LAS VEGAS CHAPTER A.I.A. - 1969

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LAS VEGAS CHAPTER A.I.A. - 1969

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The building of cities is one of man's greatest achievements. The form of his city is the indicator of the state of his civilization. Out of the complex forces and interactions of human beings living together in a society, the city is born—and lives—and sometimes dies.

The city is the mirror of its civilization. But thinking men, creative men, realize that it is not enough for a city simply to reflect life as it is. At its best, the city itself contributes to, and determines the quality of life of its citizens to a large degree.

This study is the product of a group of concerned men who have sat down together to critically analyze their city. The concerned men are practicing architects, members of the Las Vegas Chapter of the American Institute of Architects. The city is Las Vegas.

This study is the first phase of a program in which the Las Vegas Architects intend ultimately to create a proposed master guidance plan for downtown Las Vegas. Their purpose is to demonstrate their concern and willingness to serve their community in the way they know best. To these men, it is far more than a public relations gesture; it is a desperately serious business. These men know that the future consequences of decisions about to be made in local planning
may well be staggering in scope.

It all started with discussions by the mayor and city commissioners about a new city hall. Immediately the question of location arose. Previous studies by outside consultants such as the Ebasco Report and the Stewart-Eisner report made various recommendations, but it seemed the decision was to be made anew and without independent professional advice. At this point, the president of the Las Vegas Chapter of the AIA, in a publicized statement, opened the eyes of many citizens to the far-reaching effects of this matter. It became obvious that when projected five, ten, or fifteen years into the future, these decisions could influence directly the expenditure of hundreds of millions of dollars in downtown Las Vegas. This was no time for thinking small.

The reception by the mayor and civic groups throughout the city of the offer from the Chapter to assist was gratifying. The architects were then committed to act. This report reflects the collective and individual thinking of Chapter members whose professional lives are closely interwoven with the very fabric of the city of Las Vegas.

The technique of the report is to use, as a guide for discussion, the outline of questions created by the American Institute of Architects during its "War On
Ugliness" campaign. This outline causes us to question qualities—or lack thereof—in our own city. What about the circulation skeleton? The streetscape? Groupings by usage? Centers of activity? Public facilities? Historic features? Visual features? What about the whole form of the city? These and other questions are answered here in a critical analysis. The form is that of a group discussion.

The reader might not agree with all that is said in this report. In fact, one might observe occasional contradictory views within the report. This is because it represents the comments of not one but numerous individuals whose views the writer felt should all be expressed because every opinion has some validity and out of such dialogue comes progress. The lack of disagreement is often the sign of disinterest—the most fatal effect on the form of a city.

The actual writing was done by George Tate, AIA., and much assistance in typing and printing given by the planning staff of the City of Las Vegas.
A - The Circulation System as a Whole.

1. Is it balanced to provide for all modes of transportation?
   - Auto
   - Transit
     - Bus
     - Other
   - Truck
   - Pedestrian

What was a balance of the various modes of transportation 10 or 15 years ago does not apply today—in Las Vegas or almost any other American city. The trend everywhere has been to accommodate the automobile at the expense of the pedestrian. Like the law of supply and demand, this has come about apparently because of the will of the people to make automobile travel more and more convenient and therefore it may be justifiable. But eventually a point of no return may be reached as it has now in some of our large cities where it becomes necessary to halt, or by some force partially reverse this trend simply because of the ultimate limit of cars, trucks, buildings, and people to occupy the same space. We should give serious thought to providing for and encouraging modes of transportation in the future other than just automobiles.

Las Vegas, as a typical sprawling, growing desert community calls for the convenience of private transportation between any two points in the city. This almost means a 120 square foot conveyance when parked for each and every person old enough to drive a car. If a building houses 150 working people in perhaps 10,000 square feet, there must be approximately 45,000 square feet of
parking space next to the building for each person to have ready access to his private means of transportation. When all these people leave the building to go home, 150 cars pour out into the circulation skeleton and probably no two are headed to exactly the same place.

The automobile is here to stay. But as population becomes more and more dense, a private car may become less and less convenient. The time is not yet such that mass transit would be well received in Las Vegas. In fact, keeping the city bus system operating in the black is a problem now—and getting worse. However, it is not too early to prepare for future transportation systems where people will leave their cars either at home or at an outer perimeter and switch to some form of mass transit within densely populated areas. The next logical step is to connect these populated centers with high speed expressways or other mass transit modes. Because of high ground valuations and acquisition costs, monorail or other overhead conveyances should be considered.

2. Is it articulated to express differing kinds of traffic?
   Through Traffic (expressways, boulevards)
   Local Traffic
   Transit Traffic
   Truck Service

Presently, there are not enough articulated expressways to get from one central area to another, but the city and county planning staffs have obviously been working on this and great progress has been made. Unfortunately, their efforts cannot keep pace with the growth of the city. It is still very awkward to get from Paradise
Valley to Rainbow, or from downtown to Highland for example. Obviously the completion of the freeway system will help here.

City planning studies show 12th and 13th streets as part of a cross-town north-south traffic couple. This has been partially effected between Charleston and Fremont. Although these one-way streets have eased the density and attendant traffic problems around Fremont Street, they have, if anything increased the traffic bottleneck around Charleston Boulevard. There are schools both on 12th Street (Maryland Parkway) and on 13th Street, causing bunching up of traffic. The "Y" at Gass is extremely awkward and is the location of a number of accidents. The present termination of the one-way street at 13th and Stewart is also a hazardous intersection.

While this "couple" concept might show some progressive thinking, this particular one appears not to have been adequately carried out in detail. An informal observation made by a firm located at 214 Maryland Parkway showed between 8 and 10 cars travel the wrong direction on this one-way street between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. on a typical day.

To help relieve the congestion and awkwardness at Gass and Maryland Parkway, it would be hoped that the City would acquire the now bare triangular property and develop a park area. Should this ever become the site of dense
apartments, the traffic problem would be severe. At least the tip of vacant land should be held to prevent this possibility.

