



A civic plan by the Citizens' Committee, 1923

Project

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Public Policy Roundtable Discussion

Plummer: In reflecting on what Don and Ray presented, I was impressed with their homework and presentation examples of how governments have created agreements on very difficult public processes. We also heard from Ray on some very creative financing mechanisms that could be put in place. Maybe we can pick up the conversation at that point, of the examples that we heard tonight that are particularly apt to the situation we are looking at here, and do we have a chance to take those as models or should we be looking at some entirely new models?

Caginalp: Are we talking about greenspace or housing?

Plummer: We are talking about greenspace.

Caginalp: We are assuming there is no housing basically.

Plummer: We can assume that there is a housing development that will be built, but we are not talking about the financing of the housing and we are not talking about the governmental agreements that need to be developed to allow the housing to occur. We are looking at the financing mechanisms that are needed to put a public greenspace in place and the type of cooperative agreements that are needed to address the environmental issues related to Nine Mile Run.

Robison: I would like to suggest that we step backward from what you said. Ray and Don discussed how to get financing and at least basic principles with government cooperation. Especially from the point of view of the citizens the public policy question is money for what? cooperation for what? And, I thought we had agreement on this. Because I am not from Squirrel Hill. I would have thought that what Eloise said about wanting a park was enough. And it might be enough for me, I may take it on faith that we will have a nice linear park and now let's talk about how to raise money. But what I hear around this room and last night at the Squirrel Hill Urban Coalition meeting is that there is a great deal of

unreadiness; people are not willing to take these things on trust. I suggest, unfortunately, before we can seriously move on to issues of financing, how to encourage intergovernmental cooperation, we have got to get some kind of consensus on what 'it' is, what it is we are trying to do.

Dzombak: Can't we just address the greenway without any consideration, at least initially, of what is going to be on the plateau?

Robison: Well maybe, but the question is, what is the greenway? I would take it on faith, but I don't hear that around the room. I don't think there is a readiness.

Caginalp: Can I ask a question, that I think is very fundamental, of the people sitting at the table, who is a resident of Squirrel Hill and not an interested party in the sense of being a developer or a member of the STUDIO or whatever?

Robison: Four of us.

Reaves: I agree with Jonathon, I cannot imagine anyone opposing a greenspace running down the middle of the valley, why can we not accept that and then, we can look at that as an opportunity in fact. In preparation I spoke with landscape architects working with the city. This is an opportunity through the process to decide what that is going to be. I don't think it is going to be an active waterfront. At the same time, it is not going to be covered with gravel, it is going to be something in between. Is it at least enough that we can settle on that. So let's go with it.

Robison: That's enough for me, but I don't think it is enough for Squirrel Hill. I fear it is not enough for a lot of people in this room.

Reaves: I have not heard anyone object to what I just laid out or Eloise's idea of a park.

Berman: I don't know if we can exactly define what the greenway is going to look like at this point because it depends on a number of things. Will the sewage problem be corrected? Will there be a development? Will there be slag movement? What type of slag movement? All of these things will influence what is going to be there.

Robison: That is the exact opposite of what he said.

Berman: No, no, no. There is going to be some type of greenway there if it is done through some type of cooperative program. I think the two key questions we are trying to address tonight are can it be done through cooperation, if needed and where needed, and how are you going to pay for it.

Robison: That woman in the back of the room asked from the very beginning, what is the greenway?

Solomon: That question was adequately answered.

Plummer: Can I take a stab at the question? I think what it is, is a work in progress. There are two general concepts we are working with and they are being refined through this process of discussion, and identification of issues, management of issues and fact, and a public discourse. We know that this work in progress has two general objectives. One, is the creation of a residential community that fits into the community that is already existing in the East End. The other objective is to take advantage of this private development and extend the greenspace we have at Frick Park to the Monongahela River and in doing that to really capture a vision of the city of Pittsburgh that is deeply embedded in our history. So what that greenspace is going to look like in terms of the types of plants to grow in which place and the dimensions of it are to be decided. We are really addressing so many issues as we go through this.

