Detroit Shows How to Rebuild a City

By Bob Liston

The following article appeared recently in the "Baltimore News-Post" and we recommend it to your thoughtful reading. It is a fantastic program, particularly when you realize that it is actually being executed. It takes big ideas to conceive and execute such a schedule. It will take big ideas to get Baltimore's $900,000,000 Urban Renewal Program started. Here's hoping we can join Detroit, Dallas, and other cities in answering Lord Winster. It is too bad this is not the reply to Lord Winster's remarks printed in the last issue.

Mr. Blessing, who is interviewed, will be one of the many distinguished panelists at the Middle Atlantic State Regional Conference next month.

Detroit, in its efforts to make a "dream city", has invested $700,000,000 in civic improvements since 1950 and has seen private investors pour in an almost equal amount. The resultant fever of construction with slums giving way to office buildings, housing projects and arenas seating 55,000 is the handwork of Charles A. Blessing, the Motor City's director of planning.

In an exclusive interview, Blessing told what Detroit plans to do and how it is doing it. The most important ingredient in rebuilding a city, he said, is the master plan. "When there is a master plan for a city, it builds confidence." Knowing what is to be done, where and when generates confidence and understanding as to timing and location of all future developments. It encourages investors to come in. "Equally important, I think, is the philosophy of a city which accepts the principal of orderly growth under a plan adopted, adhered to and accepted as a guide."

Detroit adopted its master plan in 1950, after a decade of development. It is under constant revision, Blessing said, but never has the mayor or city council departed from it on a wild scheme. The master plan maps are hung on the wall in the budget director's office. They are the guide which the city uses in its growth. I think the best indication of the success of the plan is the fact that $700,000,000 worth of public improvements have been made under it. Included are highways, parks, libraries, health centers, hospital additions, police and fire stations, public lighting, major thoroughfare improvements and, most of all the $10,000,000, 75 acre Detroit civic center".

This civic center, located on the Detroit River, includes a $30,000,000 city-county office building, a Ford Auditorium costing $5,000,000; a $3,000,000 veterans building; and now under construction a $50,000,000 convention-exhibit hall. It will be the largest in the world.

Detroit spent $14,000,000 alone for land for the center in the heart of the city. The Ford Auditorium was a gift of the Ford family, to which sizable public funds were added to build a "Carnegie Hall of Detroit". The huge convention hall, capable of seating 55,000 people when completed, includes $11,000,000 of private capital raised during Detroit's 250th anniversary celebration in 1952. In addition, land is reserved for a Federal building and a State office structure. They will become part of the civic center complex.

The pump priming by the city has seen private investors join in. Blessing commented, "Mayor Cobo, who died earlier this year, said he hoped to see private investments total $500,000,000 before he died. He may have made it." The list of private investments built or planned is imposing: A National Bank Building, 15 stories high and costing $16,000,000; a Detroit Bank & Trust Company Building, 10 stories high erected at a cost of $12,000,000; a Hilton Hotel; a $5,000,000 Greyhound Bus Terminal; a Federal Post Office building; a 100-acre, $30,000,000 private housing project. Other projects leading to Detroit's "dream city" are a 3,800 unit Federal low-cost public housing development and a 73-acre "model" light industry and wholesaling district to be built with $25,000,000 of private money. There is a medical center district of 120 acres. Four hospitals have raised $13,000,000 already. A plan for the rest is now before the Federal government.

Much of this private investment is under an urban renewal set-up. Baltimore got started on its urban renewal projects in 1956. Detroit started planning in 1947 and was ready when the first urban renewal
design, it is now. Our times have produced far-

... architect's work must be charged with something 

current, structural, and economic 

... rings true; however, all too often beauty is missing, 

... failure to achieve architectural delight stems from 

... limited sources. In many instances it is due to the 

... beyond maximum function and use, or the result will 

... economic pressures and deadlines, while 

... not to be condoned, play their part in our meager 

... care not or dares 

... not look beyond his immediate isolated effort. 