The traditional concept of private ownership of land constantly comes into conflict with ideal city planning. Where people increase travel on an existing street, enterprising businessmen see this as a good location for small businesses. In fact as these little businesses pop up, and the natural flow of traffic is further and further impeded, it becomes more and more difficult to get across town by using this street, and so another nearby existing residential street becomes an infant expressway. Again, as traffic increases on this street, the pressure builds up to spot zone for small businesses and the cycle continues. The worst part of this is that as these strip commercial enterprises pop up, they produce some of the most visually disastrous areas of the city—ironically just where most of the people travel. East Charleston Boulevard is an example of an advanced state of this condition.

This is the American way of small businesses starting on a shoestring and hopefully growing into thriving enterprises. This is well and good. The problem lies in the too liberal granting of spot or strip commercial zoning on streets which should be retained exclusively for traveled ways. When these run through residential areas however, this is another problem.
Several years ago, as the traffic flow became too difficult at peak periods along Las Vegas Boulevard South, enterprising motorists started using 6th Street, one of the city's most attractive residential streets.

It became a contest of will between the residents who had city officials on their side and the motorists who sought the route of least resistance. Stop signs were put up at intersections and an awkward concrete barrier installed at 6th and Charleston to discourage as many through travellers as possible. As long as businesses are encouraged or allowed to develop along travelled routes, people will seek out alternate routes through residential areas and placing obstacles to discourage them is in effect treating the symptoms, not the disease.

The circulation system is almost never really of adequate capacity to handle peak loads. Adequate arteries cut through existing urban areas are forced upon us as eventual necessities, but seldom accomplished gracefully or in time because of the astronomical costs of land acquisition and adjustments. In this light, advance planning and acquisition of expressways long before the areas become inflated in value is well worth the expense. In Clark County, the action of the Regional Street Planning group is a giant step forward in this respect.
4. Does it serve the major areas of origin and destination? Unfortunately the existing street patterns do not serve well to move large numbers efficiently between major areas of origin and destination. Where recent expressways have been created—such as the West Fremont—traffic flows smoothly between major areas. The problem still lies in the increasing use of existing commercial streets such as Las Vegas Boulevard South, and Charleston Boulevard. Inasmuch as these are now such well established commercial strips, additional crosstown expressways—besides those which will be furnished by the freeway system—should be planned and started now.

B - Its Passageways

1. Are these designed to minimize conflict between traffic and abutting uses? In the newer residential areas, passageways are created automatically as minor street patterns. The ideal situation is one where we drive out of our driveway, down a pleasant curved residential street, then onto the speedway where we travel directly and rapidly to the turnoff into the restricted passageway which leads to our destination. This is accomplished fairly well in the scattered tract developments. Of course, the very fact itself that they are widely scattered throughout the valley, creates the need for an ever increasing network of expressways. The weakness in the present system lies in what happens to the connecting streets. All too often these are merely passageways which become heavily travelled. Also, the older established
areas are in a rather rigid grid pattern, and many are now experiencing obsolescence, and passageways are no more than in-between streets.

There is nothing wrong with old fashioned in-between streets per se. In fact, much can be said in their favor—provided there is a conscious design effort to maintain them as such by protecting them from the encroachment of commercial developments and by controlling traffic entry and conflict with abutting uses. In other words, some of the older residential areas south of Fremont Street still have a potential for residences if they could be protected in neighborhood groupings from cross-traffic and from the everwidening ring of obsolescence which spreads from the downtown area as it changes in use from residential to commercial. This problem must be discussed in greater depth further on.

C - Its Interchanges

1. Are there adequate interchanges between the differing modes and kinds of transportation?

One of the most glaring inadequacies of the circulation system is the absence of consideration for the pedestrian. Although much of the year is hot and the community is too spread out to really get anywhere on foot, the few opportunities for walking have been even further dissipated by lack of attention in planning. In great cities, one of man's most worthwhile activities is walking. Nearly everyone you talk to expresses a desire to walk more, to
see people and buildings and mountains and the sky from eye level. Life seen through the windshield, travelling at 40 to 60 mph can never furnish this type of soul satisfaction. Yet what has been furnished in Las Vegas for this purpose? Next to nothing! The downtown area has a natural opportunity to develop this potential because of the density of people. But as long as businessmen insist on squeezing more and more automobiles down these narrow streets, past their businesses, the pedestrian will run a poor second. (pun) There is no reason why there cannot be an effective compromise, but the pedestrian must be given a higher priority than he now has. This possibility in the downtown area will be covered in greater depth at another point in this report. However, let us not think that this lack of consideration for the pedestrian is confined to the downtown only. It is widespread throughout the city.

The newer shopping centers with air conditioned malls show some concern for the pedestrian. By separating the pedestrian from his car—which he must leave out in the parking lot—businessmen have discovered the possibilities of inducement of people to browse and shop and mingle with others in a pleasant atmosphere. The same potential awaits us on a larger citywide scale. We must encourage people not to jump in their cars to drive to a destination in the next block. We
must consciously design the spaces, the groundscape, the passageways which will make them say, "I think I'll walk, it will do me good." Much remains to be done in this respect in this city.

Whether by planning genius or by accident, the location of the two downtown parking garages has served a good purpose of pulling cars to these two locations, from which pedestrians can then walk inward to Fremont. Unfortunately, however, as the heart of the city expands, these two points of terminus for the cars will be more and more in the area of pedestrian activity and traffic bottlenecks will be created by cars trying to get in and out of these facilities in the midst of cross and through traffic. This condition is now a serious problem at peak times on Carson Street in front of the Courthouse. Ingress and egress controls here should be planned now.