Wertz: I would like to add something to this: the concern that this fellow mentioned. Could it not be more defined early on? Another person mentioned the marriage between the greenway and the community. I have a concern that has been expressed. I think it would be advantageous if a philosophy could be defined early on. I think it relates to the slope mainly. The sloping that will be done to make it more gradual and how much that is going to bring the development into the view of the stream. Is it going to be like, oh my god, we lost what little bit of nature we had and now we have suburban development imposing on us at the stream level? Or is it going to be preserved in a way that the development is somehow out of sight or blends in so much so that the sense of nature is preserved in the valley? I do agree that if that can be more defined early on it can be reassuring to many people. That this development is not going to encroach and impose itself on that nature. Even if the details are not worked out yet, some of that philosophy about how the slopes can handle some of that will go a long way toward reassuring some people.

Tessitor: The concern that I have, in being involved in many projects and seeing them go, some of them extremely bad, is that when you package the financing in such a way that you say we are not going to worry so much about how much you are going to

get, we are only going to worry about getting. By the time it has to be got, too often what you are getting is something you don't want, but then it is too late because you have been working on this and everything is in motion. We see this with the Mon Valley bypass. And so maybe we are putting the cart before the horse in doing this. And I am concerned from the standpoint that this is such a major project with major environmental impacts and sociological impacts. Yesterday the Urban Redevelopment Authority had their meeting and one of the things that was talked about was unintended consequences. When you are talking about unintended consequences you have to be evaluating secondary impacts and cumulative effects, that is part of an Environmental Impact Study (EIS) process. So I would ask of the EPA, will an Environmental Impact Study be required of this? If the development is using federal moneys, and it has some very serious environmental impacts, physiological issues and there are sociological issues. And there are alternatives in that there are other sites within close proximity that are also usable, perhaps more usable, and the only issue they may raise is the complexion of the people who live near there, which is not a valid issue to be raised. I would suggest that the EPA should be requiring before one step goes forward that, yes, there has to be an EIS on this, because the Mayor is going to want to run in and get started on this in a few months.

[Note: An Environmental Impact Statement is required by law for major federal projects and programs that may have an impact on the surrounding environment. See 42 U.S.C.A. §4332. To date, an EIS has not been requested by the EPA.]

Plummer: I would like to suggest that we keep the discussion focused on the greenway.

Tessitor: But this is because you are tying into [the development]. If you are looking at a tract of land and what you are going to do with this tract of land and you are moving this thing ahead without an EIS process, which is to look at alternatives, to look at these things, to look at alternatives as far as costs, etcetera, and lay something down that you can work with....

Plummer: Well, for the discussion, we are looking at the greenspace and the opportunity that is presented by the greenspace. You have made a good point in terms of having a process that looks at the issues that relate to the development itself.

Tessor: But you made the point that they are not to be divorced, that they are tied together and if that is so, then, you must evaluate.

Plummer: I don't believe I made that point. They are two projects that are occurring side by side and we are looking for the opportunity for the greenway while this other project is also being examined.

Reaves: You are right that they are linked, no one is denying that. But Alan makes some very good points. For the first time someone started to define some of the issues with respect to the greenway. Part of what I was thinking about in my remarks was that, if we can find a funding stream, to deal with the greenway and the problems and opportunities in the valley, divorced from the housing, not as an add-on, and you are right, too often these things get built as, "Well, we will add on a few trees; it will look good." If we can find a way to define that piece of it and work cooperatively through the process then I think we are further ahead in reflecting the values that Alan and others mentioned. I think that is where some progress can be made.

Dzombak: You can decide what you want in the greenway, maybe you don't want the slopes to be touched and then that goes forward to possibly impact the development project. Focus now on what you want in the greenway and then you can argue later with how the development does or does not concur with your vision of the greenway.

Goto: I have been working on soil, slag, and habitat issues. People think park and see lawns trees and manicured gardens. But these days some people with an environmental background are thinking about ecosystem function, in relationship to education.... This could be an educational focus for university, high school, junior high even grade school. You can explain how an ecosystem works. How we reclaim land from the history of industry. The second thing is: we would all like to find out what is the best solution and vision about the greenway, but before that we should be finding out what is there. Nine Mile Run is very mysterious. It has been abandoned for over 40 years. Two weeks ago we walked the site with Sue Thompson of the Carnegie Museum of Natural History and we found a hop tree, a threatened species in Pennsylvania and we found it growing in slag. Neighbors know that there are turkey there; we have seen beaver. Something has happened, little by little species have

been introduced into the community. So I am concerned that if the development changes the surface of the slag and the slopes, we will lose that vegetation. Animals and birds will lose their food source and place to hide and place to make babies. We would like to somehow enhance or improve the existing living things for the future. Unless we know what is there we cannot make plans. It is not simply, "These plants are good, so let's plant." Slag must also be tested for what will grow. We cannot simply say this is the best way, we need some type of test and research.

