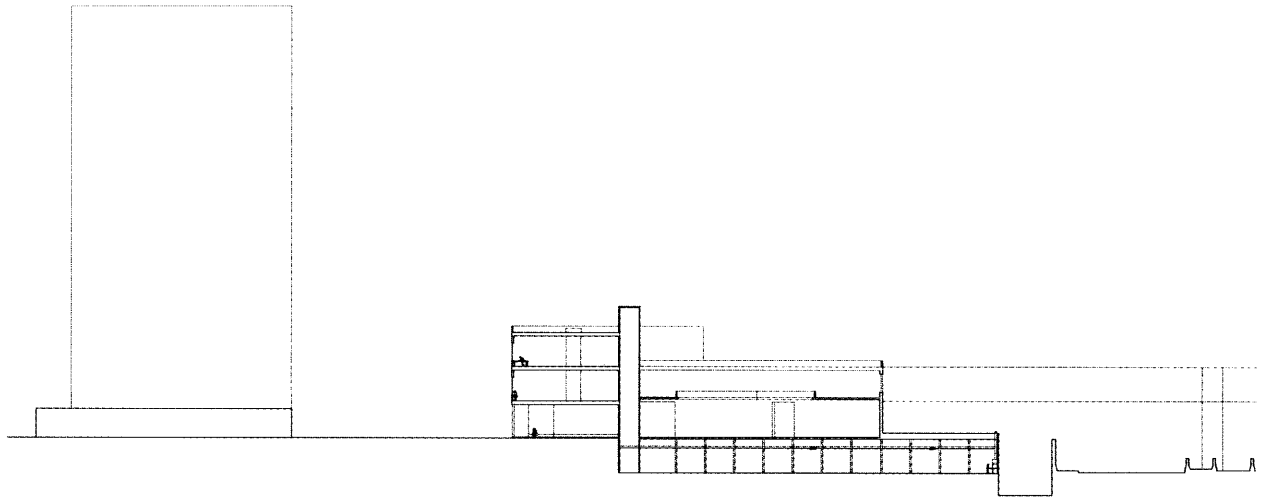
63



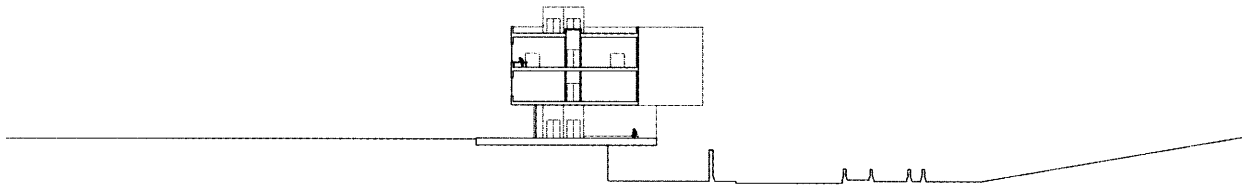


64





65



Works Cited

Bodnar, John, Simon, Roger, and Webre, Michael P., *Lives of Their Own: Blacks, Italians, and Poles in Pittsburgh, 1900-1960*, University of Illinois Press: Urbana, Chicago, London, 1982

Busch, Akiko, "A Good Neighbor by Design: Expanding its campus toward a revitalized downtown, Rhode Island School of Design reaches out to its home city." *Metropolis* February 2003, p. 88

Darden, Joe T., *Afro-Americans in Pittsburgh: The Residential Segregation of a People*, Lexington Books: Lexington, MA, 1973.

Edmunds, Arthur J. *Daybreakers: The Story of the Urban League of Pittsburgh, the First Sixty-Five Years*. Urban League of Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh, PA, 1983.

De Kherchove, Georges, & de Soos, Henri, *Human Rights in Urban Areas*, "The fourth world and human rights." UNESCO: Paris, 1983. pp. 40-81

Dixon, John Morris, ed. "Sculpture Studio, California College of Arts and Crafts: Oakland, CA: Jim Jennings Arkitekture" *Progressive Architecture* January 1991, p. 116-117

East Liberty Presbyterian Church, *The East Liberty Presbyterian Church*, Caxton Company: Cleveland, OH, 1935.

Ford, James *Slums and Housing: with special reference to New York City: History/Conditions/Policy* Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA, vol. I & II 1936.

Fullilove, Mindy Thompson, M.D. *Root Shock: How Tearing Up City Neighborhoods Hurts America, and What We Can Do About It*, New York: Ballantine Books, 2004.

Fulton Stuart Collins, John, Jr. *Stringtown on the Pike: Tales and History of East Liberty and the East Liberty Valley of Pennsylvania. its origin, early struggles and the people who shaped its destiny, past and present, together with related stories of old "Pittsburg" coincident with the settlement of "Stringtown."* Edwards Brothers, Inc: Ann Arbor, MI., (no year listed, approx 1966).

Glasco, Laurence A., *The WPA History of the Negro in Pittsburgh*, University of Pittsburgh Press: Pittsburgh, 2004.

Hart, Sara "Iron Studio" *Architectural Record* October 2002, p.137-139

Jacobs, Jane, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Vintage Books: New York, 1961, 1992.

Johnson, Lynn and Levinson, Joel B., *Pittsburgh Moments*, University of Pittsburgh Press: Pittsburgh, 1984.

Kidney, Walter C., *Landmark Architecture: Pittsburgh and Allegheny County*, Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation: Pittsburgh, 1985.

Klein, Philip, *A Social Study of Pittsburgh: Community Problems and Social Services of Allegheny County*, Columbia University Press: New York, 1938.

Lecuyer, Annette "Cranbrook Continuum" *Architectural Review* November 1997, p.79-81.

Lorant, Stefan, *Pittsburgh: The Story of an American City*, Doubleday & Co., Inc.: Garden City, New York, 1964.

Lubove, Roy, ed., *Pittsburgh, New Viewpoints*: New York, London, 1976.

Lubove, Roy, *Twentieth Century Pittsburgh: Government Business, and Environmental Change*, University of Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh, vol. 1 & 2, 1969.

Mallgrave, Harry Francis, *Modern Architectural Theory: A Historical Survey, 1673-1968*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Ross, John J., ed. *First Annual Yearbook; Pittsburgh Chapter; the American Institute of Architects, Pittsburgh Chapter of The American Institute of Architects*: Pittsburgh, 1970.

Schultz, Constance B., and Plattner, Steven W., ed., *Witness to the Fifties: The Pittsburgh Photographic Library, 1950-1953*, University of Pittsburgh Press: Pittsburgh, 1999.

Sennett, Richard, *The Conscience of the Eye: The Design and Social Life of Cities*, W.W. Norton & Company: New York, London, 1990.

Smirniotopoulos, Peter "Matriculation Reloaded: University Town Centers can Fuel Local Economies" *Urban Land* October 2003 p. 90-98

Smith, Arthur G., *Pittsburgh: Then and Now*, University of Pittsburgh Press: Pittsburgh, 1990.

Stryker, Roy, *A Pittsburgh Album*, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette: Pittsburgh, 1958.

Toker, Franklin, *Pittsburgh, An Urban Portrait*, The Pennsylvania State University, 1986.

Williams, Melvin D. *On the Street Where I Lived*, Holt, Reinhart and Winston: New York:, 1981.

Van Trump, James D., *Life and Architecture in Pittsburgh*, Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation: Pittsburgh, 1985.