

May 2018

# Sheltering Opportunity: City Planning and Housing in Chicago, 1909-1941

Kari Renae Smith

*University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dc.uwm.edu/etd>



Part of the [History Commons](#), and the [Urban Studies and Planning Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Smith, Kari Renae, "Sheltering Opportunity: City Planning and Housing in Chicago, 1909-1941" (2018). *Theses and Dissertations*. 1920.

<https://dc.uwm.edu/etd/1920>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by UWM Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of UWM Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [open-access@uwm.edu](mailto:open-access@uwm.edu).

SHELTERING OPPORTUNITY: CITY PLANNING AND HOUSING IN CHICAGO, 1909-1941

by

Kari Smith

A Dissertation Submitted in  
Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy  
in Urban Studies

at

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

May 2018

## **ABSTRACT**

SHELTERING OPPORTUNITY: CITY PLANNING AND HOUSING IN CHICAGO, 1909-1941

by

Kari Smith

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2018  
Under the Supervision of Professor Joel Rast

City planning in the United States has undergone continuous evolution; the profession has struggled to produce solutions that match the caliber of its ambitions while keeping up with the ever-changing city. Furthermore, at times special interests have co-opted city planning, utilizing and constraining the profession to meet those interests – often focused on increasing property values while neglecting other social needs, not least of which is the provision of adequate housing. This dissertation aims to contribute to a better understanding of how the definition and scope of city planning changes to include or exclude social issues by examining the relationship between city planning and housing in Chicago from 1909 to 1941 through the lens of the Chicago Plan Commission.

This research argues that the motivation to change alone – particularly from peripheral movements like that of housing – is not sufficient; in the absence of the need or opportunity to change, the status quo is likely to persist. When the luxury of maintaining the status quo is removed, the likelihood of change increases significantly. We also see that who and what are involved in the initial development of city planning has long-term consequences. What the scope of city planning includes is largely dependent upon those initial players – in the case of Chicago, the city’s elite business interests. This research

argues that those actors were able to establish city planning along narrow lines, limited to their understanding and perspective on what city planning could and should be, lines that were deeply reinforced and difficult if not impossible to shift.

This research also argues that, when the opportunity for change emerges, who is present and prepared to make demands on city planning is important, as they can successfully influence its shape and scope – for early planning in Chicago, this came in the form of the Metropolitan Housing Council. Finally, this dissertation asserts that there is value in more closely examining change and stasis via the lens of the city plan commission, a constant entity in city planning whose role and function can serve as an indicator of the state of city planning.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	iv
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS .....	vi
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	vii
I. INTRODUCTION .....	1
II. LITERATURE REVIEW .....	7
CITY BEAUTIFUL AND THE NEGLECT OF HOUSING .....	7
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CITY PLANNING AND HOUSING .....	12
An Early Divorce .....	12
Housing as a Tool or Objective of City Planning.....	16
A Static Relationship, Absent of Change .....	18
CITY PLANNING IN CHICAGO AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO HOUSING.....	22
Change in City Planning in Chicago .....	23
City Planning and Housing in Chicago.....	28
References to the Metropolitan Housing Council.....	34
THE CITY PLAN COMMISSION.....	37
As an Indicator of Planning’s Emergence, Growth, and Shortcomings.....	37
As a Stepping Stone to and Promoter of Municipal Planning.....	40
THE ARGUMENT OF THE DISSERTATION .....	41
SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY.....	44
III. NO TIME FOR HOUSING.....	49
INTRODUCTION .....	49
THE CITY BEAUTIFUL MOVEMENT AND THE WORLD’S COLUMBIAN EXPOSITION .....	51
KEEPING THE MOMENTUM GOING .....	56
Political Context: Chicago’s Machine Politics.....	57
The Comprehensive Plan as a New Solution.....	61
Daniel Burnham’s Plan of Chicago .....	61
IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN: THE CHICAGO PLAN COMMISSION .....	68
Membership.....	70
Charles Wacker .....	73
Walter Moody .....	75
The Chicago Plan Commission’s Authority and Scope .....	80
FIRST STEPS: STREETS, HIGHWAYS, AND PARKS .....	82
Projects Undertaken from 1909 to 1926 .....	83
Funding the Plan: Allocations, Assessments, and Bond Issues.....	96
THE DEATH OF MOODY AND RESIGNATION OF WACKER.....	101
CONCLUSION .....	103

IV. HOUSING MUST BE IMPROVED...BUT SOMEBODY ELSE SHOULD DO IT.....	106
INTRODUCTION .....	106
City Planning’s Elusive ‘Humanitarian Side’ .....	108
THE HOUSING MOVEMENT .....	114
Chicago’s Housing Movement.....	116
The National Division Between City Planning and Housing.....	122
The Chicago Plan Commission After Wacker and Moody, 1926-1934 .....	125
Projects Undertaken.....	126
The Waning Significance of the Chicago Plan Commission.....	130
From No Housing to All Housing .....	134
CONCLUSION .....	139
V. HOUSING NEEDS PLANNING...BUT DOES PLANNING NEED HOUSING? .....	141
INTRODUCTION .....	141
THE CHICAGO PLAN COMMISSION .....	143
Changing Leadership and an Identity Crisis .....	145
THE METROPOLITAN HOUSING COUNCIL.....	150
Housing Needs Planning... ..	153
Efforts to Revive the Chicago Plan Commission.....	154
Formally Merging City Planning and Housing .....	155
The Land Use Survey .....	156
Remaking the Chicago Plan Commission .....	161
THE “NEW CHICAGO PLAN COMMISSION” .....	168
A New Kind of Planning .....	170
The Neighborhood as Base Unit .....	170
Planning as a Process, Not a Product.....	175
Public Participation.....	178
...BUT DOES PLANNING NEED HOUSING? .....	180
CONCLUSION .....	184
VI. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS.....	190
MAIN FINDINGS .....	192
What Shapes City Planning?.....	193
Motivation Without Opportunity.....	194
Motivation With Opportunity.....	197
The Impact and Potential Impact of Outside Groups.....	199
The Commercial Club.....	200
The Metropolitan Housing Council .....	201
The Role of the Plan Commission.....	203
CONCLUSIONS.....	204
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	206
Archival Collections .....	206
Secondary Sources .....	206
CURRICULUM VITAE .....	213

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

MHC Metropolitan Housing Council

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

In addition to recognizing the contribution of my advisor, Dr. Joel Rast, I would like to thank the members of my dissertation committee for their time and support: Dr. Margo Anderson, Dr. Marc Levine, and Dr. Joe Rodriguez.



## I. INTRODUCTION

Modern city planning in the United States has been an established function – primarily in the public sector – for over a century. Throughout its lifespan, city planning has struggled to clearly articulate and achieve its aims, a struggle that has been exacerbated by the complexity and ever-changing nature of cities. One relatively consistent goal of city planning is that of comprehensiveness, a goal that generally translates into identifying and addressing the myriad of urban problems in a way that is beneficial to all of a given city's inhabitants. It was the flood of problems that mid- to late-19<sup>th</sup> century cities were facing – overcrowding due to unprecedented population growth, congestion of streets and residential districts, inadequate housing in terms of quality and quantity, poverty, and so forth – that inspired efforts to alleviate and prevent such problems, efforts that would ultimately produce the profession and discipline of city planning.

Despite its ambitions to comprehensively improve cities and guide their development in ways that prevented future problems, city planning has often fallen short of its aims. The result has been regular change and evolution in the profession; at some times city planning has drifted from its stated objectives and at other times there have been intentional efforts to redirect city planning in new or previously intended directions. This dissertation will look at one case of change and lack of change in city planning, examining how and under what circumstances change does and does not occur.

Chicago in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries was experiencing all of the challenges named above and, as in most other American cities, city planning emerged in response. As with the profession as a whole, city planning in Chicago promised comprehensive solutions to urban problems that would benefit and improve the lives of all

of Chicago's citizens. In reality however, city planning in Chicago in its first decades primarily focused on improvements to the streets and public spaces in the downtown area that benefited business and commerce while neglecting other social issues, most notably the deteriorating and insufficient housing stock. Between the publication of Chicago's first comprehensive plan in 1909 – Daniel H. Burnham's Plan of Chicago – and the U.S.'s involvement in World War II, city planning in Chicago would shift from a precise focus on business-centric improvements to one that incorporated housing after two decades of strict adherence to the former approach and strong resistance to the latter.

As such, city planning in Chicago in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and its relationship with housing offers a prime case for examining how change does and does not occur in city planning. Furthermore, the evolution of city planning in Chicago is examined via the lens of the city plan commission, an entity which has been consistently present in city planning in the United States, but which has been largely overlooked as having something to offer in terms of understanding how city planning functions as an institution.

The three empirical chapters of this dissertation look at city planning in Chicago from 1909 to 1941. In the first of these chapters, we see how the scope of city planning was shaped and influenced by the business interests of the city, largely via the Commercial Club, and how planning's leadership maintained a rigid focus on projects that favored commerce while strictly excluding housing. We see how the momentum of what was known as the City Beautiful movement – manifest in the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition and the subsequent Plan of Chicago – and the absence of municipal efforts to initiate and develop city planning allowed the Commercial Club to freely shape city planning based on its priorities and interests.

The chapter then illustrates how the Commercial Club carried its vision for Chicago as a city of commercial supremacy into reality through the construction and creation of the Chicago Plan Commission, which was sanctioned by the mayor and City Council and mandated to study and implement the Plan of Chicago. We will see how the Chicago Plan Commission proceeded to do just this through projects that focused on improving streets and public spaces. This work was supplemented by a public education campaign that sought to build public sentiment and establish the commission as an entity working for all of the people, not just the business interests upon which its mandate was solidly based. We also learn here that, though the Plan of Chicago and the Chicago Plan Commission received overwhelming praise for their innovation and unprecedented gains in city planning, there was growing criticism of their neglect of more pressing social issues, particularly the lack of quality housing. Nevertheless, the Chicago Plan Commission reiterated and reinforced its narrow focus on the Plan of Chicago, largely dismissing calls to engage with other more social issues.

In the second empirical chapter, we learn about the growing housing movement in Chicago and the efforts to address slum conditions despite housing's exclusion from city planning. We see here that the persistence of housing issues did not inspire a broadening of city planning's scope; in fact, through to the late 1920s, the projects of the Chicago Plan Commission became more rather than less focused on transportation-related work that favored commercial operations in the downtown area. We also see in this chapter that, nearing the end of the 1920s, the prescribed focus of the Chicago Plan Commission began to have negative consequences as the effects of the Great Depression became increasingly dire. The collapse of the municipal bond market and the commission's past preoccupation

with solely public improvement projects resulted in its waning significance as funds for such projects disappeared. The commission convened less and less, membership dwindled, municipal appropriations diminished, and public lectures all but ceased.

The end of the second empirical chapter introduces a significant change in the work of the commission when it took on a study of blighted housing conditions in 1933, despite decades of firmly excluding housing from its repertoire. This action signals the initial impact that the federal government's interventionist response to the Great Depression and the private sector's failure to make headway on housing concerns would have on city planning in Chicago.

The third and final empirical chapter carries us forward from the commission's sudden engagement in housing, exploring whether and how this would result in a substantial change in the scope of city planning and its relationship with housing. This chapter demonstrates that, despite the initial responsiveness of city planning to the new opportunity to engage with housing via the availability of financial resources from the federal government, the Chicago Plan Commission would continue to falter, struggle to maintain its significance, and resist the inclusion of housing for some years yet. Nevertheless, these changing conditions stimulated a city planning identity crisis, which would ultimately demand a reevaluation of the profession and create an unprecedented opportunity to change its definition and scope.

As we will see in this final empirical chapter, key to this opportunity to ultimately realizing a significant change in city planning and its relationship to housing was the

Metropolitan Housing Council (MHC),<sup>1</sup> created in 1934 to develop a housing plan for the city of Chicago. Recognizing that its success depended upon the functioning of the Chicago Plan Commission and housing's inclusion in city planning, we will see that MHC set on several ventures to strengthen city planning and unite it with housing. After several years of effort, many of which were unsuccessful, MHC was successful in passing an ordinance in the late 1930s that replaced the old Chicago Plan Commission with a new, smaller commission and large City Plan Advisory Board. Furthermore, housing became an official mandate of the commission, as the ordinance required it to work with the Chicago Housing Authority to identify locations for housing projects.

The opportunity to influence city planning in the 1930s allowed MHC to redefine the nature and scope of the profession in other ways as well. This included the adoption of a more genuinely comprehensive view, a shift to a more front-end focus on data collection and plan development as opposed to the implementation of an existing plan, and a move to approach city planning via the neighborhood unit, working to understand smaller subsections of the city as unique entities with their own resources and challenges. City planning had been successfully revitalized and recreated. Despite these achievements, the future trajectory of city planning and housing, particularly whether their new relationship would move in the direction MHC envisioned, was not yet clear. The third empirical chapter concludes with a summary of how city planning evolved following its reorganization and reshaping in 1939 and into the 1940s.

---

<sup>1</sup> The Metropolitan Housing Council is the name this entity held when it was first created. It has since taken the names Metropolitan Housing and Planning Council and Metropolitan Planning Council, the latter of which it held at the time of writing this dissertation. The title Metropolitan Housing Council will be used in this dissertation, referring to the entity under each of its three names.

The main findings of this research provide us with insight regarding when and under what conditions change in city planning is more or less likely to occur. This research argues that the motivation to change city planning alone – particularly from peripheral movements like that of housing – was not sufficient; in the absence of a need or impetus to change, the status quo is likely to persist. When the luxury of maintaining the status quo is removed – for example, when a formerly reliable financing source is removed – the likelihood of change increases significantly.

Also, we see that who and what are involved in the initial development of city planning as an institution have long-term consequences. What the scope of city planning would include was largely dependent upon those initial players – in the case of Chicago, the Commercial Club and the city’s elite. This research argues that those actors were able to establish city planning along very particular lines, limited to their understanding and perspective on what city planning could and should be, lines that were deeply reinforced and difficult if not impossible to shift. In addition, this research argues that, in moments of opportunity to change, who is present and prepared to make demands on city planning is important, as they can successfully influence its shape and scope – for early planning in Chicago, this came in the form of MHC. Finally, this dissertation asserts that there is value in more closely examining change and stasis via the lens of the city plan commission, as it is a constant entity in city planning whose role and function can serve as an indicator of the state of city planning overall.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### CITY BEAUTIFUL AND THE NEGLECT OF HOUSING

It is important to consider the historical context during which city planning emerged in Chicago and the United States. The presence of one trend has particular significance, that of the City Beautiful movement. This movement would prove to have a notable influence on those engaged in the early city planning movement; consequently, several key perspectives driving the City Beautiful movement would become incorporated into city planning and significantly influence its trajectory.