Plummer: What is the endangered species?

Goto: Hop tree, it is just a threatened species.

Caginalp: Basically, I agree that without scientific studies it is speculative to discuss that we can do this or we can do that. And it is nice to see artists thinking through a different perspective than someone like me, a scientist. But you can discuss making a nice park on the moon or whatever and then you find out there is no oxygen and then, gee, you can't have a park. At this moment, we have only a dozen borings and in those dozen borings, without getting too technical, they have chromium, in hot well three in numbers like thousands per million and then in the next one down, it's ten. Those are ridiculous numbers, they vary by a factor of a hundred. I am willing to bet anyone, I will pay for the drilling there, that the spot they found ten is closer to a thousand. Anyone that wants to take the bet, the companies that did the studies, I will shell out a couple thousand to show you that that is not ten there. Even if you assume they are right, you already have a factor of a hundred, so the next one may be by ten thousand per million and you almost have Superfund status, I believe.

Blaustein: The point that Reiko was making is that there are plants growing in the slag, the same slag that you are saying are contaminated to these quantities. Threatened plants in the state of Pennsylvania are growing there and are surviving in the slag and in the slopes. We are continuing to study and document what those plants are, but, even in these most adverse conditions, where plants of these magnitude and variety can grow, this is the same slag.

Caginalp: I am not worried about the plants or the animals, I am saying that there are some constraints imposed on what the scientific study would show in this area.

Now, on 238 acres, all of the environmental people I have spoken to say that you need hundreds, at least, of drillings to find out what has been deposited over many, many years. You don't know what is there. I would suggest that there will be some constraints on this. One of the constraints is that you won't be able to move lots of slag. This two million, five million cubic yards whatever that will be out because it will endanger those of us that live close to it and others. That is one constraint. The stream is so heavily polluted that their own study says that the stream represents the primary restriction, how do they phrase it, the primary restriction to developing residential housing.

Plummer: Can I just interrupt here? I have been with this process for many months and have been to virtually all of the public meetings that have been held on this, there have been several that have occurred, and this particular set of issues has been aired at every one of these meetings. So I am confident, as an observer of this process, that these questions are in fact being heard and that they are being discussed in a serious way. They are recognized as questions that do need to be addressed. I think it takes us away from...

Caginalp: I will ignore those points, and—

Plummer: I think we have another question or comment to be made.

Robison: I think what I said was seriously mis— I failed to make myself clear. Joe, when you said there are two points when defining what the 'it' is, the work in progress, you were looking at me as if I was one of the people you have to convince, and I am not. In the first place, I don't even live in Squirrel Hill and in the second place, I am so anxious to see both the greenway and the housing community succeed, I am willing to take it on trust. My concern is political, I am hearing so much unwillingness to take things on trust and so much dispute about what the 'it' is, that it undermines the public support we need. I think the environmental questions as well as the financing and the intergovernmental can only be dealt with after we have a consensus on what the 'it' is. Then we could say, now we know what it is we want, this is what we have to find out environmentally, this is what we have to do about it, and this is the money we have to raise, that the possibilities [are] for doing it. I may be wrong, but I have heard a lot of dubiousness from people who I would have thought would have been absolute cheerleaders for this project.

Reaves: Can we ask around the table what people's values are for the greenway?

Caginalp: Those that live outside of Squirrel Hill or—

Reaves: Let's hear from those that live inside first. I don't care. I live inside.

Caginalp: Do you want me to start with what I envision? Basically, there are two severe constraints. One is that you can't put a large housing development there because it's housing and what is under there. And the second constraint, without getting too deeply into it, that material is toxic.

Reaves: No, no, no, what is in the greenway?

Caginalp: Okay, the greenway. Okay, I'll skip that part. I would like to see maybe a thin layer of topsoil, some grass, some shrubs, whatever, make it pretty and then bike pathways and stuff like that assuming it's not too toxic to do that safely and then 20 years later, with new technology, clean it up.