As the private automobile becomes the dominant mode of transportation in the city, interchanges between modes (such as at bus depots and train stations) become less critical. However, it is imperative that we not be lulled into overlooking these problems just because we ourselves drive cars. There are still many individuals who are dependent upon buses, trains or other modes for
their transportation. While the bus loading zone on 4th Street, or the depots at the end of Fremont Street are not now serious problems, failure to provide for future terminals may be one of our greatest mistakes. The San Francisco Bay area is now building its high speed computerized urban transit system at fantastic land acquisition costs. Only time separates us from having those same problems here in Las Vegas—and perhaps the not too far distant future either.

Generally speaking, the two greatest tourist attractions in Las Vegas are the downtown area and the strip. Probably more taxis shuttle between these two—with a possible third terminus of the airport—than any other areas in the valley. The demand is being met for the present. But it appears that much more could be done in the way of a connecting circulation link. A freeway between the two is the first answer given by most but after a little thinking, this solution can be seen as short-sighted. These people have come to Las Vegas to see Las Vegas. Why couldn't such a travelled way be one of the most attractive memorable experiences of these millions who visit annually? This would be a giant undertaking, and it would be a difficult task to prevent degeneration of such a route into the typical strip commercial, sign cluttered street that now typifies Las Vegas to most visitors. But what a
potential! Perhaps Main Street, or 2nd Street (Casino Center Boulevard) is the street which should be developed. This will be treated in the next phase of work done by the AIA.

Another area of great concern in this same light is the visual impact on the average visitor who arrives by plane at the McCarran Terminal and who hails a taxi and rides into the city. The only saving grace to the ugliness which hits him is that it is quite likely that only a short time earlier, he rode in a taxi through an equally ugly environment to get to the airport in another city. (But not necessarily so.) His sole evaluation of the various cities he visits may be almost exclusively on the basis of his ride to and from the airport. At Los Angeles International it is a ghastly experience. At Washington's Dulles, it is a delightful experience. At Las Vegas, it is .... While he can move fairly conveniently and rapidly down Paradise Road, it is anything but paradisical. Overpowering lighted signs and billboards fight to get closer and closer to him as he steps off the airplane. A hundred thousand dollar lighted sign featuring topless dancers straddles a barren rural type looking house--still lived in--with a partly wrecked car in the front yard. A block-long architectural flop, advertising office space available, passes the car window, a row of garish little night
spots--including one for Las Vegas' teenagers--greets his eye. On one side, some converted barracks, on the other, a cluttered little shopping center. And so on. This is not a problem of the run-down, older section of a city. This is practically brand new. Yet we have squandered the potential. And this goes on. Here is another opportunity where design professionals must produce a worthy concept and local citizens must encourage its adoption by government and by free enterprise.

E - Its Accouterments.

1. Lighting.

Regarding the accouterments of the circulation system, a general observation is that in a purely engineering sense, much is being accomplished; but in an architectural sense, much is lacking. That is to say that guard rails, light levels, traffic signs, etc., are being provided, but the amenities of pleasing design, suitability to adjacent environment, etc., are not.

Light levels on travelled ways and at critical intersections are constantly being upgraded. From the standpoint of safety, this is a necessity and must be continued as more and more of the population moves at night. The technology of lighting will allow better quality as well as quantity at feasible costs as time goes on. What must accompany this progress, is design of the standards and luminaries, control of conflicting light
light levels with abutting uses, and relationships to architectural or natural features.

Lighting provided by private businesses to draw attention to their buildings, signs, or products, is a frequent offender to safety and neighborhood harmony. While there are city and county ordinances against glaring lights in the eyes of motorists, this abuse continues. A concerted law enforcement effort should attack this problem now. A drive around town in the evening is an easy way to pinpoint these offenders.

2. Traffic Signals.

Not everyone in a city will ever be satisfied with the location of traffic signals. However, it does appear that there are some glaring misplacements of traffic lights. Constant attention by the traffic engineers is required here. In no case should lights be placed as a result of business or political pressures, to enhance land values for special private interests, as appears to have been the case occasionally in the past.

3. Traffic Signing.

Much attention should be given to the design and graphics of traffic signs and signals. At the present time, traffic graphics are completely overpowered by commercial messages. Not only are the official traffic messages often lost or rendered ineffective but are in many cases turned into a real serious traffic hazard.
by competitive private signing. This is a serious problem and one which will undoubtedly get worse. The sign industries are influential and scream that businesses are hurt and the free enterprise system damaged if they are restrained in putting up signs. Many state with a straight face that extensive studies prove commercial signs are in no way traffic hazards. Some companies say the answer lies in taking traffic signage out of the hands of bureaucratic agencies and giving it to independent sign companies who by using modern sign techniques would make the official signs more effective.

Even in a city known for its spectacular electric signs, there must be bounds of restraint and control. It is humorous--but not humorous--to observe that when it became a contest between the 4-Queens marquee sign and the city's street sign for the same space, the street sign had to bend over to get out of the way. This writer can also testify that the Tropicana continuous reader panel signboard on the strip is hazardous; watching some 35 to 40 seconds for a sentence to pass across the board, he drove his car off the side of the road (Spring Mountain Road) and thoroughly frightened the whole family.

Not enough design attention is given to the simple instructions to a stranger driving in this city. These graphics should stand out because of their unique and
and tasteful design, be located at approaches to and at strategic intersections, should be appropriately lighted at night and should be protected from encroachment by private entities. Perhaps a practical location for these messages would be overhead or in medians something like freeway signs—except of a much more attractive design.

Much is said about using more landscaping in median islands and strips. Undoubtedly, this is a good point. But it is by no means a panacea, or the only possibility. This is a desert community. Plant life comes at great cost. Water must be furnished to each and every plant by automatically controlled irrigation. A suitable growing soil must be imported and periodically treated. Maintenance of these areas is necessary and costly. But of course, the results are marvelous, and we know that where this cost and effort have been furnished, we have not only greatly enhanced our community but that we are leaving an inestimable legacy for those who come after us. But what of some of the other possibilities for dealing with median strips?