The City Beautiful movement came to prominence in the last years of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth. The common thread among City Beautiful proponents was a focus on beauty and aesthetics, largely applied to perspectives on how cities should be designed. According to Jon Peterson, City Beautiful “sought to upgrade the appearance of the nation’s towns and cities by drawing eclectically from virtually the entire national stock of urban aesthetic ideas.”<sup>2</sup> Neoclassical architecture in Europe also played a role in the development of City Beautiful, not least of which was the work of Baron Haussmann via his famed remaking of Paris, which was admired by burgeoning planners in the United States.<sup>3</sup>

It was within this context that city planning was born, and City Beautiful influenced the new profession, leading to a preoccupation with aesthetics and neglect of more

---

<sup>2</sup> Jon Peterson, *The Birth of City Planning in the United States, 1840-1917* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 98.

<sup>3</sup> Richard LeGates and Frederic Stout, “Editor’s Introduction,” in *Early Urban Planning Volume I: Selected Essays*, ed. Richard LeGates and Frederic Stout, (London and New York: Routledge/Thoemmes Press, 1998), xv; Peterson, “The City Beautiful Movement: Forgotten Origins and Lost Meanings,” in *Introduction to Planning History in the United States*, ed. Donald A. Krueckeberg, (New Brunswick, New Jersey: The Center for Urban Policy Research at Rutgers University, 1983), 41.

complex social issues such as housing, poverty, and race. Critics of City Beautiful labeled it as “excessively concerned with monumentality, empty aesthetics, grand effects for the well-to-do, and general impracticality.”<sup>4</sup> Benjamin Marsh, an early advocate for including housing and other social causes within the scope of city planning, concurred with the sentiment that City Beautiful was overly concerned with beauty and that the poor would not benefit from its accomplishments. But City Beautiful would ultimately overcome its critics, evident in city planning’s prioritization of public improvements and inattention to housing. City Beautiful would inspire the design of the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition (the Fair), which was hosted by Chicago to commemorate Columbus’ discovery of the New World, and seen by many as the beginning of modern city planning in the United States.

John Reps, in his extensive 1965 account of American city planning, *The Making of Urban America*, identifies the time period beginning with the Fair to the First World War – a period that captures the revitalization of L’Enfant’s plan for Washington, D.C. and Daniel Burnham’s 1909 Plan of Chicago – as a period of growth, evolution, and change in city planning.<sup>5</sup> Reps states that it was the influence of the Fair, the ripple effect that it had, the inspiration that it triggered, that would shape and mold city planning in its wake:

The Chicago Fair of 1893...led to a new direction in American city planning. The sight of the gleaming white buildings disposed symmetrically around the formal court of honor, with their domes and columns echoing the classic buildings of antiquity, impressed every visitor...in comparison with the dingy industrial cities of late nineteenth-century America, the Fair seemed a vision of some earthly paradise that might yet be created in the coming era.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> William H. Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 285-286.

<sup>5</sup> John W. Reps, *The Making of Urban America: A History of City Planning in the United States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 497.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 497-498.



The attention and the impact that the Fair would have on people's visions of what a city could and should be were extensive. While the overwhelming view was one of acclaim and admiration for the geniuses behind its design, there was some criticism regarding the view that the image of the Fair would send urban planning down a deliberate path based on outdated Classic and Renaissance architecture and imagery. Nevertheless, such criticism was easily drowned out by enthusiasm and support. The thought that, despite its beauty and grandiosity, the "White City" of the Fair was not a real city and that it had the luxury to exclude and overlook persistent and serious urban challenges did not diminish its momentum or the impact that it would have on city planning.<sup>7</sup>

Reps also dove into the influence that L'Enfant's plan for Washington, D.C. had on the shape and trajectory of city planning, particularly its role as the inspiration for the City Beautiful movement, the "preoccupation with the appearance of the city and the concentration of improvement efforts on the erection of a few monumental structures of classical design" while "pressing social issues and economic ills" were overlooked.<sup>8</sup> Similar to the Fair, the occurrence of the re-planning of Washington, D.C. produced a ripple effect of inspiration:

A wave of enthusiasm for civic planning and beautification swept the country, and soon groups of business men and civic leaders in major cities began to discuss the possibilities of preparing such a plan for their own communities.<sup>9</sup>

As with the 'White City,' Reps claims that there was a narrowness and exclusionary bent to the model that cities attempted to replicate following the implementation of the

---

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 501-502.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 262, 524.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 514.

L'Enfant plan. Entranced with the boldness of the planners' visions, not much concern was given for how their plans would be implemented:

...when private business or civic betterment groups underwrote the costs of early city plans they were following a long tradition in American municipal affairs...the plans produced under such sponsorship were almost always unrealistic...<sup>10</sup>

Reps also touches on patterns of action and reaction that often spun American city planning off particular directions:

..."The City Beautiful Movement" [with its] preoccupation with the appearance of the city and the concentration of improvement efforts on the erection of a few monumental structures of classical design...these early planners overlooked more pressing social and economic ills, as well as other physical inadequacies of the city.<sup>11</sup>

Robert Walker's *The Planning Function in Urban Government* states that city planning was delivered in its initial years mostly from the hands of consultants working independently, with the city plans they created being funded by either "civic improvement organizations or...for official city planning commissions."<sup>12</sup> One of the most famous of these commissioned plans was the Plan of Chicago (the Plan),<sup>13</sup> whose benefactor was the Commercial Club of Chicago. Though the Plan does mention the consequences that the slums and their congestion were having on the city, particularly on its "moral and physical health,"<sup>14</sup> the reference to the problem of poor housing and the need to solve it is perfunctory. The Plan did not provide any specific plans or projects related to housing, but merely identified it as a serious dilemma to be solved.

---

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 524.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Averill Walker, *The Planning Function in Urban Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1941), 17.

<sup>13</sup> Herein, the terms Plan of Chicago and the Plan will be used interchangeably to refer to Daniel H. Burnham's Plan of Chicago.

<sup>14</sup> Walker, *The Planning Function in Urban Government*, 17-19.

Corbin Sies and Silver, in their introduction to the 1996 volume *Planning the Twentieth-Century American City*, emphasize the significance of the City Beautiful movement, stating that it “established the basic structure of modern city planning.”<sup>15</sup> They cite Mel Scott’s criticism of City Beautiful, who argued that it “was an intellectually shallow attempt to impose European classicism on ugly American cities” and “an elitist fad.”<sup>16</sup> Behind the City Beautiful movement was an underlying philosophy that “an all-knowing expert” could act on behalf of the citizenry at large and the public interest and that they, by manipulating the spatial environment, could “mold to positive ends people’s attitudes and behaviors.”<sup>17</sup> Again citing Scott, the editors also note that the early planners largely came from a finite group of professions – landscape architecture, engineering, architecture, real estate, academia, and civic reform.<sup>18</sup>

Mel Scott, in *American City Planning Since 1890*, argues that those that fell within the same professional and class-based realm as the planners – businessmen and men of wealth and influence – shifted planning towards becoming more “scientific.” This excitement for developing new scientific efforts as well as advancing and institutionalizing their

---

<sup>15</sup> Mary Corbin Sies and Christopher Silver, “Introduction: The History of Planning History,” in *Planning the Twentieth-Century American City*, ed. Mary Corbin Sies and Christopher Silver (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 16.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 18-19.

<sup>17</sup> Jon Peterson, “Frederick Law Olmsted Sr. and Frederick Law Olmsted Jr.: The Visionary and the Professional,” in *Planning the Twentieth-Century American City*, ed. Corbin Sies and Silver, 53; Joan E. Draper, “The Art and Science of Park Planning in the United States: Chicago’s Small Parks, 1902 to 1905,” in *Planning the Twentieth-Century American City*, ed. Corbin Sies and Silver, 117.

<sup>18</sup> Corbin Sies and Silver, *Planning the Twentieth-Century American City*, 3.

profession also, according to Scott, drew city planning even further away from more social concerns such as housing.<sup>19</sup>

## **THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CITY PLANNING AND HOUSING**

As noted, city planning in its early decades largely rejected or overlooked the housing issue. The focus of early planning was primarily on parks, roadways, and grand civic spaces. Robert Walker, in his 1941 study of city planning, suggested that it was a preoccupation with property values that led to protestation from private property owners upon any attempt by planners to document or explore the extent of the housing issue. As a result, such issues were left unacknowledged; for example, it was rare for a city planning entity to put the label of ‘slum’ on any of its neighborhoods, despite slum housing conditions being common in early 20<sup>th</sup> century urban America.<sup>20</sup>

### **An Early Divorce**

Many city planning historians have documented the occasion when planning and housing, two arenas that were previously conjoined, parted ways. Scholars, including Peter Marcuse, identify the earliest National Conferences on City Planning as the stage upon which the “divorce” between the two fields took place.<sup>21</sup> Both the housing movement and the city planning movement were forming organizationally and institutionally during this

---

<sup>19</sup> Mel Scott, *American City Planning Since 1890: A History Commemorating the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the American Institute of Planners* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 117-118.

<sup>20</sup> Walker, *The Planning Function in Urban Government*, 27, *supra* note 26, 29-30.

<sup>21</sup> Peter Marcuse, “Housing in Early City Planning,” *Journal of Urban History* 6, no. 3 (Feb. 1980): 153, 163.

time, and the first national conference within which city planning played a part was one that had a significant presence of housing reformers and discussion:

At first, the National Conferences on City Planning and the National Housing Association had a very heavy overlap of membership and shared very similar concerns. The same individuals read papers at both meetings, and they pressed for similar types of public action.<sup>22</sup>

According to Marcuse, Benjamin Marsh, the key representative of the housing focus at these conferences, was present at the first National Conference on City Planning and spoke of the need for planners to study and consider housing conditions as well as develop potential solutions. Other planners, including John Nolan, also declared the need for planners and city plans to address housing, though Marcuse argues that this referred to middle class housing, not the pressing lower class housing and slum conditions that were truly plaguing America's growing cities. The reality of this interest in only middle class housing became more apparent at the national conference in 1910, when the landscape architects and architects came to "dominate" the sessions, pushing those housing reformers interested in lower class and slum housing out.<sup>23</sup>

By 1911, the National Housing Association was no longer an equal participant in the National Conference on City Planning and, in fact, had begun to hold its own conferences. This division would only grow: "In 1917, when the American City Planning Institute was officially founded, only two of its fifty-two charter members could be listed as "housers.""<sup>24</sup>

Jon Peterson, in *The Birth of City Planning in the United States, 1840-1917*, argues that the split between housing and planning was deliberately caused via a political power

---

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 163-164.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

play by Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. against Benjamin Marsh beginning at the first National Conference on City Planning in 1909.<sup>25</sup> Marsh was an outspoken man, passionate about social issues and interested in an agenda that focused on prioritizing the alleviation of congestion and its many ills in urban residential quarters. Many saw Marsh as too impassioned, not least of which was Olmsted, Jr. The latter saw that Marsh had the potential to continue building momentum and set city planning's trajectory along such social issue-based lines. He saw a threat in Marsh's potential capacity for taking over the national conferences from then on.<sup>26</sup>

Olmsted, Jr. also feared that Marsh and his counterparts would soon begin to influence public opinion, so he set out to redirect city planning and the national conferences in a direction he saw as more fit for effective urban planning, a direction that separated city beautification and the engineers and architects from social welfare and the social progressives. He would be successful in this, and redirected the 1910 national conference to be more in line with his preferred vision for city planning, crowding out those that advocated for relief from congestion with more representation from technical fields like engineering and architecture. More importantly, his presence counterbalanced those interested in social welfare and congestion on the executive committee organizing the conferences. Olmsted, Jr. went further by joining a subcommittee whose task it was to set the program for the second national conference to be held in 1910, a committee that Marsh was not included in, meaning that Olmsted, Jr. could influence the direction without needing to work against Marsh's congestion agenda.<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> Jon Peterson, *The Birth of City Planning in the United States*, 247.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 247-250.

By the second national conference, Olmsted, Jr. had selected the organizing staff and gave the keynote address, allowing him to further set the agenda and trajectory of city planning.<sup>28</sup> In that keynote, he declared that there was an opportunity to move towards “the physical shaping of city, not...reform advocacy.”<sup>29</sup> This shifted the perspective to one in which city planning and housing were no longer part of a united movement, but rather two separate movements that, on occasion, merely interfaced with each other.<sup>30</sup>

Gordon E. Cherry, in his 1980 *Shaping an Urban World*, also references the presence of housing at the first national conference on city planning, then being organized by Benjamin Marsh. During that first conference, the participants hailed from both housing and city planning, with the two groups co-mingling naturally and discussing topics and solutions that were largely synonymous. “The 1909 National Conference on City Planning focused on social problems, housing being prime among them.”<sup>31</sup> Cherry presents the same history as many others, contrasting the first conference in 1909 with those of 1910 and 1911; by 1911, housing and city planning had gone their separate ways.<sup>32</sup>

Cherry provides an example of the rigidity being formed in the now-dominant view of city planning by describing George B. Ford, an early city planner and conference attendee. At the first national conference, Ford held the position that:

Specific facts had to be collected...methods of analyzing that data formed the subject matter of particular sub-categories of scientific city planning, or could be supplied by related disciplines, e.g. highway engineering; and such analysis would lead, in his classic phrase, to the ‘one, and only one, logical and convincing solution of the problems involved.’”<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 251.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 255.

<sup>31</sup> Gordon E. Cherry (Ed.), *Shaping an Urban World* (London: Mansell, 1980), 31.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 29-30.

Ford was attempting to make the planning and management of cities like the running of a business, which ultimately resulted in “the concern for improving housing conditions” being “dropped to the wayside.”<sup>34</sup>

These scholars, while acknowledging the split between city planning and housing, do not look beyond this initial divorce to determine how the relationship between the two fields changed or remained the same over time.

### **Housing as a Tool or Objective of City Planning**

Michael Oxley, in his text *Economics, Planning and Housing*, presents housing within the context of planning systems, listing it as one of planning’s objectives:

Planning systems are used by governments to promote policy objectives. These objectives include securing sufficient quantities of new housing and ensuring that the location of this housing is appropriate...Planning may also be expected to have some effect in making housing more ‘affordable’ for certain sections of the population.<sup>35</sup>

In Oxley’s view, housing was a factor to be managed within city planning, not an issue or institution in its own right with which planning had a relationship. Housing was a challenge faced by governments, one which governments have an interest in overcoming. Planning and “the instruments of planning policy” offer a toolbox with which governments can craft solutions to various housing problems.<sup>36</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>35</sup> Michael Oxley, *Economics, Planning and Housing* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 3.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 5.