Reaves: Clearly passive uses, a trail?

Steinberg: I'll second that. That's what I would like to see but also enough of the greenway so that you can be inside it at some point and not know that the housing is there.

Reaves: Accentuate the valley nature of the thing.

Steinberg: Exactly.

Blaustein: But no remediation? Just putting things on top to seal it up?

Steinberg: I'm not sure.

Caginalp: You see, when you say remediation, I really dislike this abuse of terms like reclamation, remediation. Remediation means taking 12 million cubic yards truckloads by truckloads to Ohio and cleaning it up and so on. I am concerned more with people than with a few insects or whatever. Just by mixing up the soil and doing this and seeing this or that plant grow does not eliminate the chromium or ten other substances I will avoid listing.

Plummer: For example, is there any sense that the waterway needs to be cleaned up?

Berman: Is there one thing that we can agree on, that the sewer system needs to be cleaned up?

Everyone: Yes, yes, yes.

Caginalp: The sewer system needs to be cleaned up.

Reaves: I would like to see the stream open through its entire course, not culverted at any point, that is one of my values.

Everyone: Yes, yes, absolutely.

Reaves: Could it be fishable? Should it be fishable?

Goto: People are seeing some fish and crayfish there.

Robison: Fishable means fish that you can eat.

Goto: There are some gilled snails, planarium and scud in Nine Mile Run Creek. In Fern Hollow Creek, which runs through Frick Park, there is more aquatic life. Caddisfly is one of them.

Reaves: Should there be ways to get to it except at the mouth and way up in Frick Park? Should there be trails into it?

Steinberg: Yes, there needs to be a way to give Swisshelm Park people and Squirrel Hill people a feeling that it is their park too.

Reaves: What should happen at the mouth of the river?

Dzombak: Some other access, twelve-year-old kids have the guts to go down it on bikes, but no reasonable people would do it.

Plummer: Should it be a park which people are really and truly encouraged to use and to take advantage of from a recreational and a relaxation standpoint?

Steinberg: Absolutely. Water does that. Water gives a sense of relaxation that nothing else can give.

Reaves: Should it be lit at night?

Steinberg: I have dual concerns about that. You don't want to mess with nature, but at the same time you don't want people to be afraid to use it.

Blaustein: Frick Park is closed at night.

Dzombak: It would be hard to police too. If you light it, then you feel obligated to protect the people in there.

Kriska: It is the extension of Frick Park.

Wertz: Schenley doesn't have lit trails.

Kriska: Schenley is kind of a commercial park; it has the golf course.

Steinberg: I think it would be a mistake to light it.

Plummer: Should the park be integrated into the larger plan for bike trails and the connecting of the whole park system all the way down to the point ultimately?

Steinberg: Absolutely, yes. You want to encourage people to use it for commuting, if necessary, as well as recreation. It is part of an overall city plan that would attract people, keep people here.

Kriska: I see Schenley and Frick as two different entities. Schenley is more open, while Frick is more of a preserve.

Robison: You can get lost in Schenley. You can be in there and not be sure if you are in West Virginia.

Kriska: That's a question. Do you want to have baseball fields like the corner of Frick Park at Forbes and Braddock, the playground? Is it safe enough? On this side of the river, away from the slag, you can have those things but for kids, six- or five-year-olds—is topsoil going to help protect them from the slag?

Reaves: One problem with playing fields, for me, is that they are going to have little leagues, or beer leagues or whatever, and a lot of cars are going to need to access nearby parking, with asphalt.

Caginalp: It seems that the park has another constraint in that whatever you put there has to be minimum parking, like a museum might be okay, an art gallery, all those things because there is a little bit of traffic on occasion. But, I think the traffic is a very major issue. Whatever we can put there that is not going to attract much traffic would be very useful.

Berman: My eleven-year-old grandson is visiting us, that's my daughter's son, and my son is home with his two little kids, and the three of them with my daughter-in-law's young nephews and nieces all went down to a little creek today near where we live and they had a hell of a good time. They just waded in the creek with shoes on. That's the kind of thing I see here, out in the West Hills. They must have been there for three hours, and they just enjoyed it. They had little boats. They skipped stones across the creek a little bit. That's the kind of thing I see here and this kind of defiled landscape. I don't see an active place. I don't see little league ballfields. It's a place to commune with nature, to get close to nature, to see plants and see bunnies.