Phoenix has created some successful median treatments using not only plants, but rocks, colored aggregate, sculptures, etc. Driving along Central Avenue in that city, it is a pleasant experience to come to a stop for a red light, look out your car window and see a very
pleasing arrangement of boulders or a stone sculpture set
in an interesting brick ground pattern in the median.
Much can be done in our community in this respect.

Although previous comments have been made about the urban
transit system, perhaps a more comprehensive summary should
be made about the transit rolling stock in general. Essential-
tially, these are buses and trucks.

The city bus system now is not extensively used and the
present trend appears to be toward even less use. A
self-defeating cycle sets in. As demand decreases, service
decreases, profits drop, costs rise, demand decreases
further, and so on. However, looking far into the future,
not just in the next 5 or 10 years, but beyond that....
mass transportation is likely to become more and more a
necessity. Again, as we look at other larger, older
cities, we see something of our own future. A bus sys-
tem might appear to be a dead horse today (pun), but we
should not be too anxious to count it out in the future.
Now is the time for some far-reaching studies of possible
future means of rapid transit for bringing population to
the city centers and for low-speed mass transportation
within those centers. In the meantime the city bus
system has a place in the transportation picture and
should be encouraged in every way possible to stay in
operation. Those who do use these buses are often the
less affluent, or the aged, or children and would be in serious trouble if this service were discontinued as some are suggesting.

2. Trucks

As to heavy trucks, the completion of the freeway will help the big truckers through the city without entangling them in our own local pattern as is now the case. Deliveries by trucks within the city will continue to be a problem and in fact become more serious in downtown business cores. The vacation of some downtown alleys has aggravated the situation somewhat but not as seriously as might be expected because alleys in densely occupied areas soon reach a level of maximum service and actually become serious problems in maintenance and safety. As long as cities use the traditional grid pattern, service to businesses will be a problem solved best simply by making deliveries during the most slack periods. This is often handled in downtown areas by deliveries to the front of buildings, by sidewalk elevators or chutes to a basement level under the buildings. But the whole matter of deliveries to businesses deserves extensive study and will be an important consideration in the ultimate plan of the downtown area.
The Streetscape

Its function

1. Adequacy of area

While there is generally sufficient area throughout the city for pedestrians, there is such an absence of conveniences and amenities for pedestrians anywhere that with the possible exception of downtown Fremont Street people just do not walk very much, and hence there is not very serious pedestrian congestion. In the downtown area, however, one is likely to find it occasionally a problem of walking on the sidewalks simply because of the number of people. This is most likely to happen on weekend nights when visitors are in town going from casino to casino, and local people—mostly teenagers—are scurrying to line up at the "adult only" movies. Bottlenecks occur at the street intersections where impatient gamblers and noisy kids wait nervously for the "walk" sign, then dart off in all directions.

Actually this downtown pedestrian activity is one of the pleasures of city life which is a refreshing contrast to the typical urban view of life from a fast moving auto. One doesn't really mind a little jostling and hearing strangers laugh and talk excitedly. What is lacking in fact is simply some small spaces developed for the pedestrians to stop and talk, or to sit down in the shade, or to turn into some interesting little shop display. Pro-
bably the most unpleasant part of walking downtown is the wait at the intersections for the light to change—especially if it is in the heat of the summer. The heat and jostling and noise and fumes under these circumstances make people especially tense and irritable.

In other words, a general analysis of the downtown area is that there is a tremendous opportunity here for the development of one of the richest experiences of city life. This opportunity is now being wasted simply because little or nothing is being done about it. We must decide if these downtown streets are principally for cars and that pedestrian travel is just a by-product, or if the pedestrian is of sufficient importance to draw the line on cars and create some amenities for the man-in-the-street. The possibilities are endless: benches, arcades or canopies, congregation areas, planting, a variety of paving materials, water fountains, sculptures, shade trees, visitor information centers, etc. We have in Las Vegas, a downtown unique throughout the world. With some comprehensive design, the streetscape could become as famous as a congregation center as Rockefeller Plaza in New York City, Champs Elysees in Paris, or Piccadilly Circus in London. The Las Vegas strip has its own character as a glamorous travelled way; downtown Las Vegas has the potential of a unique and famous center for pedestrian congregation.
We have been speaking mostly about Fremont Street between Main and Las Vegas Boulevard as the downtown area. It would be foolish indeed to overlook the truly downtown character of other nearby streets and areas such as Carson, Ogden, Stewart, Casino Center Drive, Third Street, Fourth Street, etc. Now is the time to make meaningful plans for these important areas as well. For example these "side streets" might well contain the vast pocket parks, or pleasant shopping areas, or financial and institutional centers which are needed to balance the glittering gambling establishments on Fremont. The area around the County Courthouse is rapidly assuming a population density which requires immediate planning. The area north of Fremont is, with the coming of the Freeway, a giant question mark. Is this area to become the back yard of downtown, with parked cars jammed together in lots, and derelicts staggering from dive to dive in and among the forest of concrete pylons supporting the noisy and dirty freeway above? Or is this area to become an attractive civic center with lawn and trees and beautiful buildings, with places for people to walk and to rest and talk with each other as well as conduct the important matters of local government? That it will become the latter is one of the principal objectives of this study by the American Institute of Architects.
B - Its appearance

1. Impact and Convenience

Another extremely important aspect of this design is the visual impact upon a visitor arriving to the city's center via the freeway. In most other cities, this approach is visually disastrous. In Las Vegas, it could be equally disastrous if nothing is done about the present backside view of the Fremont buildings or the slum neighborhood now around the Police Station and Main Street. Much can be done even in relatively low cost programs to make this initial appearance a pleasurable experience.