Gertrude Sipperly Fish, editor of the 1979 text *The Story of Housing*, presents housing's relationship with city planning as one wherein the latter is part of larger system that delivers policies that favor homeowners and property owners. This views housing as a component of the urban system that city planning can affect in particular ways, either intentionally or unintentionally. Within *The Story of Housing*, Steven E. Andrachek's chapter "Housing in the United States: 1890-1929" references legislation and other regulations that were created via attempts to ameliorate housing issues. He also documents the increasing number of surveys that were conducted by governments and agencies to better assess the housing situation. These references are presented within the context of a larger comprehensive city planning system, not as part of a freestanding housing movement. Andrachek discusses how zoning interfaced with housing when the former first emerged in New York City in 1916 and in other cities shortly thereafter. He highlights the ease with which zoning legislation passed and was enacted when compared to the struggles of those in the housing movement to achieve similar legislative gains. Ultimately, zoning supported the upper and middle classes in terms of protecting housing values and often stigmatized low-income housing. Andrachek labels zoning as "faddish" and incapable of encompassing or addressing the complexity of urban housing issues.<sup>37</sup>

K. Kay Stewart, in her chapter in the same text titled "Twentieth Century Housing Design from an Ecological Perspective," presents zoning in a similar manner. Stewart states that zoning's original interest was more directly connected to housing – alleviating congestion, reducing overcrowding, and providing adequate light and air in residences –

---

<sup>37</sup> Steven E. Andrachek, "Housing in the United States: 1890-1929," in *The Story of Housing*, ed. Gertrude Sipperly Fish (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1979), 147, 153-154, 173-174.

but that it quickly moved towards objectives related to property use. Stewart also invokes the Garden City Movement and its introduction of planned residential communities to the United States. This reference does not, however, touch upon the interface between the city planning and housing movements, but is rather presented as a trend within city planning that merely had an effect on home construction and architecture.<sup>38</sup>

Jon Peterson touches on planning's involvement with the federal government's wartime housing construction efforts; but praise goes only to the high quality of the architecture, with no mention of any change in the relationship between housing and city planning.<sup>39</sup>

### **A Static Relationship, Absent of Change**

Roy Lubove, in *The Urban Community: Housing and Planning in the Progressive Era*, lays out the various movements that emerged during the Progressive Era, of which housing and city planning are two that lay alongside zoning, park development, conservation, the City Beautiful movement, and the concept of the Garden City. He illustrates the shared objectives of housing reformers and those more closely connected to urban planning such as landscape architects. Both the housers and the landscape architects strove to change the physical environment as a means to achieving the ends of improved social conditions. They

---

<sup>38</sup> K. Kay Stewart, "Twentieth Century Housing Design from an Ecological Perspective," in *The Story of Housing*, ed. Gertrude Sipperly Fish (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1979), pg 460-463.

<sup>39</sup> Peterson, *The Birth of City Planning in the United States*, 319-320.

both also shared the view that private interests would have to be set aside in the public interest if social change was to occur.<sup>40</sup>

The difference between the two fields, according to Lubove, was in housing's link to and prioritization of public health issues and the view that sanitary standards should come before open space issues. The evolving field of public health largely influenced housing during this time; housing reformers adopted the germ theory approach and, as a result, the housing movement was in part being carried forward by public health and away from city planning. Lubove also states that it was economics that kept housing and the architects that largely favored city planning and design separate. Designing low-cost housing, which was needed to solve many housing issues, was not appealing to architects.<sup>41</sup>

John Bauman, in his 2001 article "Community Building versus Housing Reform: Roy Lubove and the History of Housing Reform in the United States," illustrates that some scholars that delved into housing, including Lubove, did not touch upon the changing relationship between city planning and housing. According to Bauman, Lubove's presentations of the successes and failures of both city planning and housing generally came in three forms: 1) blanket statements about the relationship between the two fields in a manner that suggests the relationship is static and never changes, 2) praise or condemnation of housing projects completed by planners, often comparing them to past projects and assessing them as either an improvement or not, and 3) descriptions of a change in planning's approach to housing (i.e., an increase in standards and quality while building wartime housing communities) absent any reference to the housing movement's

---

<sup>40</sup> Roy Lubove, *The Urban Community: Housing and Planning in the Progressive Era* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1967), 2.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 6-8.

contribution to the development of any such standards. Lubove, like others, notes the changing relationship between the government and housing, but not city planning in particular and not in a way that suggests that housing is a movement or institution in its own right.<sup>42</sup>

Jon Peterson also does not speak to any changes in the relationship between city planning and housing after the 1910 division. He does argue that the split was reinforced at the federal level in the late 1930s with the US Housing Act. In speaking to the government's efforts via the act to construct housing units, he states that:

...drawbacks for comprehensive planning became apparent. While...housing measures excited planners, neither made approval by local city planning authorities a prerequisite to action, although some states would do so. Thus, the old split between planning and housing, itself rooted in the mentality of Progressive Era reform and its self-imposed divisions of labor, found new, federalized expression.<sup>43</sup>

Finally, Peterson references additional legislation that engaged both city planning and housing: the National Housing Acts of 1949 and 1954. The first of these generated the creation of general plans in cities, which were required to access federal funds for urban renewal and slum clearance. The second required both a "workable program" and a comprehensive plan. Both aimed at rebuilding America's downtowns following World War II. Peterson delves into the outcome that these two acts generated: an "upsurge in the production of comprehensive plans," most of which were disconnected from the piecemeal projects that resulted. What Peterson does not do here is explore whether or how such legislation that drew together housing and city planning changed the relationship between

---

<sup>42</sup> John F. Bauman, "Community Building versus Housing Reform: Roy Lubove and the History of Housing Reform in the United States," *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 68, no. 3 (Summer 2001): 293-313.

<sup>43</sup> Peterson, *The Birth of City Planning in the United States*, 323.

the two fields, nor did he delve into whether or how the laws influenced the scope or identity of city planning.<sup>44</sup>

Some scholars note that, when city planning did engage in housing, it often worsened rather than alleviated problems. Cherry states that the failure to resolve housing issues in American cities was due in part to housing reform and city planning being separated. City planning prioritized real estate values over aiding urban citizens living in sub-standard housing. What demand there was for some form of comprehensive planning related to housing was connected to public health concerns such as epidemics and the influx of immigrants. As public health issues were resolved and immigrants were increasingly Americanized, the pressure for city planning to engage in housing was largely removed.<sup>45</sup>

Many scholars also note that the separation between city planning and housing, so prevalent in the United States, was distinct from city or town planning in Europe. Britain is often used as a prime example. As Cherry accounts, in Britain:

The first two Planning Acts (1909, 1919) were composite pieces of legislation in which housing figured first in the title. Not till 1925 was there a Town Planning Act in its own right, and that was only a consolidating measure.<sup>46</sup>

The formal link between city planning and housing in Britain would go on to affect how land and space in the country were organized and managed. Furthermore, it established the provision of adequate housing and affordable rents to the working class as a focus. Having that relationship produced solutions that engaged both fields when a housing crisis was experienced. This contrasts with how city planning took shape in the US; at the same

---

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 326.

<sup>45</sup> Cherry, *Shaping an Urban World*, 4.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

time that Britain was institutionalizing the relationship between city planning and housing through its first Planning Act in 1909, Frederick Olmsted, Jr. was working against Benjamin Marsh to strategically exclude housing and other social issues from the scope of city planning.<sup>47</sup>

Cherry argues that both zoning, a significant tool of city planning that emerged in the early 1900s, and regional planning also failed to address housing in effective ways. There was a logical link between the objectives of city planning, regional planning, zoning, and the problems of housing and the former three appeared primed to focus on the latter. Despite this, according to Cherry:

...contrary to all expectations, neither the city planning movement as it moved from intellectual crusade to practical influence, nor zoning, nor the Regional Plan of New York, contributed much to the solution of the housing problem of the ill-housed, and arguably each actually worsened it.<sup>48</sup>

Cherry tells us that it was not until the Great Depression that city planning engaged in housing and, even then, it was largely a byproduct of efforts to increase employment.<sup>49</sup>

## **CITY PLANNING IN CHICAGO AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO HOUSING**

One of the most ubiquitous and extensively documented events in city planning history scholarship is the World's Columbian Exposition (the Fair), which was hosted by Chicago in 1893. Much of the literature on the birth of modern city planning in the United States includes the Fair in its narrative, often identifying this event as the official beginning of the profession and discipline or disputing that same claim, arguing that preceding events

---

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 4-5.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 25.

were equally if not more significant. Given that the Fair was held in Chicago, the Windy City is consequently included in a majority of accounts of the birth of American city planning, though the level of detail and contribution to understanding Chicago's particular brand of city planning varies extensively.

### **Change in City Planning in Chicago**

Marc A. Weiss and John T. Metzger's essay "Planning for Chicago: The Changing Politics of Metropolitan Growth and Neighborhood Development" in Robert Beauregard's *Atop the Urban Hierarchy* gives an account of planning in Chicago that is similar to those of city planning in general seen above. They tell us that industrial growth in the 1800s and 1900s created conditions that demanded solutions, and city planning was the response. Increases in population meant more people were demanding services and infrastructure, and existing resources were overwhelmed and inadequate. They present an initial period of city planning that emerged from these conditions and lasted until the Great Depression in the 1930s.<sup>50</sup>

Some scholars document changes in city planning's approach in Chicago, though often only for select periods and not comprehensively. For example, D. Bradford Hunt and Jon B. DeVries, in their 2013 text *Planning Chicago*, describe a shift in city planning's approach in Chicago that began in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. What they describe as "neighborhood conservation efforts" entailed a change in perspective from the "top-down, heavy-handed variety" of existing public housing projects and urban renewal to a focus on

---

<sup>50</sup> Marc A. Weiss and John T. Metzger, "Planning for Chicago: The Changing Politics for Metropolitan Growth and Neighborhood Development," in *Atop the Urban Hierarchy*, ed. Robert A. Beauregard (Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1989), 123.

neighborhoods that were struggling but not yet in blighted or slum conditions beginning in the 1950s. This approach had a neighborhood focus and included “housing code enforcement, infrastructure upgrades, spot clearance of slums, changing traffic patterns, and even cul-de-sacs in an effort to resist the lure of the suburbs.”<sup>51</sup> This new approach, according to Hunt and DeVries, was a response to the backlash against urban renewal as well as the negative effects of the Plan of Chicago project that pushed Ogden Avenue through the Lincoln Park community. Hunt and DeVries tell us that Chicago and Baltimore pioneered this new planning approach, the “conservation idea,” with the earliest action in Chicago attributed to the Chicago Plan Commission via their identification of a 56-square mile area in need of “conservation.” This suggests that the change in planning was a reaction to forming or changing public opinion – the negative response to urban renewal.<sup>52</sup>

Other scholars approach change in city planning in Chicago somewhat more broadly. Carl W. Condit, in his 1974 book *Chicago 1930-70: Building, Planning, and Urban Technology*, provides a synopsis of how planning in Chicago evolved over that forty-year period. His review of the history identifies various eras in city planning, such as the “Burnham phase” which lasted until 1925, the subsequent interest in regional planning, and the gradual move towards urban renewal. However, Condit does not delve into the mechanics of those shifts and how or why these changes in city planning’s approach occurred.<sup>53</sup>

---

<sup>51</sup> D. Bradford Hunt and Jon B. DeVries, *Planning Chicago* (Chicago: The American Planning Association, 2013), 99.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 99-100.

<sup>53</sup> Carl W. Condit, *Chicago 1930-70: Building, Planning, and Urban Technology* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1974), 270-271.



The Progressive Era is often cited as a distinct period of change in terms of increasing efforts to direct city development, which manifested in the emergence of city planning and the idea of the comprehensive city plan and the planning expert. Jason Cooke in “Compensated Taking: Zoning and the Politics of Building Height Regulation in Chicago, 1871-1923,” tells us that “[p]lanning historians agree that the early twentieth century progressive movement spawned a campaign toward modern, comprehensive planning.”<sup>54</sup> This era of planning, according to Cooke and others, was largely driven and significantly influenced by “local business interests...planning professionals and technocrats” with an agenda that included “shaping planning objectives” and “establishing authority and political influence.”<sup>55</sup> One of the first priorities in the implementation of Daniel H. Burnham’s Plan of Chicago, the “transformation of North Michigan Avenue into a corporate-commercial extension of the Loop,” is a prime example of what the priorities and nature of city planning were during this period.<sup>56</sup>

Another well-documented point of change in city planning in Chicago beyond the Fair was the publication of Daniel H. Burnham’s Plan of Chicago in 1909. Commissioned by the Commercial Club, the Plan of Chicago was unprecedented in its scope and influenced city planning in Chicago and nationwide. Robin F. Bachin, in her 2004 book *Building the South Side: Urban Space and Civic Culture in Chicago, 1890-1919*, states that the publication of the Plan of Chicago changed the local government’s role in the development of the city, as well as the relationship between business and government:

---

<sup>54</sup> Jason Cooke, “Compensated Taking: Zoning and the Politics of Building Height Regulation in Chicago, 1871-1923,” *Journal of Planning History* 12, no. 3 (2013): 209.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 221.

After Burnham presented the Plan, the mayor-appointed Chicago Plan Commission strengthened the role of government, which became the new locus of plans for city growth and economic development. Business and government would work together to promote commercial growth and to regulate and control urban development.<sup>57</sup>

Bachin argues that the Chicago Plan Commission was able to function independently and was not subject to public oversight. In addition, the commission reinforced the growing sentiment that city planners were the experts that were best able to make decisions on behalf of the citizens at large about how the city should grow and develop. Furthermore, the Chicago Plan Commission, with its over-representation of members from the architecture, landscape design, and engineering professions, had a narrow view of what city planning entailed. This perspective “equated science and expertise with efficient commercial development.”<sup>58</sup>

Chicago’s mayors, aldermen, and newspapers celebrated the publication of the Plan of Chicago and the subsequent creation of the Chicago Plan Commission. In addition to marking the inauguration of the implementation of many of the Plan’s proposed projects – all of which were focused on improving conditions for commercial development in the downtown area – the release of the Plan of Chicago kicked off an unprecedented and unmatched public education campaign. This effort, led by the Chicago Plan Commission and largely funded by the Commercial Club, aimed to win over the public’s support of the Plan’s projects. The campaign included public lectures and a textbook, *Wacker’s Manual of the*

---

<sup>57</sup> Robin Bachin, *Building the South Side: Urban Space and Civic Culture in Chicago, 1890-1919* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 192-196.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.

*Plan of Chicago*, the latter of which was utilized in civic education classes in Chicago's public schools.<sup>59</sup>

The Plan of Chicago is also reported to have set the stage for large-scale shifts in urban development in Chicago that were yet to come. Amy D. Finstein, in her article "From 'Cesspool' to 'The Greatest Improvement of Its Kind': Wacker Drive and the Recasting of the Chicago Riverfront, 1909-1926," notes that 1924 marked the initiation of the transformation of South Water Street into what is now called Wacker Drive. This project reinforced city planning's limited focus on the downtown Loop area and signaled an era focused on modernization and developing efficient traffic systems. According to Finstein:

More than a simple street, the construction of Wacker Drive manifested shifting attitudes about urban propriety, redefined boundaries for the city's business district, and asserted new visions for modern transportation and modern architecture.<sup>60</sup>

Finstein tells us that the Wacker Drive project symbolized the shift to an automobile- and downtown-centric approach to city planning. Samuel Kling provides a related argument in "Wide Boulevards, Narrow Visions: Burnham's Street System and the Chicago Plan Commission, 1909-1930." He tells us that the drastically increasing use of the automobile in the late 1920s caused the Chicago Plan Commission to build off of the Plan of

---

<sup>59</sup> Walter Moody, *Wacker's Manual of the Plan of Chicago: Municipal Economy* (Chicago: Henneberry Co., 1912), 197.