Kriska: Let nature take its course, like it does at Frick. The deer come out; the raccoons come out.

Caginalp: One thing I sense from what everyone is saying is that if you put one thousand families there, all of these ideas can be thrown out the window.

Berman: The question is that you are looking at one tract which may or may not be impacted simply because another tract

is going to have some impact on what's going on.

Solomon: You have to start somewhere.

Caginalp: I agree with what everyone is saying, it's wonderful. I am just saying that this vision is in direct conflict with apartment buildings.

Berman: Not necessarily.

Steinberg: I don't know if it is necessarily true either only because I use Schenley Park and Frick Park all the time; there are times you go there and there is absolutely no one there. They are certainly surrounded by many, many, many more thousands of houses. But it is something that must be looked at and considered.

Reaves: Well, I would like to see a greenway even if the development never takes place.

Caginalp: Absolutely, that would be wonderful to see a greenway without a development.

Frankland: You know, in effect, there is a greenway there now. It may not be a nice one or a fancy one. But it has biking trails and hiking trails, there is something there now.

Tessitor: It is not as if we are going to be putting something there that is not there now. You are going to be transforming. What are you going to transform it into is the question. Or maybe you just leave it as it is. The Seldom Seen Greenway for instance. Very little has been done with it. Now, it wasn't as severe. But it did have some major things happening there, but they just let it grow. It is fairly recent, according to the history that we are hearing now that it has been left. That is an option too that has to be put on there for analysis. That is, just let it go.

Goto: At the Seldom Seen Greenway, the community works very hard to keep it clean. Their place is pristine, like an old, mature forest. Nine Mile Run has a different situation. Some people who grew up there told me the place used to be their playground. Then, the slag dumping started. They felt their place became a dump. People don't really want to take care of it. So it is a little different than Seldom Seen.

Caginalp: What would be the cost—the kind of thing that we were discussing—to have some paths and green areas, whatever, that does not seem to me to be a very costly thing, on the scale of a city. I mean, just to have some wild grass and bushes. If you look at something like Phipps, although it is a much smaller thing, there is a very rich flower

exhibit, four times a year, it is only a forty dollar per family contribution. It is really a very trivial amount. I really wonder if this kind of thing was done and financed by private contributions, perhaps by the companies that polluted it in parts or other industrial companies. Would that be a very costly thing, you think?

Berman: You have the sewage, first thing first.

Caginalp: I know, you have the sewage, but suppose that is cleaned up, just the idea of doing these kinds of green things.

Dzombak: Yes, you can take the cost minimal approach, fix up the trails with some kind of gravel.

Caginalp: But also some green things there, you know, some topsoil, perhaps add some wild grass, bushes and trees, whatever.

Blaustein: What would be the extent of this, how wide?

Caginalp: The whole area.

Blaustein: The whole 238 acres?

Reaves: No, no, no.

Caginalp: Let's just take the valley first, just the valley perhaps.

Goto: I think you can have more diverse species. That would make it less artificial. In 1954, Dr. Black from Pitt University studied Frick Park and he identified 250 different species [of plants]. Now at Nine Mile Run, about half of them exist. Of these about 60 percent are native plants. We should have more diverse plant communities.

Plummer: Can I pose another question related to the values driving this? And keeping the idea of taking a look at one domain larger, I guess, than the one we are taking. Is this park, this greenspace opportunity, does that enable us to do something about the way that Pittsburgh itself is viewed? In other words, many people coming into Pittsburgh go by Nine Mile Run, they see a slag heap there; they see this kind of uncertainly utilized piece of property that, at least in my view, is not very aesthetically pleasing. Is one of the values we are working toward here an improvement in how Pittsburgh receives its visitors and the way the outside world perceives our community?

Caginalp: I don't think it has as much impact as you think. I mean, I live on Beechwood and Rosemont and it would be nice to see something green there. I don't actually see the slag heap. But if I walk

down the road or whatever, it does not really look that bad to me. A lot of areas in this world have rocky formations, whatever, it really does not look that ugly. But if you look at it from the point of view, if we are going to take this as part of the package where we have immensely more traffic so that the street becomes a two-lane highway, that would have a negative impact. I see some gain that we have some parkland or whatever, but not so much that it outweighs other things.