2. Materials and Street Furniture

Pedestrian and vehicular passageways need to be separated and defined from each other. The use of varied surface paving materials can accomplish far more in defining this separation than signs or fences. The necessary so-called street furniture such as police and fire call boxes, utility poles, street lighting, hydrants, litter baskets, postal boxes, newspaper dispensers can all be improved in design and integrated into the streetscape to make it more convenient and attractive. As indicated earlier, planting, and artistic grace notes are presently glaringly absent. This is probably because it is no one's job to furnish such a comprehensive integrated design in street furniture. Building owners build their buildings on property lots which line the streets. The street department builds and maintains the streets. The fire department requires fire plugs at certain intervals, the traffic department puts up traffic signs as needed, the
postal department places mail boxes, etc. etc. Lacking is the overall integrated design effort to provide intentional, planned variation in scale, harmony of design, coordination of services, and interaction of spaces around and between buildings. This responsibility should be placed in a single entity such as the City Planning Department, for example, be properly funded, and faithfully supported by all departments.

3. Integrated Signing

In previous sections, comment has been made about traffic and commercial signing. Speaking with special reference to the downtown area, it should be added that electric signs--and building facades--are a unique feature of Las Vegas. But to interpret this situation as meaning we should not attempt to control signing would be disastrous. As soon as the Freeway offramps are installed there will be an enormous pressure from the sign industry to line these arteries with large, costly, billboards and lighted signs advertising major downtown casinos. If governed by reason and a concern for all interests and groups in the city--not just the hotels and casinos--this could be an asset and a significant design element. Without control and consideration for all the city's citizens, it could become a grotesque display of honky tonk clutter and a sad misuse of land opportunity. Now is the time to make the decision which will prevent this situation by placing a moratorium on sign permits in
these important areas.

Las Vegas, like almost every American city, has residential neighborhoods which need rehabilitation, and residential neighborhoods which should be cleared and redeveloped. The area east of the Union Pacific tracks to 10th Street, and from North Las Vegas to Sahara is presently in a state of decline. New homes are being built outside on the city's edges, and many residents are moving out, allowing the inner—or old city—to be up for grabs. This usually means spot zoning and an attitude of just letting things run their course. A good comprehensive master plan should pay greater attention to the future of this area.

New subdivisions, with few exceptions, follow the old cut and dried F.H.A. patterns and really fall short of creating an environment worthy of human occupancy where schools, business enterprise, cultural and recreational activities, etc., are integrated consciously into the initial design. As long as land ownership and enterprise operate in their present manner, the best we can hope for is some coordinating effort to attract these diverse agencies together into an integrated pre-planned community. To do this for a neighborhood population center of five to ten thousand people requires a very
wealthy, imaginative, public minded, dynamic force capable of acquiring large sites and investing great sums of money which may show little or no return for many years. In the new cities, such as Reston in the east, this leadership has been furnished by wealthy insurance companies, and the results are significant. To return to the problem of the subdivision however, there is still much which can be done to coordinate the efforts of planning officials, school leaders, and business enterprise to create worthy urban centers.

One rather neglected area of residential land use is that west of the tracks and in what will be north of the east-west expressway. This area has housed the heart of the negro population for many years. While this area is now being affected greatly by new travel arteries through and nearby, more attention should be paid to the quality of residential living for those who live there now, and will live there in the future. Within this area, some developments such as that of the City Housing Authority present attractive, well-kept, neighborhoods. Other, older, poorly-kept buildings and neighborhoods present a sad contrast.

One of the biggest problems in planning for these areas seems to be the reluctance to get involved in the controversial social problems of race which are tearing apart
our larger cities today. Many negroes prefer to move away from this area commonly called "westside" and attempt to integrate into other parts of the city. Many negro families have moved into housing vacated by middle-class whites in North Las Vegas who have in turn relocated to new housing tracts on the edge of the city. But many black citizens remain in the Westside area and these, not always, but often are the disfranchised, racially segregated, and discriminated against. Any worthwhile city plan must consider this social problem and present worthy workable alternatives.

Another particularly glaring land misuse is seen emerging in the triangular area bordered by Fremont Street, Charleston Boulevard, and 13th Street. This traditionally has been occupied by modest homes on small lots, but now is experiencing obsolescence as a single-unit residential area. While this is logically a good location for higher density housing (apartments), the street pattern is so inappropriate for this purpose, that the land remains somewhat stagnant in the midst of urban activity. Bearing on this problem is the ultimate use of East Fremont Street from about 10th Street to Five Points East. Several of the automobile agencies have now moved out leaving conspicuous vacant areas along Fremont. Will this street receive new life blood with attractive resort facilities or will it deteriorate
into the same splintered, cluttered commercial pattern of East Charleston. Again, direction is needed now.

2. Commercial Areas

Commercial areas are being developed in such profusion, one is often concerned for their survival, let alone questions of appropriate siting. Assuming that the laws of supply and demand will automatically take care of the number and location of businesses is dangerous indeed. Furnishing commercial outlets for society, of the proper type, and in the most suitable locations is an important factor in city planning. Although commercial facilities in Las Vegas are profuse, it is safe to say that they are not necessarily well defined and sited in relation to their market. This is largely because of the effects of increasing real estate values and land speculation which are characteristic in a rapidly growing area. Of all people, architects know well that commercial sites are often more the result of political and promotional machinations than sound urban planning.

The typical commercial center is poorly designed and with few exceptions is an asphalt jungle where the shopper's life is endangered and his senses offended. The lowest human values are brought out. Trash and litter abound, signs are so bad and so many, cars interfere with pedestrians, lights are glaring, sound bombards our ears,
individual. Thoughtful and wise these values and will sign approach in their own city seem to be fairly well this is because industry is an economic force and it control. As the area grows, industry will greatly increase. Out, industrial areas now bed into the inner city be an important bearing some of this as the free-through the existing industrial railroad. The view from stacks of industrial build-rusty parts and trash yards have also become
the object of a dense forest of billboards on huge legs to raise them up to the eye level of the passing motorist. One sign company official, in urging a closer density of these signs, pointed out what a community service they were providing by helping to screen this industrial view. Whether or not he was right, one is certainly led by this comment to wonder about the public's values and goals in city planning.