<sup>60</sup> Amy D. Finstein, "From 'Cesspool' to 'The Greatest Improvement of Its Kind': Wacker Drive and the Recasting of the Chicago Riverfront, 1909-1926," *Journal of Planning History* 14, no. 4 (2015): 288.

Chicago's proposed street system, eventually even focusing so much on traffic and streets that it lost much of the intended vision of the Plan.<sup>61</sup>

Another documentation of change in city planning that can be found in the literature is that which discusses the waxing and waning authority and legitimacy of city planning in Chicago. Robert C. Klove does just this in his 1948 "City Planning in Chicago: A Review." He tells us that "the vigor of city planning in Chicago waned," largely due to the profession's failure for its first three decades to base its work on sound "economic and social research."<sup>62</sup>

### **City Planning and Housing in Chicago**

One aspect of city planning relationship – or lack of relationship – with housing in Chicago that is well documented in the literature is housing's exclusion from the Plan of Chicago. Carl Smith, in his 2006 *The Plan of Chicago: Daniel Burnham and the Remaking of an American City*, notes that the exclusion of housing was the most ubiquitous criticism of the Plan. Behind this criticism was a larger concern that the Plan served primarily business and commercial interests, while ignoring the difficult realities of the average citizen.<sup>63</sup>

Bachin, in *Building the South Side*, documents criticisms that emerged in response to the Plan. Prominent housing reformers, such as Mary McDowell, noted the Plan's "lack of attention to the fundamental urban problems of poor housing, bad ventilation, and lack of

---

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 288, 290; Samuel Kling, "Wide Boulevards, Narrow Visions: Burnham's Street System and the Chicago Plan Commission, 1909-1930," *Journal of Planning History* 12, no. 3 (2013): 245.

<sup>62</sup> Robert C. Klove, "City Planning in Chicago: A Review," *Geographical Review* 38, no. 1 (Jan. 1948): 127.

<sup>63</sup> Carl Smith, *The Plan of Chicago: Daniel Burnham and the Remaking of the American City* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), 126-128.

access to nearby breathing spaces.”<sup>64</sup> Mary McDowell’s concern was that Daniel Burnham’s Plan of Chicago did nothing to improve the lives of the city’s poorest citizens. She questioned whether the Plan could truly garner civic pride while concurrently ignoring and squandering the opportunity to address the dreadful conditions of those living in neighborhoods like the Back of the Yards near Chicago’s stockyards. Bachin also tells us that the University of Chicago Settlement Board contested the Plan’s claim that it would make Chicago a great, world-class city, arguing that the city could not achieve greatness if the working class lacked “habitable comfortable dwellings.”<sup>65</sup>

Margaret Garb, in “Race, Housing, and Burnham’s Plan: Why is there no Housing in the 1909 *Plan of Chicago?*,” credits the exclusion of housing from the Plan of Chicago and the city planning movement to planners’ belief that the behavior of the city’s citizens could best be shaped via the manipulation of public space. According to Garb, the level of civic pride and moral behavior that city planning aimed to achieve could not be accomplished via the private residential home, in the view of city planners.<sup>66</sup>

Similar to city planning history’s thorough accounting of the divorce between city planning and housing at the national level in the early 1900s and the lack of examination of whether and how that relationship proceeded to change over time, the exclusion of housing from the Plan of Chicago is well documented while the subsequent evolution of the relationship is not.

Hunt and DeVries touch upon housing, but not specifically on its relationship with planning. They indicate that, in 1957, the creation of a new Department of City Planning

---

<sup>64</sup> Bachin, *Building the South Side*, 198.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Margaret Garb, “Race, Housing, and Burnham’s Plan: Why is There No Housing in the 1909 Plan of Chicago?,” *Journal of Planning History* 10, no. 2 (2011): 99.

with urban renewal funds spurred the development of housing in downtown Chicago, but again housing is presented here as a venture or project of city planning, not as a separate movement with which planning interfaced. They also mention the notorious public housing projects that have been widely seen as significant urban development failures that exacerbated rather than alleviated urban social issues. Consistent with other scholars, Hunt and DeVries present housing as an issue with which planning had previously attempted to address or to which there was pressure for city planning to provide solutions.<sup>67</sup>

As a result of pressure for fair housing from particular ordinances that were created following housing marches, Chicago's 1966 Comprehensive Plan included language regarding planning's intentions to follow the City Council's new fair housing policies. Specifics of whether and how entities or groups from the housing movement were involved in this inclusion are not provided. Hunt and DeVries also touch on how, in the late 1970s and 1980s, city planning worked with private developers on efforts to build the South Loop New Town, but this delves into planning's relationship with private real estate and not with the housing movement.<sup>68</sup>

Hunt and DeVries explore housing a bit more in depth in their treatment of how the Chicago School perspective – which sees cities as constantly evolving systems wherein the deterioration of neighborhoods can be the result of poor housing stock – influenced planning's approach to the city and neighborhoods. Hunt and DeVries argue that the Chicago School's "environmental determinism" fueled the housing movement's efforts towards slum clearance in an effort to eliminate other social ills in the 1920s and 1930s. Though they introduce the housing movement very directly here and state that this is an

---

<sup>67</sup> Hunt and DeVries, *Planning Chicago*, 6, 7, 30-31, 33-36.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 7, 42-43.

indication of the Chicago School's influence on city planning, how precisely the motivations of the housers to clear slums permeated planning institutions is not clear. The authors also attribute the Chicago School with, at least in part, justifying public housing and urban renewal. Overall, the message from Hunt and DeVries here is that planning's ventures into the housing realm resulted, more often than not, in a worsening of the housing situation. As such, they tell us about planning's impact on housing, but not about planning's relationship with housing institutions, entities, or movements.<sup>69</sup>

Hunt and DeVries, in their mention of the city of Chicago's 2004 zoning update, share an interaction between housing and city planning that is similar to the exclusionary relationship that we will see in the empirical chapters of this dissertation. They state that:

For their part, housing activists clamored unsuccessfully for "inclusionary zoning" to require affordable housing in all new large developments.<sup>70</sup>

This signals that, over a century after formal city planning emerged in Chicago, housing demands could be and were denied by planning.

Carl W. Condit, in the first of two volumes on Chicago titled *Chicago 1910-1929: Building Planning, and Urban Technology*, approaches housing in Chicago from primarily a private market and architectural perspective. His singular mention of planning's involvement is used to note that, despite all of the innovative capacity found in Chicago in terms of the design and construction of buildings, there was a void of concern about addressing issues found in low- and middle income housing. As such, any resources

---

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 97-99, 151-152.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 258.

available were focused on higher income housing while the residents most in need of assistance were neglected.<sup>71</sup>

There are a number of accounts in the literature that present city planning's general inadequacy regarding or disinterest in housing issues in Chicago. Arnold R. Hirsch's 1983 *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960* cites public housing plans that disregarded population density limits set by the Chicago Plan Commission. Instead, controlling the housing options of the city's black population trumped following guidelines set by city planning institutions. In this case, the Chicago Plan Commission did not have the power or will to force the city council to follow established planning standards. Hirsch argues that the Chicago Plan Commission during this time was made to serve the political will of the aldermen; as such, even if city planning wanted to establish or maintain a productive relationship with housing entities such as the Metropolitan Housing and Planning Council, it was unable to do so.<sup>72</sup>

Thomas Lee Philpott, in *The Slum and the Ghetto: Immigrants, Blacks, and Reformers in Chicago, 1880-1930*, notes that the Chicago Plan Commission "ignored housing altogether" in its first decades.<sup>73</sup> Philpott argues that this lack of interest and action persisted into the post-WWII era, when the Chicago Plan Commission "drove full speed ahead on a dazzling series of projects to improve the central business district, streamline the city's trade and transportation network, and beautify the lakefront" while undertaking no housing projects. This was due, according to Philpott, to planning's self-prescribed arena

---

<sup>71</sup> Carl. W. Condit, *Chicago 1910-29: Building, Planning, and Urban Technology* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1973), 167.

<sup>72</sup> Arnold R. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race & Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), 103, 228.

<sup>73</sup> Thomas Lee Philpott, *The Slum and the Ghetto: Immigrants, Blacks, and Reformers in Chicago, 1880-1930* (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1991), 205.



being limited to the “public domain,” which did not include housing. The Chicago Plan Commission was interested in only that which would increase property values.<sup>74</sup>

The Chicago Plan Commission’s engagement in housing in the city was, during the post-World War II era, largely focused on efforts to address or eradicate “blight” and slum conditions. During this time, the Chicago Plan Commission tended to do more harm than good when it came to housing, particularly the housing of the city’s black population, which it largely ignored.<sup>75</sup>

Thomas Dyja, in *The Third Coast: When Chicago Built the American Dream*, covers the issues of poor quality housing, housing shortages, and race as it related to housing; the Chicago Plan Commission and planning are never referenced as significant players in the various solutions the city generated, most of which were relative failures. Dyja’s direct references to the Chicago Plan Commission describe it as “toothless,” a tool that was manipulated by the City Council, and as an entity that took actions that were ultimately detrimental to those living in low-income housing while favoring businessmen. In one instance, Dyja’s reference to “the planners” refers to those within the South Side Planning Board, not to those of the Chicago Plan Commission or otherwise directly affiliated with the municipality. In general, Dyja argues that many large-scale efforts to construct public housing, remove housing from blighted areas, and generally address the city’s chronic housing issues were stimulated or driven by private interests rather than the municipality. When government involvement in housing is referenced, it always involved the City

---

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 246.

<sup>75</sup> Martin Meyerson and Edward C. Banfield, *Politics, Planning and the Public Interest: The Case of Public Housing in Chicago* (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1955), 30, 35.

Council or the Chicago Housing Authority, with little to no mention of the Chicago Plan Commission or city planning.<sup>76</sup>

Another well-documented interaction between city planning and housing in Chicago is the former's classification of areas of the city as "blight" or "blighted" as a means of justifying redevelopment, often via the use of the police power and eminent domain. Robert C. Klove, in his article "A Technique for Delimiting Chicago's Blighted Areas," details how the Chicago Plan Commission developed its approach to tackling blight in the post-WWII period. This work, according to Klove, was galvanized by the 1941 Illinois Neighborhood Redevelopment Corporation Law, which enabled city plan commissions to definitively label areas proposed for redevelopment as blighted or slum areas. The link between this technique and housing is in the legal definition of blight, wherein an area could be considered blighted if "the major portion of the housing is detrimental to the health, safety, morality or welfare of the occupants."<sup>77</sup> This argument is repeated by Klove in "City Planning in Chicago: A Review."<sup>78</sup>

### ***References to the Metropolitan Housing Council***

The Metropolitan Housing Council (MHC) was created in 1934 to advocate for a plan for alleviating Chicago's housing issues. As we will see in the empirical chapters that follow, this objective led the organization to work very closely with and influence the young city

---

<sup>76</sup> Thomas Dyja, *The Third Coast: When Chicago Built the American Dream* (New York: Penguin Books, 2013), xxx, 7, 36-38, 75-78, 86-88, 92, 163, 164-167, 199-200, 211, 364-366.

<sup>77</sup> Klove, "City Planning in Chicago: A Review," 483.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 127, 483.

planning movement in the 1930s. As such, it is of interest to explore whether and how MHC is acknowledged in accounts of Chicago's city planning history during that time frame.

Hunt and DeVries' examination of city planning in Chicago, which focuses largely on the post-WWII period when MHC's focus had expanded far beyond just housing, does not provide much information, perhaps due to the time frame of their research. They do specifically note the work that MHC has done over much of their history to "balance growth coalition and reform interests," which made a positive contribution to efforts to achieve more equitable planning in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>79</sup>

Carl Condit, in *Chicago 1930-70: Building, Planning, and Urban Technology*, notes the creation of MHC in 1934, stating that it marked "the beginning in Chicago of the recognition of building as a social force and of the responsibility of the federal, state, and municipal governments for the creation of a healthy city."<sup>80</sup> Condit also mentions MHC's survey work, which often informed assessments of the extent of the housing issue in the city; its criticisms of the city's lack of a strategy for managing the housing deficiency and maintaining existing stock; and its position against a 1967 exposition's use of lakefront land. He does not, however, specify whether these actions occurred within an existing relationship with city planning or the Chicago Plan Commission, let alone whether they signaled a change in that relationship or if either entity influenced the scope or activities of the other.<sup>81</sup>

In *The Third Coast: When Chicago Built the American Dream*, Thomas Dyja mentions MHC and its influence on and involvement in various public housing projects and

---

<sup>79</sup> Hunt and DeVries, *Planning Chicago*, 15.

<sup>80</sup> Condit, *Chicago 1910-1929: Building, Planning, and Urban Technology*, 270-271.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 82, 83, 142.

legislation that would later fuel urban renewal. However, he does not reference or delve into the relationship between it and the Chicago Plan Commission or city planning in general. Dyja, throughout this book, which focuses largely on Chicago in the Post-WWII era with some background provided, tends to discuss planning and housing as coexisting entities without exploring the changing nature of their relationship.<sup>82</sup>

Despite the fact that, as we will see in the empirical chapters of this dissertation, MHC played a significant role in the 1939 reorganization of the Chicago Plan Commission, the former entity is not referenced at all in the 1940 article “The New Chicago Plan Commission” by Albert Lepawsky. Similarly, though MHC designed the Land Use Survey and advocated for the Chicago Plan Commission to take the lead on conducting it, which it did in 1940 after years of reluctance, the former is not credited for this contribution, or even mentioned, in Harold M. Mayer’s 1943 article “Applications of Residential Data from the Chicago Land Use Survey.”<sup>83</sup>

The same can be said for W. Russell Tylor’s 1945 review titled “A Summary Analysis of Two Outstanding Studies by the Chicago Plan Commission,” which looked at two studies developed by the Chicago Plan Commission based on the Land Use Survey. Hirsch, in *Making the Second Ghetto*, also fails to credit MHC for the Chicago Plan Commission’s engagement in housing surveys conducted in the late 1930s.<sup>84</sup>

---

<sup>82</sup> Dyja, *The Third Coast*.

<sup>83</sup> Albert Lepawsky, “The New Chicago Plan Commission,” *The Journal of Land & Public Utility Economics* 16, no. 1 (Feb. 1940); Harold M. Mayer, “Applications of Residential Data from the Chicago Land Use Survey,” *Journal of Land & Public Utility Economics* 19, no. 1 (Feb. 1943): 85-87.

<sup>84</sup> W. Russell Tylor, “A Summary Analysis of Two Outstanding Studies by the Chicago Plan Commission,” *Social Forces* 24, no. 2 (Dec. 1945): 239-241; Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*, 189.