... A companion piece to Lord Winster's article 

... Architectural ugliness will continue to engulf the few 

... the architectural society of the University of Manitoba: 

... An architect's work must be charged with something 

... beyond maximum function and use, or the result will 

... the visual delight one receives from sensitive and 

... the enrichment of form 

... and detail, and the play of color and texture. This 

... achieved architectural delight stems from 

... failure to achieve architectural delight stems from 

... numerous sources. In many instances it is due to the 

... and defeatism, economic pressures and deadlines, while 

... not to be condoned, play their part in our meager 

... If ever there was a need for careful and thoughtful 

... it now. Our times have produced far-

... reaching advantages in science and technology as 

... well as highly significant social and political change. 

... as an age of mass production standardization, 

... and rapid economic growth. It is a period of highly 

... increased personal and group prosperity, yet all the 

... while something is lacking. 

... the unknown and 

... reaching advantages in science and technology as 

... and to perfect scientific and industrial know-how, a world 

... world of unprecedented ugliness has grown up around us. 

... All about us we see the sickening consequences of 

... an angry environment full of discord and chaos con-

... Glaring lights, blaring noise, dust and dirt, dis-

... lack of order and design, all assault our sensitivities 

... and pollute the city and countryside alike—an en-

... environment seemingly dedicated to the mobile juke-

... of Ranchburger delight. Much of this is the prod-

... or by-product of the machine, and there can be 

... great advantages and potentialities 

... supplied by technology, but certainly the fault does 

... not lie with the machine. Our environment and the 

... products about us are of our own doing; it is for us 

... to decide whether the machine is leader or servant. 

... It is for us to build for pleasure and a full life rather 

... than strangulation and slow death. 

... The know-how and the means have resulted in 

... contemporary architecture, often fine, and occa-

... sionally exciting architecture. Today's building often 

... reaches unprecedented heights in its solution of prob-

... lems of shelter. The physical limitations and restric-

... tions imposed by bygone period design have been 

... all but rejected. Public and private buildings alike, 

... large and small, have in many instances reached 

... levels of accomplishment that honestly rate the 

... designation, contemporary architecture. 

... Yet it is difficult to reconcile the top-flight indi-

... vidual architectural accomplishment with the un-

... believably low level of over-all environmental per-

... formance. For every bit of excellence there are 

... countless examples of ugliness. The angry sea of un-

... design has all too often practically engulfed these 

... examples because the architect cares not or dares 

... not look beyond his immediate isolated effort. 

... The planning of the Regional Conference of the 

... A.I.A. has been so successful that it has blossomed 

... into an event of National importance. The panelists, 

... listed below, whether from California, Chicago, our 

... immediate region, or Baltimore proper, are of na-

... tional stature in their respective fields:—

... Victor Gruen, California Architect and designer of the nationally known 

... Fort Worth City Plan

... Carl Fejes, Washington, D. C., City Planner and Urban Renewal Consultant

... Edmund N. Bacon, Executive Director, Philadelphia Planning Commission

... James W. Rouse, Jr., Mortgage Banker & Developer, Baltimore

... Harry Weese, Architect, Active in Urban Redevelopment in Chicago

... David A. Wallace, Architect, Director of Planning Council, Greater Balti-

... more Committee

... Charles Blessing, Architect, Executive Director, Detroit City Planning Com-

... mission

... Jefferson B. Fordham, Dean—Law School, University of Pennsylvania

... David M. Feiss, Washington, D. C, City Planner and Urban Renewal Consultant

... Feiss, Washington, D. C, City Planner and Urban Renewal Consultant

... James B. Feiss, Washington, D. C, City Planner and Urban Renewal Consultant

... Herbert S. Feiss, Washington, D. C, City Planner and Urban Renewal Consultant

... Herbert S. Greenwald, Developer, Chicago

... Topping this impressive list of speakers is Senator 

... John Sparkman of Alabama, Chairman of the 

... Senate Committee on Urban Renewal, will deliver 

... the principal address at the banquet on Friday night. 