4. Institutional

Unlike most larger cities, we can view the development of institutional facilities more in perspective than retrospective. We have at hand the opportunity which has already by-passed older and larger cities. We must not make the mistake of failing to set aside sufficient and appropriate sites for such facilities. In these sites, we must include green areas and open spaces which are not being provided by privately owned and developed projects because of the demand for land for commercial use. The past purchase of land by the City for recreational sites has been criticized by many as poor business, but time will bear out the wisdom of this action.

The school district has also made some land purchases which were criticized as extravagant at the time, but which have saved the taxpayer millions of dollars as these areas became more populated and the cost which they would have
had to pay for school sites multiplied many times. The
ground set aside specifically for city and county govern-
ment shows some foresight, but not enough. It is hoped
that as a result of this architectural study, city and
county officials may be guided in an intelligent land
acquisition program which will culminate eventually in a
civic center worthy of this community.

North Las Vegas, with a progressive mayor and city manager,
has made enormous progress in the past five years. Their
civic center especially typifies their determination to
change the traditional image of that city to one of pro-
gress and prosperity. Again, where progress has been
achieved, there has been much criticism from the local
citizenry. But credit is in order for those who have
accomplished much in the face of this criticism. A note
of caution must be sounded, however, to North Las Vegas
city officials. Present plans seem to indicate a great
desire to encourage commercial enterprise into the area
west of Civic Center Drive. Should this desire for
development become great enough that indiscriminate
commercial land use be permitted, the resulting effect
on the Civic Center would be catastrophic. The situation
now at Civic Center Drive and Las Vegas Boulevard North
is somewhat ludicrous with five service stations at
this point.
A - Core of the City

The core of the City of Las Vegas is difficult to define but can generally be described by the varying activities in what is thought of as the downtown area. Essentially these activities are the casino centers on Fremont between Main and Casino Center Boulevard, the retail trade area on Fremont between Casino Center Boulevard and 8th Street, the banking and office area on Carson Street, and the area north of Fremont presently occupied by city and state governmental agencies. This core functions fairly well now but without more positive planning direction will fail miserably as the city grows.

Accessibility to the core is now from a number of major streets, and as noted earlier, when incoming traffic terminates at the two parking garages and pedestrian traffic then flows on into Fremont, a somewhat ideal condition is achieved. However, with the completion of the freeway offramp, traffic to Las Vegas downtown from both north and south will be dumped in from the north. This is going to alter present patterns in the downtown. Unfortunately, there seems to be an ever-increasing tendency toward putting more cars down Fremont in the casino area. On a Saturday night after a local basketball game, traffic on downtown Fremont often becomes hopelessly snarled; just
a preview of what we are faced with constantly in a few years if we keep encouraging this pattern.

Special attention should be focused on Main and Fremont where the old Union Pacific depot has been completely eclipsed by declining train travel and the contrast from glitter gulch. At this important terminus of Fremont Street lies a design potential worthy of much greater effort.

Downtown Las Vegas seen from the air presents a revealing picture. One is often surprised when flying over Las Vegas, by the large areas devoted to parking near the downtown. (Unfortunately, when looking for a parking place while on the ground, one often is chagrined to find the opposite.) As land values increase, more of this parking space will be lost to buildings and it will become necessary to find more parking space. Whole blocks of old eyesores such as ancient railroad housing and vacant buildings around the police station and west of Main Street should be razed for this purpose.

As stated earlier, one of the most critical links which must be maintained is that between the airport and the downtown core. This has extremely important ramifications such as the choice and development of a major route.
From time to time, much is said about a downtown mall. Then the idea is dropped either from lack of drive or from fear of resistance from downtown property owners. The term itself, "Mall" seems to stir up emotional juices which prevent further logical development. One idea which seems to have gotten lost in the shuffle is a concept where traffic is still allowed on north-south streets but not on Fremont, for say two blocks. --Or where parallel parking is removed and traffic is held to one side of the street and the other devoted to pedestrian activity. There are numerous possibilities short of the conventional mall where all traffic is cut off.

A simple amenity can be injected into the downtown area even now which would enhance this core significantly. That is potted trees and shrubs placed at intervals along the sidewalk. Many businessmen have expressed a desire to pay for these planters but will not start anything until someone shows them a comprehensive overall program so that their efforts will not just add more clutter.

B - Employment Concentrations

The employment concentrations of Las Vegans insofar as a planning consideration, are at the hotel casinos and at the larger office buildings and businesses. Inasmuch as these are also sources of service to large
numbers of people, visitors and local people alike, the traffic problems of these employees are the same as the users, except that the problems are more critical at shift changes.

The development of the triangle between Charleston Boulevard, East Fremont, and Las Vegas Boulevard South should be considered as a "natural" for apartment dwelling for employees of the downtown area and the businesses which will exist on the periphery of this triangle.

C - Transient Accommodations

Quite favorable comment must be made for the adequacy and proper relationship of transient accommodations. Present hotel and motel accommodations with nearby restaurants and facilities is far better than most cities. In the middle or lower class motels, however, much of a critical nature can be said. The stereotyped "modern" Las Vegas motel is poorly designed, poorly built, and is identified to the traveler by oversized blinking, glaring, and cluttered signs.