## **THE CITY PLAN COMMISSION**

Another distinct characteristic of this research is its approach via the perspective of the Chicago Plan Commission. While ubiquitous to city planning since its birth, plan commissions have not warranted much study or close examination. The history of these commissions – typically five- to seven-member appointed citizen groups – is only to be pieced together from as little as a few paragraphs or pages of the history of the whole of planning. As a result, despite much non-historical literature and material that presents these commissions as the entity where responsibility for delivering planning in a given city lies, history often presents them deep within the context of its accounts of the planning profession and practice as a whole. The most common historical presentations of plan commissions in the United States as found in planning history tie them to planning's birth, growth, and shortcomings in some way, shape, or form. A smaller portion of the historical accounts present them as more of a rest stop on the way to institutionalized city planning, still well embedded in the story of planning.

### **As an Indicator of Planning's Emergence, Growth, and Shortcomings**

As noted, there is some debate about when exactly the planning profession was born. Many see planning as a direct product of the Progressive Era and trace the beginning of the discourse that resulted in the birth of planning to the Fair of 1893. Some, however, draw its history to points earlier in time, viewing the birth of planning not as having happened in a vacuum; rather, they see it as the natural evolution and convergence of key principles such as the need for comprehensive planning and coordination that had long existed in engineering, preservation, and the parks movement from the early 1800s. But all

agree that, once it arrived, support for planning, at least the idea if not the practice of it, spread rapidly. The exponentially increasing number of plan commissions is cited as an indicator of the growth of the planning profession; later these numbers would be reported with the caveat that the commissions were not fully functioning, serving as evidence of planning's decline.<sup>85</sup>

In the planning history books, the Hartford, Connecticut commission created in 1907 is most often cited as the first permanent plan commission to exist in a U.S. city. Despite the inclusion of pre-planning governmental functions and movements, particularly the parks movement, as part and parcel of planning's history, there is no corresponding association or comparison between commissions that preceded those of planning in historical accounts of the latter. There is no parallel connection made with entities such as Boston's Transit Commission, which had produced a master plan by 1906; the New York City Improvement Commission that focused on comprehensive planning beginning in 1904; and various boards of survey and topographical bureaus that helped to lay the groundwork for professionalizing government functions during the 1800s.<sup>86</sup>

Weak plan commissions are at times presented as one of the causes of planning's failure to deliver on its utopian promises, though some historical accounts do provide evidence from which a defense of plan commissions can be pieced together. This comparison illustrates that, ironically, previous and sometimes more successful commissions often had more authority and access to funds than have most if not all plan

---

<sup>85</sup> Stanley K. Schultz, *Constructing Urban Culture: American Cities and City Planning, 1800-1920* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 209; Holleran, *Boston's "Changeful Times"*; Peterson, *The Birth of City Planning in the United States*, 322.

<sup>86</sup> Michael Holleran, *Boston's "Changeful Times,"* 262; Peterson, *The Birth of City Planning in the United States*, 171, 177, 269.

commissions. Thus, for a task that demanded more centralized authority and plans for entire cities that were inherently without precedent in their total cost if fully implemented, plan commissions were often limited to advisory bodies with little to no fiscal allocations, left to compete with other municipal commissions for limited tax revenues.<sup>87</sup>

Despite the fact that planning emerged as a solution to the problems generated from uncoordinated, market-driven, and patchy urban growth, some historians argue that planning's inability to deliver on comprehensive planning led to its becoming exactly what it aimed to prevent: piecemeal and opportunistic. Limited in their authority, political power, funds, and/or technical capacity, smaller planning efforts were often pursued only as political, temporal, or fiscal circumstances allowed. A similar view of plan commissions – or rather the effect of this opportunistic and unstable climate on commissions – can be seen in Hunt and DeVries' account of planning's life in Chicago. Their illustration of the Chicago Plan Commission is set in the context of that city's dying planning practice; Chicago's commission ebbs and flows between periods of irrelevance and periods of high political stature and influence. The latter was at times achieved solely due to the political capital or clout of a specific commission member or chairman. Even the 1909 creation of the original plan commission in Chicago – the nation's second documented permanent plan commission – has been presented as the product of the savvy capitalizing on of political momentum resulting from the well-received Plan of Chicago, which to this day is heralded as an ideal of comprehensive planning. The Plan's sponsors seized this opportunity to solicit the legislation needed to establish a plan commission to carry out their famed vision.<sup>88</sup>

---

<sup>87</sup> Peterson, *The Birth of City Planning in the United States*, 181.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 221-222, 283-285; Hunt and DeVries, *Planning Chicago*, 48, 51.

## **As a Stepping Stone to and Promoter of Municipal Planning**

As presented in planning's history at the point when public support for comprehensive city plans had grown and the time to deliver was at hand, plan commissions preceded municipal planning departments and were effectively the first entities responsible for planning. The commissions' emergence is followed by criticisms of the mismatch between their uncompensated, voluntary members and the fact that their authority was limited to an advisory function in government with real decision-making power lying elsewhere. These criticisms set the stage for the subsequent demand for formal planning agencies in local government, but whether and how the role and function of plan commissions changed after planning departments were created is not clear. Some bypass the account of plan commissions as the first iteration of a planning authority and present commissions as merely the promoters of planning to the public, the advocates of comprehensive city planning, garnering the requisite attention for the discipline of planning that was to follow.<sup>89</sup>

As a consequence of their history being nested in that of planning as a whole, plan commissions are often presented as synonymous with planning departments and agencies and are disconnected from similar commissions that came before and after. Limiting our historical understanding of plan commissions as only one piece of the planning puzzle may serve to sustain the ambiguity of their purpose and function. This may subsequently provide some insight into some structural incompatibilities between plan commissions and their intended role in the planning process.

---

<sup>89</sup> Peterson, *The Birth of City Planning in the United States*, 270-273; Marina Moskowitz, "Zoning the industrial city: Planners, commissioners, and boosters in the 1920s," *Business and Economic History*, Vol 27, Issue 2 (Winter 1998): 308-310.



## **THE ARGUMENT OF THE DISSERTATION**

This dissertation examines how and under what circumstances change occurs in city planning, particularly in its relationship with other urban phenomena and institutions such as housing. While the initial separation between city planning and housing has been documented, how that relationship changed over time is less understood. Furthermore, this research focuses on viewing the evolution of city planning via the lens of the city plan commission, an entity which has been consistently present throughout the history of the profession in the United States, but which has been overlooked as an entity which offers much in terms of understanding how city planning functions as an institution.

As noted, the empirical chapters of this dissertation focus on the years 1909 to 1941. These chapters begin with an introduction to city planning in Chicago, an overview of how the scope of city planning was shaped and influenced, and an explanation of how a rigid focus on City Beautiful and projects that favored business and commerce was maintained, while housing was strictly excluded. The empirical chapters carry us through changes in the leadership of the Chicago Plan Commission, the projects undertaken, and the waxing and waning significance of city planning in Chicago. They also illustrate the housing movement in Chicago and the ways in which it was working to alleviate housing issues despite its exclusion from city planning.

In this empirical account, we get a sense of how city planning began as exclusively City Beautiful- and business-centric and persisted as such for many of its early years. We see that the city's business interests – in the form of the Commercial Club of Chicago – had a significant influence over the shape and scope of city planning. The City Beautiful

movement, supported and sanctioned by the Commercial Club, was preoccupied with grandiose civic improvements at the expense of projects that more directly benefitted the conditions of the poor and working classes. We also get a sense of the profession's identity crisis going into the 1930s and how the Metropolitan Housing Council, created in 1934, was partly successful and partly unsuccessful in broadening city planning's scope to include housing.

This research identifies several instances in history when the motivation to expand planning to encompass housing was present, particularly from housing and other reform groups, but argues that the opportunity to change did not exist until the 1930s. From 1909 to the Great Depression, city planning excluded housing, despite calls for its inclusion from a variety of actors. Even following the introduction of financial incentives to engage in readily available housing studies, the Chicago Plan Commission maintained its resistance for some years, and it would take additional pressure and the incentive of federal financial resources to ultimately achieve change.

In the case herein, we see that the City Beautiful movement was manifest in the World's Columbian Exposition and the Plan of Chicago. The Commercial Club's involvement in both of these milestones and the subsequent construction of the Chicago Plan Commission's membership solidified a City Beautiful bent to city planning in Chicago. Significant positive publicity and the passing of municipal bonds to fund public improvement projects afforded the Chicago Plan Commission the luxury of limiting its work to business-centric improvements, largely focused on roadways. To further reinforce this deliberate focus, the Chicago Plan Commission's mandate was based solely on the Plan of Chicago rather than the pursuit of city planning in general. The 328-member commission

made up of like-minded businessmen hand selected by the Commercial Club also cited its lack of expertise in housing as further justification for its disengagement in housing.

As such, this dissertation argues that who is involved in the initial development of city planning as an institution has long-term consequences, particularly when those actors establish a precise and self-reinforcing platform upon which city planning stands. In the case presented here, the basis of city planning was limited to their understanding and perspective on what city planning could and should be.

Despite this rigidity, moments of opportunity to change did occur when the luxury of maintaining the status quo was simultaneously absent. The collapse of the municipal bond market in the late 1920s and early 1930s plus the waning legitimacy of the Chicago Plan Commission provided just such a moment. The changes in the local and national context that came with the Great Depression would be significant in terms of the direction city planning could and would go in Chicago. The influx of federal resources into employment and housing projects and the absence of historically reliable municipal funding sources would supersede the rigid adherence to Chicago's status quo form of city planning. As such, an opportunity for city planning to be redefined was presented. More importantly, this opportunity was available to groups beyond just the Commercial Club, whose early influence on the scope of city planning in Chicago had contained the profession within strict bounds for decades.

This research also suggests that in moments of opportunity to change, who is present and prepared to make demands on city planning is important, as they can potentially do so and alter the scope of the field. We see this in the Metropolitan Housing Council (MHC); armed with a Land Use Survey and a plan for the reorganization of the

Chicago Plan Commission, MHC took action in the 1930s and finally had the opportunity to influence the shape of city planning to include housing, after decades of failed efforts by others to do so. The increasing erosion of the Chicago Plan Commission's legitimacy, the deterioration of the municipal bond market, the severity of the Great Depression, and the subsequent infusion of federal funds into housing projects meant that the Commercial Club would not be the only entity to ultimately define what city planning included and what it excluded.

Finally, this dissertation also affirms that there is value in directing more attention towards the city plan commission to determine its actual and perceived role in city planning. City plan commissions can tell us much, including more about where the power or lack of power behind city planning lies.

## **SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY**

In order to examine how city planning changed over time as an institution by tracing its relationship with housing, this research was conducted via process tracing using archival and secondary sources. Archival source review focused primarily on three collections held at three repositories in Chicago, Illinois. Each of the three collections provided materials generated by the three key entities examined in this dissertation: the Chicago Plan Commission, the Commercial Club of Chicago, and the Metropolitan Housing Council.

The time frame of focus – 1909 to 1941 – that was selected as the beginning and end of this range of time captures two significant events in planning in Chicago. The year 1909 marks when Daniel Burnham's Plan of Chicago was published and, more importantly, the

Chicago Plan Commission was created. The year 1941 falls just before the United States became involved in World War II and two years after the Chicago Plan Commission was discontinued and recreated with new membership and a completely different structure. The time frame was extended two years beyond the 1939 reorganization in order to capture the time needed for the full appointment of the new commission's membership as well as to include the activities that the remade entity undertook in its initial years.

Due to the distance between the author and the archival materials and enabled by the photography policies of the three repositories, all archival materials were scanned utilizing a scanning app onto a tablet. They were then catalogued and reviewed more thoroughly in Milwaukee. The resulting electronic documents were given unique file names based on the date and time of scanning and subsequently stored on an external hard drive and backed up on Google Drive. All files were catalogued in an Excel spreadsheet that included the unique file name, repository, collection, location such as box and file number or item number if catalogued in the public library, and a brief description.

To capture the position, perspective, and evolution of the Chicago Plan Commission, archival sources were collected from the Municipal Reference Collection at the Harold Washington Library Center in Chicago, a branch of the Chicago Public Library. The Municipal Reference Collection maintains records pertaining to a broad array of government activity and history in Chicago including ordinances, meeting minutes, budgets, publications, and so forth.<sup>90</sup>

---

<sup>90</sup> Municipal\_Reference\_Guy, "Welcome to the Municipal Reference Collection" last modified September 7, 2013. <https://www.chipublib.org/blogs/post/welcome-to-the-municipal-reference-collection/>

While the substance of the collection is searchable from within the public library's online search system, the repository also maintains a physical binder with a list of all materials by generating entity. This binder was used to identify all items related to the Chicago Plan Commission. From this subsection of the collection, all items generated within the 1909 to 1941 time frame were examined and scanned for more in-depth review. The types of documents collected included proceedings/meeting minutes, annual reports, publications, position statements, promotional materials, speech transcripts, and a few miscellaneous documents such as organizational charts and attendance records. The documents collected included materials from the entire time frame, with a near complete collection of meeting minutes from 1909 to 1941.

In order to capture the views, perspectives, and actions of the Commercial Club of Chicago, this research utilized the Commercial Club of Chicago records housed at the Chicago Historical Society, also known as the Research Center at the Chicago History Museum. The archivists at the Research Center provided a finding aid for the collection in advance, which allowed for the identification of items of interest prior to research visits. As with the Chicago Plan Commission records, documents generated between 1909 and 1941 were most relevant and of interest for this research. This collection included documents that were generated into the early 1920s, with the meeting minutes scanned and reviewed from 1906 to 1922. The earliest date of materials reviewed and scanned was extended to 1906 in order to capture the Commercial Club's involvement in the creation of the Plan of Chicago, which played a significant role in the subsequent creation of the Chicago Plan Commission. Materials scanned from this collection included Executive Committee and full

club meeting minutes/proceedings, annual reports, publications, and some miscellaneous documents such as correspondence and member lists.

The third main collection that was utilized for this research was focused on the Metropolitan Housing Council (MHC), an entity that played an important role in housing in Chicago from the mid-1930s on. To capture the activities and perspectives of this group, the Metropolitan Planning Council records from the University of Illinois at Chicago were utilized. Documents scanned and reviewed from this collection included meeting minutes from the Board of Governors and full council, Annual Reports, summaries of activities, project plans and details, project proposals, publications and reports, by-laws, correspondence, newsletters, and so forth.

Given that MHC was created in 1934, there were no documents available from the first twenty-five years of this dissertation's full time frame. As such, materials scanned and reviewed from this collection were limited to those generated between the years 1934 and 1941. Some additional materials from after 1941 were scanned if they included information relevant to the 1934 to 1941 period. Such documents included annual reports, as they could provide information on projects or efforts that were initiated during the research time frame; a proposed city ordinance; a publication summarizing programs and plans; and general accounting of MHC's history.

All documents were reviewed for legibility and two return trips to Chicago were made during which poorly scanned items were rescanned. These items were added to the document catalogue as supplements to the original items they were replacing. Documents in the catalogue were color-coded based on the date of collection; items that required one

or more pages be rescanned were also highlighted for easy identification and to ensure that the supplemental document was reviewed along with the original.

