

Area Plan Report: East Side Urban Renewal Area

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Prepared For: Housing Authority of the City of Milwaukee (HACM)

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1.0 Purpose & Area Description

This report presents a preliminary plan for the East Side Area, prepared as a phase of the City of Milwaukee's overall urban renewal program. The southern end of the East Side Area extends into the City's central business district along an irregular line along East Mason Street but projecting down to East Michigan Street in part. The western boundary is the Milwaukee River and its industrial fringe. On the north, the area is bounded by East North Avenue and the eastern boundary is Lincoln Memorial Drive, along Lake Michigan.

2.0 Existing Conditions & Demographics

Basic demographics and existing conditions in the area:

- Approximately 800 acres in size
- Population of about 36,000
- Wide range of land uses, including industrial, commercial, and residential
- Despite its central location and wide range of uses, the area remained predominantly residential – approximately 73.8% of the net acreage (excluding streets) was either residential or a supporting community facility related to residential use
- Categorical land use (with a total net acreage of 537 acres):
 - Residential – 278.8 acres
 - Residential-related public and semi-public uses – 117.8 acres
 - Commercial – 87.7 acres
 - Industrial – 44.9 acres
 - Public and semi-public uses not related to residential – 7.7 acres

3.0 Blighted Characteristics

Despite its favorable location, wide streets, and many excellent structures, the East Side Area had generally been depreciating over the last several decades. Some of the more visible characteristics of blight in the area included:

- The conversion of many single or two family structures into multi-family structures
- Conversion of single or two family structures into furnished rooms for transient or semi-transient populations
- Several structures were in substandard condition, with minimal upkeep
- Distribution of commercial uses in residential uses, either as a separate structure or on the ground floors of residential buildings. This practice hindered the development of major commercial concentrations outside of the southern portion of the project area
- The parks and playgrounds available were too few in number and too small to provide adequate recreational facilities throughout the area

4.0 Urban Renewal Plan Actions

This report included the following categories of actions contemplated by the Urban Renewal Plan:

- Elimination, through clearance, of major concentrations of substandard structures

- Relocation of residential and non-residential occupants
- Replanning of the area with respect to land use and streets
- Installation of needed public improvements
- Promotion of private rehabilitation efforts
- Preparation and sale of suitable sites for new private development

Only limited action would be required for those portions of the urban renewal project area that were predominantly in sound condition. Action included the elimination of any blighting uses adversely affecting the project area, the development of needed community facilities, the provision of improvements in the street system where required, and the intensive enforcement of local codes and ordinances affecting housing.

5.0 Objectives in Relation to City

In addition to treating the specific problems arising within the urban renewal area, the Plan must also be oriented to a number of other citywide needs. Some of the City Master Plan objectives that influenced the Preliminary East Side Area Plan were as follows:

- **Central City functions:** As the hub of a growing metropolitan region, the Central Business District was experiencing demands for new buildings, additional parking facilities, and associated central city uses. The plan proposed sites for new or expanded Central City commercial uses and provided for the expansion requirements of the Milwaukee School of Engineering.
- **Gold Coast Area:** The Prospect Avenue section of the urban renewal area along the bluffs overlooking Lake Michigan, formerly known as “Milwaukee’s Gold Coast,” was replanned to provide for high-end residential buildings.
- **Diverse Residential types:** Through the redevelopment program, a variety of residential types should be developed to provide for low and moderate density housing, as well as high-rise developments.
- **Industrial Land Area:** The Plan attempted to provide as much area as possible for new industrial development.

6.0 Recommendations

In order to facilitate the detailed planning of the East Side, the planning area was broken into five sections for recommendations.

City Hall Area

Preliminary studies indicated that first priority should be given to redeveloping the area bounded by the Milwaukee River on the west, East Mason Street on the south, North Van Buren Street on the east, and East Juneau Avenue on the north. The plan recommended a number of landscaped areas surrounding the building on the adjoining blocks. A portion of North Market Street should be abandoned to create an attractive municipal mall and to eliminate the dangerous 6-point intersection in front of City Hall. Two parking garages were also proposed – one behind the Pabst Theater and another located on a cleared site at the southwest corner of East Wells and North Van Buren Streets.

Commercial and office building use was recommended for several sites between East Kilbourn Avenue and East State Street. Several sites on both sides of North Water Street would be adequate for office

building construction. A large site of 6.8 acres, located between East Juneau Avenue and East State Street, was proposed for major industrial use that requires a downtown location.

East Wisconsin Avenue Area

This area was bounded by East Wisconsin Avenue, the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad, East Michigan Street, and North Van Buren Street. The Plan recommended a dramatic redevelopment of the site with one large office building, hotel, theater, parking garage, retail shop, and railroad station complex.

To the north of Wisconsin Avenue, a hotel or office building with an attached parking garage was proposed for the block directly east of the Northwestern Mutual Life Insurance Company building. This development would complement the complex proposed south of Wisconsin Avenue. The area between East Mason Street and East Kilbourn Avenue would be suitable for small apartments or hotels, parking lots, or semi-public uses (churches, clubs). Three parcels at the northeast, southeast, and southwest corners of East Mason and North Jackson Streets were proposed for high-end retail stores.

Convent Hill Area

Extensive clearance was proposed for the triangular area bounded by North Van Buren Street, East Juneau Avenue, and the Milwaukee River. Light industrial use was recommended for 9 sites, with a combined area of 15.2 acres. These sites were adjacent to the existing industrial development along North Water Street. The remaining sites, all of which were less than one acre in area, would be suitable for the construction of small industries, for the expansion of existing industries, or as parking for existing industries.

Residential redevelopment was proposed in the Convent Hill area between North Milwaukee and North Van Buren Streets. It was proposed that the existing housing, which was among the poorest in the City, be replaced with public and private housing at low, medium, and high densities. The proposed closing of portions of North Jackson Street would also create several residential superblock areas.

North Prospect Avenue Area

Four sites along North Prospect Avenue, with a total area of 19.4 acres, were proposed for luxury, high-rise apartments. Realigning North Farwell Avenue to the west and realigning East Albion Street and extending it to North Farwell Avenue would create two major sites for this purpose.

A major shopping area to serve as the focal point for the entire East Side Area was proposed between East Brady Street and the realigned portion of North Farwell Avenue. Ample off-street parking would be provided and a new street connecting East Brady and North Farwell would provide space for commercial expansion.