D - Recreational Centers

Recreation, to most visitors, means casinos and showrooms. In this respect, the demand is amply met. However, there are other recreational needs besides these--both for the visitor and the local resident--which are not met. One thing needed badly for the
visitor is a children's recreational center. Private enterprise has offered occasionally in the past to build such a park—something like a Disneyland—but to date nothing tangible has been produced. Also, as soon as funds permit, existing parks should be much more extensively equipped. A good zoo, a museum, an arts and crafts center could and should be programmed as a part of existing parks or on new sites. The Cashman field and surrounding open area is a natural for recreational facilities, but no longer can the community expect the Elks to pay taxes and finance this site. It should be picked up by the city and properly developed and managed. A bona fide stadium is badly needed for football and other outdoor sports. One or more cultural centers are needed in the community, but especially one good auditorium with a full-scale stage geared for top-notch artistic performances.
IV Public Facilities

It is hoped that the university campus will furnish more as a cultural and public events center for the community as it continues to grow. Unfortunately, the university seems to be having so much trouble furnishing basic educational facilities, that these fringe community services are out of the question for some time. It is a sad commentary on values that a state and community so famous for its glittering extravagant entertainment places cannot furnish a university plant adequate to the needs of the local students and families.

1. Siting and Scheduling

Public facilities in the Las Vegas area are from poorly to fairly well located. Schools are better located than other public facilities simply because of the land acquisition program which the School District has used for the past 10-15 years. Occasionally there appears to be some cooperation between the various Parks Departments and the School District, but taken as a whole, there is far from adequate cooperation between the various agencies in locating public facilities for mutual support.

Some parties have urged the formation of a common civic center for the location of a city hall and county government center. The Stewart-Eisner Report recommended cut-
ting a prominent civic center axis through Fremont, from the present County Courthouse to a new City Hall site near the old one. The governor's study group has urged a governmental center at what is now Cashman Field. Others have suggested moving out to the hinterlands for an administrative center, as the School District did. Many feel that there should be some effort toward a unified metropolitan government (combination of city-county functions) before making decisions about any civic center. In the meantime, the County continues to acquire ground near the Courthouse, North Las Vegas opposes any move which will diminish its independence, public employees circulate petitions out of fear of loss of jobs or seniority, and Las Vegas officials table the issue pending some solution to its present financial problems.

It is painfully apparent that if there will ever be any form of unified metropolitan government, steps should be taken immediately to provide a suitable civic center area which would be worthy of such a progressive action. Other existing--and new outlying governmental facilities could still function as decentralized services which would help to take care of the people's needs away from the city center wherever possible.

The biggest hurdle in establishing a long-range capital improvement program seems to be the problem of urban
finance. Cities are limited by law in a tax collection to pay for urban services. The federal government, on the other hand, is not limited and seems determined to demonstrate this fact regularly. The result is that cities are caught in a squeeze. They are being called upon to furnish increasing services, but lack sources of finance. It has now become quite a highly developed art in city government, to research for federal assistance programs and to use what local money is available to "match" federal funds and thereby make the insufficient money go further. Unfortunately, this often robs programs and agencies which really need money, simply because there is no federal program of their specific nature at the time. The solution to this financial problem for cities is political and cannot be solved by this group, but it must be faced and solved soon.

2. Design

LeCorbusier has said, "You employ stone, wood, and concrete and with these materials you build houses and palaces; that is construction...but suddenly you touch my heart...and I say, 'this is beautiful!' That is architecture." With very few exceptions, public buildings in Las Vegas fall sadly short of being noble architecture, worthy of a proud citizenry. All too often, responsible officials appear overanxious to demonstrate to the public that they are practicing good sound busi-
ness by looking for package deals and public facilities which do not have "wasteful frills". As a result, the only symbolism in our present public buildings is a kind of uniform mediocrity and hodge-podge.

The state of New York, and a number of other advanced agencies, have enacted legislation calling for approximately $\frac{1}{10}$ to $\frac{1}{100}$ percent of a construction budget for a public building to be allocated to works of arts. This relatively small expenditure has worked marvels in providing sculpture, pools, fountains, murals, or other features which are the architectural grace notes of a society. In the beginning, it took politicians of considerable courage to call for such legislation. Today, they are respected because of it.

3. Utilization

Local school facilities have been made available for limited community summer recreation programs. But in order to justify the sizeable school construction budget, it is recommended that more cooperative programs be developed to get year-round use of these facilities. In return, the other various agencies must be willing to assist the School District in maintenance costs connected with such uses.

It is felt that many public facilities could well be
decentralized from the downtown centers. For example, local citizens should be able to get building permits, obtain licenses, etc. at centers nearer their neighborhoods and in areas where parking is not so difficult. Also, it is not always necessary to house prisoners and locate courtrooms in the same building as tax records or other governmental services. Of course there are certain efficiencies in locating most governmental functions in one place, but one should carefully analyze the nature of these services and decentralize those which work better away from the downtown center.
Inventory of Features

In making an inventory of the visual features of the Las Vegas area, the most significant influence is the valley pattern formed by the rather unusual mountains on four sides. Sunrise Mountain looms as a big hump on the east, the more distant Sheep Mountain Range to the north, the spectacular Charleston Range on the west, and the Black Mountain Range on the south. The major highways come into the city from the four low spots between these ranges, and out of these major streets develops the city's street plan.

Essentially the site of the city is flat except for a gentle slope inward from the mountains and a few variations in terrain such as the one known as "Bonanza Hill", and the butte on which the Vocational Technical Center sits. All drainage is toward the east side of the valley where water eventually flows out through Vegas Wash into Lake Mead behind Sunrise Mountain. Being a desert climate, undeveloped land is comparatively barren of vegetation, but has distinctive coloration which is especially pleasant near sunrise or sunset.

Man-made skyline features include the taller buildings downtown or on the strip. Because of the askew street pattern where many streets seem to be parallel but in fact are not
and eventually come together (such as Fremont and Charleston), it is especially desirable to be able to orient oneself by reference to certain well-known landmarks such as prominent buildings. However, the visual effect of such landmarks is pure chance and not the result of careful placing for visual purposes. In the downtown area, it is hoped that open squares and vistas can be designed specifically with significant skyline features in mind.