Following an initial review of the materials and their contents, the full time frame of interest, 1909 to 1941, was roughly divided into three sections for more in-depth review based upon historical breaks in events. The first section spans from 1909 to 1926, with the end year marking the resignation of the first permanent chairman of the Chicago Plan Commission, Charles Wacker. The second section spans from 1926 to 1934, with the end year marking the creation of the Metropolitan Housing Council. The third and final section spans from 1934 to 1941 and slightly beyond, with the end year marking two years after the complete remaking of the Chicago Plan Commission in 1939 and the year in which the United States engaged in World War II.

Each of these three shorter time frames corresponds with one of three chapters in the main body of this dissertation. There is some overlap that will be found in each chapter as historical context is provided for the years preceding the chapter's time frame and some forecasting into the years to come is included in the concluding words. The latter is particularly relevant for the third of these chapters.

The historical data collected for each of these time periods was subsequently reviewed, with particular attention paid to 1) the activities of the Chicago Plan Commission, 2) interactions between the housing movement and city planning, and 3) changes and opportunities for change that emerged in the substance of city planning and its relationship with housing. The following three chapters make up the resulting empirical body of this dissertation.



### III. NO TIME FOR HOUSING

#### INTRODUCTION

The birth of modern city planning in the country and Chicago is broadly linked to the World's Columbian Exposition (the Fair), held in Chicago in 1893 and based upon City Beautiful ideals. The Fair subsequently inspired the creation of a comprehensive plan for its host city: the Plan of Chicago (the Plan), which was authored by Daniel H. Burnham and sponsored by the Commercial Club of Chicago. Following the publication of the Plan of Chicago, the Mayor and Commercial Club created the Chicago Plan Commission to implement the Plan. The commission, by nature of its creation, was in effect the de jure pilot and author of city planning in Chicago, created to define and shape this new institution. How city planning was articulated, what it included, and what it excluded was greatly influenced by the commission. Planning's definition was also shaped by the entities and priorities backing the commission as well as the institutional and ideological constraints within which it operated, constraints that were formed during the events leading up to the commission's creation.

Charles Wacker was appointed as the first and permanent Chairman of the Chicago Plan Commission, coming directly from his position as vice chairman of the Commercial Club's Committee on the Plan of Chicago, the committee that commissioned and acquired financing for Burnham's comprehensive plan.<sup>91</sup> As such, it was ensured that the leadership of the commission sustained the continuity of city planning as defined by the Commercial Club via Burnham's Plan, as inspired by the Fair. Over the time period examined in this

---

<sup>91</sup> The name of this committee is inconsistent throughout the data and includes the Plan of Chicago Committee, the Committee on the Plan of Chicago, and the Committee on Plan. Throughout this document, "the Plan Committee" will be used to refer to this entity.

dissertation, the commission and its leadership waffled between either 1) plainly stating that commercial prosperity was the primary aim of the work that they did or 2) making proclamations that city planning was comprehensive and genuinely humanitarian in its nature. The latter position and declarations of the commission's leadership and supporters suggested that what they were doing was driven by a desire to benefit all of the city's citizens equally and would help to alleviate all of Chicago's ills, including the slum housing conditions and the many social problems affiliated with it – poverty, vice, crime, poor health, and so forth. Despite this oscillation, we will see in this chapter that Charles Wacker and his Managing Director Walter Moody were fully and enthusiastically committed to the Plan of Chicago and the more narrow definition of city planning that it represented, which prioritized business interests and neglected broader social concerns.

This chapter will illustrate that planning in Chicago in its first decade and a half depended on the momentum of the City Beautiful movement. The vision of city planning as defined by the subsequent Plan of Chicago, and the influence of the business community via the leadership and character of the Chicago Plan Commission enabled them to move planning forward based on a prescribed conception of how planning would solve the city's pressing problems. More specifically, this chapter and those that follow will illustrate how housing – a significant and pressing problem that aligned in many ways with city planning's stated goals – was consistently excluded from the shape and scope of city planning as it was formed and institutionalized in Chicago. Though this would change in the 1930s in the wake of the Great Depression and a changing national and local context.

Although the planning movement as driven by the Chicago Plan Commission did have its critics, many of which challenged its narrowness and called for its inclusion of

housing, none of the challengers were able to break its momentum or fundamentally alter its course. As such, planning in Chicago was a movement about making improvements that largely benefitted commercial and industrial expansion. Founded solidly upon City Beautiful principles, Chicago planners claimed to be comprehensive and planning was sold as being good for all the citizens of the city. Having emerged when and how it did, the Chicago Plan Commission and city planning as it was shaped by the commission were immediately bound to a version of planning as defined by the Fair and, subsequently, the Plan of Chicago, a definition that served the priorities of the Commercial Club, an entity that was heavily involved in city planning's institutionalization.

Despite the early and consistent – if sporadic – claims that city planning in Chicago spawned from a diverse range of pressing urban problems, the examination of its substance presented in this chapter makes it clear that the fathers of early modern city planning in Chicago had a laser sharp focus on achieving business, commercial, and industrial prosperity; success in their work was predominately measured in terms of rising property values. As such, when it came to other pressing problems in the city, particularly that of housing, the leadership and work of the Chicago Plan Commission was largely silent.

To further illustrate these claims, this chapter will begin with the historical context from which city planning's narrow focus was born – the City Beautiful movement and the World's Columbian Exposition.

## **THE CITY BEAUTIFUL MOVEMENT AND THE WORLD'S COLUMBIAN EXPOSITION**

The focus of city planning in Chicago on business and commercial interests – and its exclusion of housing – is largely traced back to the World's Columbian Exposition (the Fair)

and the City Beautiful movement. City Beautiful is well known as the first distinguishable era of modern city planning in Chicago as well as throughout the country. With its preoccupation on beauty and aesthetics, the architects, landscape architects, and planners behind City Beautiful believed that a grand and magnificent city would naturally produce good urban citizens. Citizens of a city that was clean, attractive, and symmetrical would be civic minded, happy, and healthy. Supporters of City Beautiful believed that urban design could influence human morality, and that aesthetically pleasing surroundings would lead to more patriotic citizens, more productive workers, and prosperity for all. Directly addressing other social issues that affected quality of life, such as housing and poverty, was rarely if ever addressed.<sup>92</sup>

Frederick Law Olmsted was one early and well-known contributor to and critic of the City Beautiful movement. Olmsted was a prominent landscape architect that designed New York City's Central Park as well as parks and park networks in cities through the country. His style of open space design and emphasis on the need for peaceful and appealing public spaces to contrast the harshness of the urban environment preceded and directly influenced the City Beautiful movement that would follow. In particular, Olmsted's evolution from designing singular parks to comprehensive park networks or systems was perhaps his work's greatest influence on the city planning that would come, wherein the latter evolved from architecture's design of singular buildings to planning's design of complete cities. The use of wide and commanding boulevards, often complete with trees or grass medians, to replace narrow and congested roads was another significant carryover from Olmstedian landscape design to City Beautiful planning.

---

<sup>92</sup> Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement*, 1989, i.

Despite his influence on City Beautiful and his aesthetic contributions to American cities in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Olmsted was not of the movement per se. His work never expanded from the design of parks, boulevards, and networks into the designing and planning of entire cities. Yet Olmsted did manage to leave his mark on Chicago, particularly in his involvement in what was City's Beautiful's most significant manifestation: the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition.<sup>93</sup>

Modern city planning in Chicago – and the country – is said to have begun in 1893 when Chicago hosted the World's Columbian Exposition (the Fair), an event that drew millions of visitors during its five-month run. The Fair was organized to celebrate the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the discovery of the Americas by Christopher Columbus. Chicago won the bid – a bid backed by the city's elite financiers and businessmen and driven by the promise of tremendous prestige and profit that would be generated from an estimated 20 million visitors – to host the event over cities such as New York and Washington, D.C. The organizers of the Fair – led by Daniel H. Burnham and John W. Root – drew together the foremost architects, landscape architects, and artists in the country, including Frederick Law Olmsted and Louis Sullivan. The event was a tremendous occasion and physically covered at least 600 acres; on display was the best of American innovation and invention, including the introduction of the Ferris Wheel, an engineering feat for its time.<sup>94</sup>

The physical appearance of the Fair, particularly the structures within which it was housed and their arrangement would be most significant to city planning. The buildings

---

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 1-14.

<sup>94</sup> Rydell, *All the World's a Fair* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 40-42, 60-61; Reid Badger, *The Great American Fair: The World's Columbian Exposition & American Culture* (Chicago: Nelson Hall, 1979), 40-42, 103-106; Neil Harris, Wim de Wit, James Gilbert, and Robert W. Rydell, *Grand Illusions: Chicago's World's Fair of 1893* (Skokie, Illinois: Chicago Historical Society, 1994), 53-58.

constructed for the Fair were of a neoclassical design, presenting a clean and pristine image of a symmetrical and neatly packaged urban utopia – the image of a City Beautiful. This design also reflected the organizers’ and designers’ preoccupation with European cities, such as Paris, Berlin, Vienna, Stockholm, and others. In fact, the eventual leadership of city planning in Chicago would continually hold their city up in comparison against Paris in the years to come; they emphatically admired and hoped to emulate the grand boulevards, civic centers, and commanding views that were found in France’s largest city. They were inspired by Georges-Eugène Haussmann’s complete redesign of Paris, which had begun in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and transformed a dark, medieval city into a stunning metropolis and tourist destination; they dreamed of a similar reinvention for Chicago. What the Fair did not reflect, however, was many of those European cities’ inclusion of housing in their approaches to city design.<sup>95</sup>

Not inconsequentially, the man in charge of leading the organization and execution of the Fair – Daniel H. Burnham – would come to be known as one of the country’s first and foremost city planners. Burnham was tremendously successful at leading the design and delivery of the Fair, which would be nicknamed the ‘White City,’ surpassing national expectations that reflected low confidence in Chicago’s ability to deliver on their World’s Fair aspirations. The image of the Fair signaled an evolution from the architectural design of single buildings to more ambitious and comprehensive city planning – the design of whole cities from the buildings and streets to the public squares, parks, and civic art. As such, the Fair planted the seed of city planning, a burgeoning idea that a city’s problems could not be dealt with one by one and that development could not be left to its own

---

<sup>95</sup> Peterson, *The Birth of City Planning in the United States*, 239.

devices in the hands of private property owners and real estate speculators. This idea, and the images of the Fair that bolstered it, would grow into a profession and scholarly discipline. As the host of the Fair, Chicago gave the world an image of the pristine, symmetrical, and problem-free urban utopias that city planning would come to promise, an image that was possible perhaps only because it eliminated many of the urban challenges whose solutions were more elusive, such as those associated with housing.

Despite its popularity and legacy, the 'White City' could not completely isolate itself from the realities of the complex and messy urban environment, although visually it presented a stark contrast to the real Chicago within which it sat. The Fair perhaps provided an escape – for both its organizers and attendees – from the crowded tenements, slums, slaughterhouses, congested streets, and industrial workplaces just outside the gates in the actual city of Chicago. During the time of the Fair, it was estimated that nearly half of the citizens of Chicago lived in overcrowded housing and approximately 162,000 people lived in slums. Urban realities did manage to seep in as racial and ethnic tensions as well as issues of gender inequity arose within the Fair's planning and execution, just as they were simmering in cities throughout the country.<sup>96</sup>

These complications and the unwillingness of the designers to expand their vision beyond neoclassical buildings to embrace the more diverse and multi-dimensional truth of Chicago would be an omen of future city planning tendencies. Nevertheless, it was clear that a new way of thinking about the urban spatial environment had arrived and that Chicago would be one of several cities that would embrace and lead this burgeoning movement.

---

<sup>96</sup> Bachin, *Building the South Side*, 110-113; Badger, *The Great American Fair*, 36; Rydell, *All the World's a Fair*, 64-67; Harris, et al., *Grand Illusions*, 151-152.

## **KEEPING THE MOMENTUM GOING**

In the early 1900s, circa 1901-1903, members from two private organizations had an idea about how to build upon the legacy of the 1893 Fair. They were the Merchants Club and the Commercial Club and their membership boasted the names of the most prominent, successful, and influential businessmen in Chicago. Both clubs were formed in the late 1800s and were described as civic improvement groups. In 1907, the two groups merged under the Commercial Club name, with their mission being “advancing business interests, fostering friendship amongst its members and promoting the public welfare.”<sup>97</sup>

The idea of building upon the Fair’s momentum that emerged from these two clubs predated their merger. Franklin MacVeagh of the Commercial Club (in 1901) and Frederic Delano and Charles Norton of the Merchants Club (in 1903) each proposed a comprehensive plan as the solution to Chicago’s growing troubles – though they would ultimately only focus on those challenges that were relevant to business, at the exclusion of other social problems the city was facing. At this point in Chicago’s history, the population and economy were growing at an unprecedented rate, leading to many of the problems previously mentioned – overcrowding, congestion, low quality housing, traffic accidents, and so forth.<sup>98</sup>

Real estate speculation and a lack of regulation of private property in conjunction with a quintupling of the city’s population between 1870 and 1910 produced decrepit

---

<sup>97</sup> Commercial Club meeting minutes, 12 November 1910, Box 3, Folder 3, Commercial Club of Chicago records, Chicago Historical Society, Chicago (hereafter referred to as Commercial Club records); Moody, *Wacker’s Manual of the Plan of Chicago*, 74-75.

<sup>98</sup> Commercial Club meeting minutes, 08 January 1910, Box 3, Folder 1, Commercial Club records.



housing structures and literal filth in the streets. Furthermore, the streets were often impassable due to traffic backups, as they were used by streetcars, wagons, and automobiles alike. Charles Wacker, a wealthy businessman in the city and member of the Commercial Club, stated, “To-day if a wagon is standing on the side of the street and a street car passes it, other vehicles are compelled to wait until the car passes before they can get by...”<sup>99</sup> Often, businesses utilized the streets and sidewalks for loading and unloading of merchandise and goods, further inhibiting the flow of traffic. In 1908, the *Chicago Tribune* reported an average of two deaths per week in streetcar-related accidents.<sup>100</sup>

### **Political Context: Chicago’s Machine Politics**

Another consequence of the rapid and chaotic growth of Chicago can be seen in its politics. From the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century on, Chicago became increasingly notorious for its political corruption. It is important at this point to take a step back and acknowledge the political context – referred to as machine politics – within which any- and everything took place in Chicago during this time period. Machine politics in Chicago refers to a system of informal and illegal bribing, deal-making, and corruption that undermined the formal

---

<sup>99</sup> Chicago Plan Commission meeting minutes, 07 March 1911, Cc P69q 1909/11 c. 2, Municipal Reference Collection, Harold Washington Library Center, Chicago Public Library, Chicago (hereafter referred to as Municipal Reference Collection).