... The formal program starts at 11:30 a.m. Friday, 

... April 18 with the opening of the Raw Bar at the 

... Belvedere Hotel and goes through luncheon at 12:30 

... on Saturday. This is a major event that will change
the direction of Architecture in Baltimore. Don't miss it!  

Judging from the applications for space, the manufacturers are recognizing this conference as an important place to show their products. An interesting and diversified exhibition of building materials seems assured.

The Architects of the Chapter are reminded that, among other things, this conference will take the place of the Annual Architectural Exhibition at the Baltimore Museum of Art. All architects who wish to exhibit are urged to get in touch with Robert Fryer at the office of Smith & Veale. The subject must have some relation to Urban Renewal and City Planning.

**Director of Planning**

Philip Darling has been appointed to succeed the late Arthur D. McVoy as Director of the Department of Planning of the City of Baltimore, according to an announcement from the Mayor's office.

Mr. Darling moves over to this very important position from the Baltimore Urban Renewal and Housing Agency where he has been serving as Assistant Director to Oliver C. Winston for the last ten years in charge of planning and development. He prepared for a career in City Planning by obtaining his bachelor's degree in civil engineering from Yale and a Master's degree in City Planning from M.I.T. He has held planning positions with the United States Housing Authority, National Housing Agency, and the Federal Public Housing Authority.

A native of Pleasantville, New York, he moved to Baltimore and has been responsible for a great deal of the fine work that has been accomplished by the local housing authority and its successor, the Baltimore Urban Renewal and Housing Agency.

Our congratulations go to Mr. Darling and we join Mayor D'Alesandro in pledging "fullest cooperation" to him.

At the same time the Mayor accepted the resignation of Lucius R. White, Jr., FAIA, and Mr. W. Watters Pagon and praised them for long and faithful service. In their places he appointed Mrs. Duane L. Peterson, former President of the Women's Civic League, and Alexander S. Cochran, AIA. Alec seems to have long ago devised a sure-fire formula for success by collecting degrees from Harvard, Yale, and Princeton.

**Chapter News**

At the March meeting of the Chapter we had the privilege of hearing our fellow member and architect, David Wallace, Director of the Planning Council of the Greater Baltimore Committee, give a very provocative exposition of his views of the Architect's position in the last half of the 20th Century. In fact, it was a pointed plea for us to examine ourselves closely. In his opinion we have the choice of becoming a trade that concerns itself with the petty problems of the individual building, their details and materials, or of taking our position in society as Architects, in the biggest sense—knowledgeable of building design and also well informed on the economic, traffic and social problems of the city and ready to be leaders in the building and rebuilding of cities as were the architects of the Renaissance.

Mr. Wallace pleased his older listeners and startled the younger ones when he held up the much maligned "Ecole des Beaux Arts" and its planning in the grand manner as one of few schools training men to think in the large terms required for the practice of Architecture today. It was challenging indeed to hear such a stimulating talk from one who is so successful at practising what he preaches, and Baltimore is most fortunate in having Dave Wallace to guide its planning.

Our Public Relations Chairman, Mr. Silcox, has announced that the Baltimore Chapter, AIA, has reserved a space at the **ABC Construction Fair** on May 24 and 25 at the Baltimore Raceway.

The American Institute of Electrical Engineers will hold a panel discussion on **Electrical Systems in Modern Schools** in the auditorium of the new Edmondson High School at 8:00 p.m. on March 26th. The panelists will be Mr. William E. Lehr, Assistant Superintendent, School Facilities, Baltimore City and Messrs. Robert McNeill, Don Banke, and Albert Gipe, electrical engineers. Architects interested in school work should find this evening beneficial.

The Senate is at present considering the proposed alterations to the facade of the **United States Capitol Building** and we understand that there is a good chance that they can be blocked. You are urged to write to your Senators and encourage them to do everything they can to prevent tampering with the design of this great and symbolic building.

**G. Kidder Smith**, distinguished Architectural critic and photographer, will give an illustrated lecture on the New Churches of Europe at the Peale Museum at 8:30 P.M., April 10th. You won't find more exciting photographs.
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