Tessitor: I think the excavations for Route 28, for example, along the Allegheny River are much more a horrendous scar upon the landscape than a slag heap where it is now, covered with some vegetation so it is green during the growing season. We see more and more of these highway gouges, even with what they were doing with the busway. So I don't think this is as big a factor as what we are doing with our transportation rights-of-way.

Robison: I would like to make a suggestion based on what I have heard and then express a problem. There seems to be consensus around that we would like some passive park development in the valley and we would like the stream cleaned up. We probably agree on a gradual minimalist restoration of the slag heap, using the ability of the land to reconstitute itself. And, we can probably have consensus on that. But, the minimalist reconstruction of the slag is not a big dollar item, the passive park is not a big dollar item, but the cleaning of the stream is a very big dollar item. Although, legally it should have been done decades ago, the fact is there wasn't money then and we will have to be really creative to get the money, or fight like the devil, or both, to get the money now.

Dzombak: Well actually, that process has kind of started. The EPA is interested in reducing sewer overflow discharges across the whole county. And that process is sort of starting for Nine Mile Run.

Robison: It started 25 years ago, when I was a reporter covering the first discussion of how the city was going to improve its sewer system.

Berman: Don't forget now that we have consensus on a number of items but you don't have all the stakeholders at the table. You don't have the city at the table, you don't have the developer at the table, but even so, there are a few things that [a group as diverse] as this can agree on. Cooperation.

Frankland: I think we have all highlighted that this is a multi-faceted process and that

it is going in one direction, but it is going in different lanes. We have the financing, we have the flora and fauna, and I think we are trying to address all of those issues individually but bring it together at some point. And that is where we all need to meet at that point where we can all agree right now.

Dzombak: I think Ray's suggestion of looking at the values of the greenway was a useful one, we agreed on some things there. Anyone want to volunteer to summarize that for the group?

Plummer: I will be glad to do it, unless there are any other volunteers.

Dzombak: Do you want to go through that list? We talked about passive development with paths.

Plummer: Cleaning up the stream; reconstruction of the slag.

Caginalp: What do you mean 'reconstruction'?

Dzombak: I don't think we agreed on that.

Caginalp: The only thing I agreed to was very minimal movement of the slag. If you want my opinion that's it. If you don't want it, that's fine too.

Plummer: How do you want to describe what was said about the slag as part of the greenspace?

Robison: Incremental restoration using natural processes.

Dzombak: Minimal movement of slag.

Robison: I'm not expressing my position necessarily. This is what I heard. Reliance on natural processes. That seems to be one area of consensus.

Dzombak: Minimal disturbance of the slag. Clean up the stream.

Reaves: Include trails going down the middle, maybe, increase the number of access points.

Wertz: May I make a couple of suggestions? In terms of what my vision would be, a couple of major points to include. There is a great view. I think it is as nice as Mount Washington, but in a different sort of way; it is not an urban skyline, but it is an expansive natural view down the river valley. I would really like to see that included.

Plummer: You made a point in the beginning, and I thought I would preface with your notion of defining a philosophy.

Wertz: Can I mention also, you asked us before if we thought the park could be an attraction beyond Pittsburgh. I don't know if that was how you phrased it, but to reflect on Pittsburgh.

Plummer: In doing the park project, can we make a bigger statement about the beauty of the city of Pittsburgh itself.

Wertz: I think there is an opportunity, when you are going down to the riverfront there is a parking lot, if you could have a place where boats could access this. I think that would be so wonderful and that would be an attraction to out of town visitors. I often see a river or I see a stream somewhere, but I almost never see where a stream meets a river. I think that is such a rare thing to come across that if you could actually boat up to that and then have a nice little riverside restaurant or something, then take a little walk to see the stream flowing into the river. I think that would really be something to see in the city.

Dzombak: It really is something fairly unique. It is a rare observation opportunity.

Wertz: And if they did want to uncover parts of the stream, if there were needs for funding, if there could be some kind of concessions, some kind of refreshments, there could be a fundraising element to it.

Dzombak: One more point is to capture Reiko's comment that there needs to be more diversity.

Plummer: Yes, and the mystery of the site, what was the name of that threatened species?

Goto: Hop tree.



A view of Nine Mile Run looking upstream from Commercial Ave. 1947