<sup>100</sup> Walker, *The Planning Function in Urban Government*, 224; Philpott, *The Slum and the Ghetto*, 6; “Congestion of Street Traffic,” *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, Illinois), Oct 30 1905, 8. Accessed June 26, 2017: <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.uwm.edu/hnpchicagotribune/docview/173205056/373FE25A2B394F19PQ/2?accountid=15078>; Street Car Accidents,” *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, Illinois), 16 Aug 1908, G4. Accessed June 26, 2017: <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.uwm.edu/hnpchicagotribune/docview/173408099/13CE791ABC6D422EPQ/5?accountid=15078>

municipal structure and concentrated power in the hands of a select number of aldermen and powerful ward committeemen or “bosses.” At this time, Chicago was a weak mayor-strong council city and, through the political machine, power was fragmented and spread throughout the city among many factions.<sup>101</sup>

The first political machine in Chicago emerged with a saloonkeeper named Michael Cassius McDonald in the aftermath of the 1871 fire that devastated the city’s downtown area. Recognizing the shared interests of the politicians and those involved in crime, he undertook linking the two groups and filling political offices with people who would encourage – or at least not interfere with – this new relationship. Prior to the era of machine politics, businessmen in Chicago had had a much more direct involvement in the running of the city. Machine politics took the direct control of the government from the businessmen and repositioned politicians to be more influential.<sup>102</sup>

After this shift, many of the businessmen engaged in city planning efforts in Chicago were susceptible to the influence of the political machine. Any work in the city that depended upon the awarding of a license or permit, enforcement or lack of enforcement of a regulation, allocation of public funds, or use of the public rights-of-way were vulnerable, as these were the realm of the aldermanic and ward ‘boodlers.’ As such, businessmen were required to feed the machine via campaign contributions and were expected to abstain from any public criticism of the corrupt practices. If not, they would be threatened with anything from higher taxes or blocked permits to outright intimidation.<sup>103</sup>

---

<sup>101</sup> Dick Simpson, *Rogues, Rebels, and Rubber Stamps: The Politics of the Chicago City Council from 1863 to the Present* (Boulder, Colorado and Oxford: Westview Press, 2001), 46-47.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>103</sup> Harold F. Gosnell, *Machine Politics: Chicago Model* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 40.

On the other end of the spectrum, there were some businessmen that epitomized such corruption. One example is Samuel Insull, who was a member of the Industrial Club that would come to merge with the Commercial Club in 1932. He understood and embraced the political machine, as he was of the opinion that “each man had his price” in his own business dealings. It appears however, that most of the men in the Commercial Club – including those that would lead its city planning efforts – merely worked within the context wherein machine politics were accepted as inevitable. If nothing else, the political machine was familiar and, most importantly, reliable; it was so deeply entrenched in Chicago that it did not fluctuate with changing national politics. Furthermore, the political machine likely served to some extent to disarm social discontent that could be sensed in the growing criticism that perceived City Beautiful – and, by default, city planning – as elitist. This was because the political machine, due to the resulting chaotic, disorganized, and insufficient nature of local government, could quell “labor disputes, hunger riots, and class warfare” to an extent because the citizens did not demand or expect much from the authorities. Keeping such public disorder in check was certainly of interest to the city’s capitalists.<sup>104</sup>

On the whole, business’ relationship with the political machine was not a lopsided one wherein the former suffered from constant manipulation from the latter. The two groups largely left each other alone and, at times, overlapped. “The self-made politicians understood the self-made businessmen, as they talked the same language.”<sup>105</sup> The politicians were interested in business and economic relationships only inasmuch as they provided opportunities for political or personal gain.

---

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 5, 183-184.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 25.

The political machine's influence on the Commercial Club's city planning aspirations – and the shape that city planning would ultimately take – was a bit more subtle. First, it was clear that the machine politicians were not interested in providing and managing public services for posterity's sake alone; the awarding of contracts was often geared towards supporting the economic gains of the politicians and their friends and family, in the worst cases to companies that did not even exist. As such, the private business interests were often left to provide public services for themselves in the instances when it benefited their bottom line. In this context, it was not unusual that city planning in Chicago was initiated, managed, and – in the end – significantly influenced by private businessmen. The consequence of this was that private business interests were central to how city planning was defined and executed in Chicago, at the expense of other non-commercially-driven approaches. Second, as will be described further below, machine politics likely influenced city planning's preference for projects that could be executed via legal proceedings rather than regulation.

In general, the businessmen behind city planning had an advantage in that property and capital were highly coveted in Chicago, and the businessman's interests were typically valued higher than that of the common workingman. The local government's priority to serve business and propertied interests first was established in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As such, the businessmen were at an advantage in that they had propertied interests that stood to benefit, something that the politicians understood.<sup>106</sup>

---

<sup>106</sup> Simpson, *Rogues, Rebels, and Rubber Stamps*, 31-32.

## **The Comprehensive Plan as a New Solution**

Creating comprehensive plans for cities was not a wholly new concept. Public health crises such as disease epidemics had already forced cities to plan for the management and eradication of illnesses including cholera and typhoid; this demanded public works improvements and consideration of how the city's spatial conditions aided or exacerbated efforts to combat disease. The success of the Fair in creating a pristine city within a city inspired consideration of what other urban challenges could be addressed through comprehensive planning and management. The urgency of the problems in cities set the stage for the incubation of city planning as architectural and engineering advances made taller and taller buildings possible; these new building techniques, in conjunction with a lack of private property regulation, generated an exponential increase in traffic, congestion, and overcrowding.

It was within this context that MacVeagh, Delano, and Norton of the Merchants and Commercial Clubs proposed to their respective colleagues – the city's wealthiest and most influential industrialists, merchants, and other businessmen – that Chicago needed a comprehensive plan to control and guide development to ensure that their city's growth was efficient and smart. The city's most prominent businessmen thus took the helm, launching a movement towards city planning and drawing in other like-minded commercial and industrial actors along the way.

## **Daniel Burnham's Plan of Chicago**

Daniel H. Burnham's influence on city planning in Chicago would not be limited merely to his work organizing the famed World's Columbian Exposition; in fact, this effort

pales in comparison to what was to come. In 1906, the Merchants Club formed a committee to explore their idea of a comprehensive plan; that committee continued its work following the Merchants Club's merger with the Commercial Club. The Plan Committee – operating within the Club's larger mission to advance business interests – would choose who would be the author and designer of a plan to guide the development of the city, ultimately commissioning Daniel Burnham and Edward Bennett. Daniel Burnham was a logical choice, not only because of his work with the Fair, but also due to his city planning experience; Chicago would not be the first city for which he developed such a plan. Burnham, though from New York, had spent his early career in Chicago and was said to have considered it his home. He had also worked as a planning consultant doing similar comprehensive plans for other cities including San Francisco and Manila, so he was an obvious choice to do the same for Chicago due to what was often referred to as his planning 'genius.' Burnham provided his services on the creation of the plan at no cost to the city or the Merchants and Commercial Clubs, dedicating nearly all of his time for three years to the work.<sup>107</sup>

Consequently, the Chicago Plan Commission and the Commercial Club before it were not the only entities pursuing city planning in Chicago. Other groups had taken an interest in alleviating the city's ills and directing its future trajectory, either informally or through the creation of subcommittees similar to the Commercial Club's. Just two examples of this are the Association of Commerce and the City Club – both similarly business-oriented in mission, membership, or both – and each of which illustrates a different approach to how city planning could take shape in Chicago and how it interfaced with other movements.<sup>108</sup>

---

<sup>107</sup> Peterson, *The Birth of City Planning in the United States*, 215-219.

<sup>108</sup> "Plan of Chicago" meeting minutes, 22 June 1908, Archival Image & Media Collection, The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago (hereafter referred to as Archival Image & Media

The Association of Commerce not only had committees that paralleled those of the Commercial Club and planning-related issues – for example, their Street Traffic Committee – but given their similar mission and membership, they were also involved in and present at some of the Commercial Club Plan Committee meetings wherein the Plan was being developed. The Commercial Club, in its working with Daniel Burnham on the city’s comprehensive plan, drew on its connections and relationships with other such organizations for their support; these organizations were all like-minded and business oriented. Maintaining the exclusion of housing and other social issues from the Fair, such issues were also subsequently excluded from the process of developing the Plan of Chicago; as a result, the scope of city planning as it was forming was limited.<sup>109</sup>

During one meeting on June 22, 1908, the Plan Committee of the Commercial Club asked the Street Traffic Committee of the Association of Commerce to write a report on street congestion in the areas where the Plan of Chicago would recommend improvements, which would bolster evidence of the need for those projects. At the following meeting on June 29, the Plan Committee decided to appoint a new committee specifically tasked with facilitating cooperation with the Association of Commerce on the Plan of Chicago. On August 26, it was decided that there was a need to formally present the idea of the Plan of Chicago to the full Association of Commerce membership to ask for their endorsement.<sup>110</sup>

---

Collection). Accessed online June 6, 2017: <http://digital-libraries.saic.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/mqc/id/3883/rec/1>; Peterson, *The Birth of City Planning in the United States*, 282.

<sup>109</sup> "Plan of Chicago" meeting minutes, 22 June 1908, Archival Image & Media Collection. Accessed online June 6, 2017: <http://digital-libraries.saic.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/mqc/id/3883/rec/1>

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.; "Plan of Chicago" meeting minutes, 25 August 1908, Archival Image & Media Collection. Accessed online June 6, 2017: <http://digital-libraries.saic.edu/cdm/singleitem/collection/mqc/id/4239/rec/2>

As such, the committees of the Association of Commerce that were doing planning-related work were implored to support the efforts of the Plan Committee of the Commercial Club and their Plan of Chicago endeavors. Their partnership and the cooperation of fellow like-minded businessmen was identified early on as a high priority to the Commercial Club and critical to the success of the Plan of Chicago – an endorsement and partnership that, we will see later, did not apply to other movements aiming to improve the present and future of the city such as housing. The Association of Commerce also took on other planning-related initiatives that fell outside the realm of the Plan of Chicago and the forthcoming Chicago Plan Commission. At a Commercial Club meeting on April 8, 1911, member Julius Rosenwald reported on the Association of Commerce’s efforts to establish a downtown district, wherein they would comprehensively coordinate its development from the underground utilities to the lighting. This thorough yet geographically limited approach stands in contrast to Burnham’s developing Plan of Chicago, which aimed to more broadly address the city in its entirety.<sup>111</sup>

After the three years of Burnham’s pro bono work, the Plan of Chicago was ready for publication in 1909. Just 1,650 ‘de luxe’ first editions were published, each adorned with a bookplate; every copy had its own unique number of publication. These first copies were selectively distributed to politicians in Chicago and throughout the country (including to the President of the United States and his Cabinet), subscribers that had given financial contributions to fund the plan, Commercial Club members, and other prominent citizens. Daniel Burnham was gifted with the first copy in the sequence.<sup>112</sup>

---

<sup>111</sup> Commercial Club meeting minutes, 04 April 1911, Box 3, Folder 4, Commercial Club records.

<sup>112</sup> Smith, *The Plan of Chicago*, 116-117.



Burnham's Plan was unprecedented in its scope with grand and ambitious interconnected projects for a city that its leading citizens believed was destined to become the center of the modern world. Despite evidence that early drafts acknowledged and addressed a broader plan for addressing both spatial and social challenges in the city, Burnham's Plan ultimately embraced City Beautiful ideals and neglected to substantively acknowledge other pressing issues. The Plan proposed an efficient system of streets and roads, a network of forest preserves, an improved lakefront, and grand civic spaces, including the boulevarding of Michigan Avenue and a grandiose civic center to be built at Congress and Halsted Streets.<sup>113</sup> According to historian Mel Scott:

In many respects the Chicago of the Burnham plan is a city of a past that America never knew...It is an essentially aristocratic city, pleasing to the merchant princes who participated in its conception but not meeting some of the basic economic and human needs. In this metropolis for businessmen there are, with the exception of the central business district, no carefully designated areas for commercial enterprises, well distributed throughout the city. Nor are there any model tenements for workers, much less model neighborhoods. Not that Burnham, Bennett, and Moore<sup>114</sup> were oblivious to the housing problem. Slums are mentioned, but only in one paragraph...There is even an assertion that if private enterprise cannot rehouse persons forced out of congested quarters, the city itself may have to do so...But this daring idea is tucked into the report almost surreptitiously, as if it were an irrelevancy to be overlooked in the contemplation of magnificent boulevards, imposing public structures, and splendid parks.<sup>115</sup>

If the creation of the Plan of Chicago presented an opportunity to embrace a more broad conception of how to confront the city's challenges more comprehensively than did the Fair, it was an opportunity that was lost on the Commercial Club and Daniel Burnham.

It is doubtful that the members of the Commercial Club's Plan Committee felt constrained

---

<sup>113</sup> Richard J. Roddewig, "Law as Hidden Architecture: Law, Politics, and Implementation of the Burnham Plan of Chicago Since 1909," *The John Marshall Law Review* 43, no. 2 (2010): 379, supra note 12; Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement*, 282.

<sup>114</sup> Charles Moore was the editor of the Plan of Chicago.

<sup>115</sup> Scott, *American City Planning Since 1890*, 108.

by this deliberate focus on City Beautiful-related projects alone. For one, a number of the projects that Daniel Burnham included in the Plan of Chicago were not new to them as they served their business priorities and were already of interest. During the years that this committee was working with Daniel Burnham throughout the creation of the Plan, there were several other Commercial Club committees exploring the types of projects that would end up in the plan – the Committee on Lake Parks, Committee on Interurban Roadways, Committee on a Post Office site, and Committee on Streets and Boulevards. The last of these had explored the widening or boulevarding of streets such as Twelfth Street; the Plan of Chicago thus captured many of the specific spatial improvements that the Commercial Club desired.<sup>116</sup>

Burnham's Plan of Chicago would quickly become the Commercial's Club's greatest legacy and contribution to the city. Media coverage of the Plan's release was carefully orchestrated; the Committee had secured commitments from all of the local papers to not release any details about the Plan until July 3, 1909 for the afternoon papers and July 4 for the morning papers. The Plan of Chicago quickly gained national and international attention, with cities contacting the Commercial Club for advice on creating plans for their city as well as requests to temporarily obtain the plan's drawings to put on display at various festivals and fairs. Following a brief tour to Boston and Washington, D.C., the drawings of the plan were put on display at the Art Institute in Chicago, an exhibit that was

---

<sup>116</sup> Commercial Club meeting minutes, 10 April 1909, Box 2, Folder 6, Commercial Club records.

celebrated with an exclusive event for members of the Commercial Club and the Association of Commerce and their spouses.<sup>117</sup>

Charles Wacker, who was the vice chairman of the Commercial Club's Plan Committee and would become a key player in Chicago's city planning arena, declared that the publication of the Plan of Chicago marked the beginning of a new era in the city's history:

We have been honored with a call to lay the foundation for a work which, if accomplished, will mark a third epoch in the history of Chicago, the two other great epochs being the rebuilding of our city after the fire of 1871, and the creation of the World's Colombian Exposition, the grandest the world has ever witnessed.<sup>118</sup>

Heralded for its visionary nature, the Plan of Chicago was not without its criticisms at a time when the City Beautiful movement was also experiencing increasing scrutiny. The criticisms of the Plan of Chicago mirrored those of the City Beautiful Movement in general. In fact, small factions of opposition to the Plan of Chicago emerged before it was off the printing press. At the time of the plan's publication, opinions were already forming that City Beautiful – and planning – were only for the wealthy, aiming to create wide boulevards where the better-off citizens could promenade in their automobiles and indulgent civic spaces that the poor would never see. This perspective was centered on the movement and the Plan's preoccupation with beauty and aesthetics that cohabitated with a neglect of

---

<sup>117</sup> Commercial Club Regular and Annual Meeting Minutes, 09 April 1910, Box 3, Folder 2, Commercial Club records; Chicago Plan Commission meeting minutes, 04 November 1926, Cc P69q 1921/26 c. 2, Municipal Reference Collection; Chicago Plan Commission Executive Committee meeting minutes, 16 November 1909, Cc P69q 1909/11 c.2, Municipal Reference Collection.