Not to be overlooked in an analysis of nighttime features and effects are the electric signs. Some of these are so overwhelming that one hardly knows what to say in summation. A fairly reliable general observation would be to say that there is a difference between spectacular creation and good design. Some of Las Vegas' electric signs are significantly well designed but the vast majority are either grossly cluttered or at best just spectacular due to size, motion, and color. Nonetheless, one cannot overlook the visual impact of some of these sign structures, and they must necessarily be considered as an integral part of any total comprehensive design.

B - Approaches to the City

Something should be said about the visual impact on the person in a car approaching Las Vegas from any of the
major highways. Undoubtedly, the very worst image of America's cities is that conveyed by the highway approach to the city. In this Las Vegas is no different, and perhaps even somewhat worse. The cheapest, junkiest, most cluttered structures seem to build up along these routes and stretch out farther and farther to meet the traveler. It would seem that a special effort should be made when major approaches are relocated—as is occasionally done—that the very tightest of regulatory controls be exercised to develop attractive clean drives. A beautiful example of attractive approaches are those new freeway entrances into Washington D.C., both from Maryland and Virginia. It can be done.

As local residents it is sometimes very difficult for us to grasp the impression which visitors receive as they drive into Las Vegas. Because we are familiar with the major streets we fail to appreciate the confusion which greets the driver at the Main Street and Las Vegas Boulevard intersections both at the south and north entrances to the city. It would seem that these "y"s have an enormous design potential which is now totally wasted or prostituted by small, shabby, and ill-sited businesses.

Though it may not be practical for the City to purchase every desirable piece of land at crucial locations to prevent its misuse by selfish or unwise private enter-
prise, it is strongly urged that by some method, these two important triangles of land be set aside for a specific, designed use welcoming and guiding visitors. The layout of these areas is a design challenge of highest order.
A - Historical Development

The original Las Vegas townsite was established by the railroad as a basic grid system paralleling the tracks, and with the main downtown street culminating at the depot. This original townsite has some order but relates to an archaic and no longer vital role of the railroad in the community. Because a railroad is such a prominent physical feature, its customary effect is to divide a city in two, with one of the sides inevitably becoming the "wrong side of the tracks." Fortunately, the west side of the tracks in Las Vegas contains some of the most attractive residential, recreational, and commercial sections of town, but there still remains this strong divisive feature to complicate travel back and forth from east to west.

The city developed from the original railroad townsite in erratic bursts, in a patchwork pattern produced by voracious real estate activity. A typical example of senseless development is the Manhattan subdivision on East Sahara. Here an enormous acreage has been divided into 25 foot lots for the sake of real estate profit. None of these small lots is usable for any single purpose at the present time.
In the Las Vegas Valley, general orientation is not a serious problem because of the prominent mountain ranges on all sides. But much of life in Las Vegas is life after dark and disorientation is very possible because of the slightly out-of-parallel pattern of the streets. For example, for a visitor to assume that Charleston Boulevard and Fremont are parallel, and then come to the intersection of these streets at the Boulder Highway is indeed confusing. Also, there is little or no indication to a visitor as to just where major centers are located which are off the principle highways. Many tourists have passed through town a number of times and never really formed an accurate picture of the layout of the city. This alone is not serious, but a great potential is being overlooked in the possible development of areas other than Fremont Street and Las Vegas Boulevard as important visitor centers. Also, this condition could become more serious if the city core continues to disintegrate as a business center as a result of business fleeing to the outlying areas like Boulevard Mall, Commercial Center and others. One possible solution would be to better identify suggested visitor routes as described earlier, with attractive street graphics. One of the most pleasant experiences of visiting Reno by automobile is to "follow the arrows" of the Scenic Drive Route which loops out of the downtown, across the
Truckee River, through an impressive neighborhood of offices and high rise apartments, through an area of quality residences and tree lined parks, out into ranch estates, to a beautiful vantage point in the foothills and eventually back again to the city center. All the while, there is a marvellous sense of orientation in relationship to the river, the mountains, and the tall downtown buildings. Although one would be somewhat hard-pressed to lay out a "Scenic Drive Route" in and about Las Vegas, it would be well to consider the ultimate development of such a drive.

C - Visualizable Concept.

There seems to be little relation of the city plan to the topography of the valley. Although generally speaking, the entire area of the city is almost flat, one is surprised at the great number of minor elevations and convolutions which have been available for interesting site development but which have been almost totally ignored. Again, the major factor in the history of the city's physical development has been a series of wild and irrational speculations in the commodity of real estate for profit—not for orderly growth and the common best good.
The "Strip" is in itself a phenomenon. A few months ago a prominent faculty member of the Yale School of Architecture captured local headlines by stating that the Las Vegas Strip was the prototype of the future American city. At first, this thought was especially repulsive to many architects and planners who see the Strip as something less than man's highest aspirations and ideals in city design. Unfortunately, though, this professor was probably more correct than we would like to admit. With ever-increasing national affluence, it is very likely that the natural drives and tendencies of the nation are to emulate this "Strip" neon phenomenon. Seen rationally, the strip is really not much more than typical American roadside suburban blight, pumped-up fantastically by frantic economic forces. The result is impressive, garish, glittering...but not especially efficient or satisfying.

Where the major hotels once devoted a rather serious effort to landscaping the fronts of their posh establishments, it has now become necessary to park automobiles in every square foot between the sidewalk and the buildings, and the sign clutter has so destroyed the identification of each hotel, that it has become necessary to call upon a new generation of "giant" signs to give each major hotel individual identification. One wonders if it will ultimately become
necessary to call upon third and fourth generation super-
colossal signs many times larger than the buildings. Al-
ready in some instances, signs have replaced buildings--
or to put it differently, the buildings themselves have
become neon signs. For all this we have become famous.
But to a certain degree, it is the fame of freakishness.
Should the right circumstance come about, it would not
be surprising at all to see the present "Strip" side-
stepped and a new "Strip" or luxury hotel center develop
at a new location. Meanwhile, the efficiency and aes-
thetics of the present "Strip" should be seriously studied
and some new ideas considered.