<sup>118</sup> Chicago Plan Commission meeting minutes, 04 November 1909, Cc P69q 1909/11 c.2, Municipal Reference Collection.

more pressing urban ills such as sub-par housing and poverty. Nevertheless, the Plan of Chicago was celebrated in the press and gained overwhelmingly positive reviews.<sup>119</sup>

## **IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN: THE CHICAGO PLAN COMMISSION**

Within the Commercial Club's Plan Committee, discussions arose in 1909 regarding what would occur now that the Plan of Chicago was published. The committee members considered whether they should continue to advocate for the Plan's implementation, encourage the creation of a new entity to do so, or just present the plan to the city and let it make its own impact. Daniel Burnham himself expressed that the committee needed to be prepared to commit to the Plan's implementation full force or step away from it altogether. The last chapter of the Plan of Chicago does, if indirectly, venture into the realm of implementation, specifically examining the Plan's legal implications. While this final chapter did provide extensive detail on the legal aspects of the Plan's enactment, it primarily cited legislative bodies as the vehicle through which existing laws could be used and new laws created for execution of the Plan's components. An extra-legal advisory commission was mentioned in the final pages of the Plan, noting that, though it would not have legal authority, it could provide guidance in terms of implementation. Charles Norton, chairman of the Plan Committee, noted that if the Commercial Club did not want to take on the implementation of the Plan, that the Association of Commerce – another entity with a business focus – would be next in line to do so.<sup>120</sup>

---

<sup>119</sup> Smith, *The Plan of Chicago*, 128.

<sup>120</sup> Daniel H. Burnham and Edward H. Bennett, *Plan of Chicago* (New York: De Capo Press, 1970), 127-156; *A Report of Progress and Present Status From the Chairman of the Committee on Plan on Chicago*, 12 December 1908, Archival Image & Media Collection. Accessed online July 14, 2017 at:

The Commercial Club opted to advocate for the creation of a new entity specifically to undertake the Plan's implementation. They implored Mayor Fred A. Busse to appoint a commission, a request that he easily granted. On July 6, 1909, Mayor Busse sent a communication to the Chicago City Council, asking their permission to appoint such a commission:

The fathers of the Chicago Plan have asked for the appointment of a commission to take up this question and study further the problems involved in the Chicago Plan with a view to determining whether it is feasible to adopt any part of said plan now, and, if so, where to begin.<sup>121</sup>

The Mayor described this proposed commission as being made up of fellow citizens and members of the City Council with the aim of fully informing the entire city of the contents of the Plan and soliciting the endorsement of the whole municipality. It is important to note the narrowness of the Chicago Plan Commission's mandate: it was not to examine how city planning could or should be implemented in Chicago but rather specifically to study and carry out Burnham's Plan as written. This would effectively wed the Chicago Plan Commission and the first iteration of formal city planning to the Plan's priority of improvements that largely served to improve commerce while excluding housing and other social needs. The commission was committed to the Plan's views on how to approach Chicago's challenges regardless of how the city, city planning as a national movement, or any other contextual factors changed.<sup>122</sup>

---

<http://digital-libraries.saic.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/mqc/id/4157/rec/6>

<sup>121</sup> Mayor Busse to the Chicago City Council, Chicago Plan Commission meeting minutes, 04 November 1909, Cc P69q 1909/11 c.2, Municipal Reference Collection.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

## Membership

In the meantime, the Commercial Club's Plan Committee was working to generate a list of potential members for the new commission, considering the Mayor's desire to appoint "a number of Aldermen to the Commission, the balance of the names to be suggested by the Commercial Club Plan Committee. This effectively gave the Commercial Club the authority to shape the views that would be represented in the city's first official planning body, views that would be overwhelming similar to their own."<sup>123</sup> The mayor recommended that the Commercial Club committee propose two civilians to each of his aldermanic appointees, and that the commission be approximately one hundred individuals with the aldermen serving as ex officio members. In addition, Commercial Club members were to account for approximately one third of the new commission; this ratio was ultimately reflected in its Executive Committee, if not the full membership. Consequentially, nearly all the Commercial Club's Plan Committee of Chicago positions would be vacated and require reappointment by its Executive Committee, as its members would subsequently be transplanted to the newly minted Chicago Plan Commission. As such, this would ensure that the business-centric priorities and exclusion of other important issues of the Plan of Chicago would be replicated within the Chicago Plan Commission.<sup>124</sup>

---

<sup>123</sup> Commercial Club meeting minutes, 21 June 1909, Box 26, Folder 8, Commercial Club records; Charles Wacker, who was relaying a message he obtained in a private conference with Mayor Busse, reported this to the committee. There is no indication of whether the mayor wanted specific aldermen on the commission or why he suggested two civilians per alderman. It is possible that he believed that he, as mayor, was better equipped to select the political representation and that the Commercial Club, as businessmen, would be capable of ensuring adequate citizen representation.

<sup>124</sup> Commercial Club meeting minutes, 09 August 1909, Box 26, Folder 9, Commercial Club records.

The size of the proposed Chicago Plan Commission membership list soon ballooned from one hundred as proposed by the Mayor to over three hundred; the drastic increase was perhaps due to a stated aim to make the group 'representative of the entire city.' This fully representative character of the commission membership was often proudly stated; it was said that great care was taken to ensure such complete representation. It appears, however, that 'representation' was narrowly defined as having members from each of the city's fifty wards, not representation in terms of class, engagement in other social movements such as the housing movement, or other socio-economic terms. In fact, the makeup of the commission was quite homogenous, with all members being upper class white males, most coming from business, commerce, industry, finance, or other similar occupations. The Commercial Club, in their influence on the makeup of the commission's membership, selected mostly members of their own ilk, those with whom they already had relationships and familiarity.<sup>125</sup>

The City Council complied with the Mayor's request to create the commission and, on November 1, 1909, 328 of Chicago's 'finest' – the wealthiest, most reputable, and most commercially or industrially successful – were appointed to the first Chicago Plan Commission. In his letter to the City Council, Mayor Busse championed his appointment of a broadly representative body in order to ensure the best consideration of the Plan: "To the end that the public spirited work of these men may receive thorough consideration, I have endeavored to make the membership of this "Chicago Plan" Commission as representative

---

<sup>125</sup> Peterson, *The Birth of City Planning in the United States*, 222; Smith, *The Plan of Chicago*, 117.

as possible of every section and every element of our population.”<sup>126</sup> The men selected were considered the ideal model citizens for the rest of the city:

The Chicago Plan Commission appointed by the Mayor in the truest and best sense represents the people of this city. Its members are the business and political leaders in their respective wards, selected with careful regard to their known ability...because they are especially fitted for this particular problem.<sup>127</sup>

As mentioned, of the first membership, the vast majority were businessmen of various sorts: from drug store owners and millers to brewers and steel magnates. The second largest category of membership types was politicians, both those that were solely in politics and those that had either come from or were still in business. At least twenty of the initial commission members were lawyers or had a legal background, which would have been valuable given the legal elements of the Plan’s implementation. The financial sector and real estate were well represented, as was, surprisingly, the medical profession, which may have been a reflection of the link between planning and public health. There were also at least seven clergymen on the original commission. The unwieldy size of the commission indicates that the members were brought on more for the influence of their names than to function as an active working group. The “people of this city” in this case meant the city that they strove for, the city of the World’s Columbian Exposition, the city of wealth and commercial success, not the city that Chicago actually was.<sup>128</sup>

---

<sup>126</sup> Memorandum, Chicago Plan Commission meeting minutes, 04 Nov. 1909, Cc P69q 1909/11 c.2, Municipal Reference Collection.

<sup>127</sup> Commercial Club meeting minutes, 08 January 1910, Box 3, Folder 1, Commercial Club records.

<sup>128</sup> Herein, the terms World’s Columbian Exposition and the Fair will be used interchangeably to refer to the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition; Smith, *The Plan of Chicago*, 118.



There were a handful of members of the original Chicago Plan Commission that provided the potential for a link between other active social movements in the city and the planning movement. This included George H. Hooker and Graham Taylor, both of the settlement movement; Joseph T. Bowen, the husband of social reformer Louise DeKoven Bowen; and Julius Rosenwald, a prominent businessman and philanthropist that was engaged in a number of Chicago's city improvement initiatives. Whether these links were to come to fruition was yet to be seen. What is clear, however, is the overwhelming representation from the business community and the near absence of representation from the growing housing movement, which we will learn more about in the following chapter.<sup>129</sup>

### ***Charles Wacker***

On November 3, 1909, two days after appointment of its membership by the City Council, the Plan Commission held its first meeting. Charles Wacker presided over the

---

<sup>129</sup> Roster, Chicago Plan Commission meeting minutes, 04 November 1909, Cc P69q 1909/11 c. 2, Municipal Reference Collection; Jane Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull-House, with Autobiographical Notes* (New York: Penguin, 1981), 238; Nicholas Kelley, "Early Days at Hull House," *Social Service Review* 28, no. 4 (Dec. 1954): 427.; "Taylor, Graham," Virginia Commonwealth University Libraries Social Welfare History Project, accessed July 4, 2017. <http://socialwelfare.library.vcu.edu/people/taylor-graham/>; "Guide to the Julius Rosenwald Papers 1905-1963," The University of Chicago Special Collections Research Center Finding Aids, accessed July 4, 2017. <https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/e/scrc/findingaids/view.php?eadid=ICU.SPCL.ROSENWALD> |; "The Men of Hull-House: An Overlooked Aspect of Settlement Life," *Urban Experience in Chicago: Hull-House and Its Neighborhoods, 1889-1963*, University of Illinois at Chicago, accessed July 4, 2017. [http://hullhouse.uic.edu/hull/urbanexp/main.cgi?file=new/show\\_doc.ptt&doc=1033&chap=48](http://hullhouse.uic.edu/hull/urbanexp/main.cgi?file=new/show_doc.ptt&doc=1033&chap=48); Diana Dretske, "Joseph T. Bowen Country Club, Waukegan," *Lake County, Illinois History* (blog), April 19, 2013 (10:09 a.m.), <http://lakecountyhistory.blogspot.com/2013/04/joseph-t-bowen-country-club-waukegan.html>.

meeting as its first Chairman. Wacker had been a part of the institutionalization of city planning in Chicago since day one, having served on the Commercial Club's Plan Committee as its vice chairman. His appointment as the first and permanent Chairman put him at the helm of the commission and its 28-member Executive Committee. Born in Chicago, Charles Wacker had acted as partner in his German-born father's malting and brewing company in his late twenties. Wacker's success was not limited to brewing however; he was equally successful in his ventures into banking, real estate, and other enterprises. As such, his leadership maintained the strong representation of the business community and its priorities at the helm of the city planning movement.<sup>130</sup>

Wacker was an elaborate orator and his speeches included proud declarations of Chicago's potential and the magnificent, yet urgent, opportunity that he and the other civic-minded citizens of the Chicago Plan Commission had before them to cement their city's commercial and industrial supremacy. Wacker invested much of himself into the Chicago Plan Commission, not least of which included countless hours into the realization of Plan of Chicago projects. Wacker would later even front his own money to fund commission operations in the absence of municipal appropriations and pending additional contributions from the Commercial Club. Most importantly though was Wacker's unwavering commitment to the Plan of Chicago as written and the form of city planning it

---

<sup>130</sup> Walker, *The Planning Function in Urban Government*, 233-235; Chicago Plan Commission Executive Committee meeting minutes, 16 November 1909, Cc P69q 1909/11 c. 2, Municipal Reference Collection; "Charles H. Wacker Dies at Lake Geneva," *The Newberry Foreign Language Press Survey*, accessed June 1, 2017. [http://flps.newberry.org/article/5418474\\_6\\_1092/](http://flps.newberry.org/article/5418474_6_1092/)

represented, a form that was predominately focused on improvements to public space and the exclusion of housing.<sup>131</sup>

### **Walter Moody**

Charles Wacker and other members of the Chicago Plan Commission identified a need for early and extensive public education in order to build a positive public sentiment for the Plan of Chicago. In its early years, the commission received financing from the Commercial Club for its basic operations - \$7,000 in the first year and a willingness to continue at \$10,000 a year – an amount that allowed for basic operations, but not the extended public education campaign.<sup>132</sup> Prompted by the resignation of the commission's first secretary Mr. Chamberlin, Chairman Wacker proposed the hiring of Walter Moody, a well-known member of the Association of Commerce and described by Wacker as “a hustler,” to take the lead on a publicity campaign for the Plan of Chicago:

...I wanted to secure the entire time of some man, because I felt from the way matters have shaped themselves that it had become absolutely necessary...I undertook to find a man with enthusiasm, a man who could devote all of his time to the work, a man who really believed in the proposition; and the man whose name I would like to suggest a little later on for appointment...is Mr. Walter D. Moody, who has been General Manager of the Association of Commerce for a number of years.<sup>133</sup>

As Wacker noted, Walter Moody had served as general manager of the Association of Commerce, an organization equally if not more centered on business and commercial

---

<sup>131</sup> “Report on Plan of Chicago Plan Commission Covering the Period from April, 1918 to April, 1919 made to the Commercial Club,” Commercial Club Annual meeting minutes, 12 April 1919, Box 6, Folder 2, Commercial Club records.

<sup>132</sup> Chicago Plan Commission Executive Committee Meeting minutes, 22 April 1910, Cc P69q 1909/11 c. 2, Municipal Reference Collection.

<sup>133</sup> Chicago Plan Commission Executive Committee meeting minutes, 13 January 1911, Cc P69q 1909/11 c. 2, Municipal Reference Collection.

priorities. While he served in his previous position, the membership of the Association of Commerce had grown substantially. As such, he knew business and businessmen and stood out as the clear choice for the commission; as far as records show, he was the only man considered for the job.<sup>134</sup> Walter Moody was brought on board and Wacker subsequently appointed a committee to propose his publicity plan to the Commercial Club:

I think it would be important to have this commission take some action which would bring before those people strongly the importance of the move, and how anxious we are to have it immediately inaugurated.<sup>135</sup>

The need to preemptively garner public support was in part anticipating the financing needs of the widening of Twelfth Street and Michigan Avenue, two projects from the Plan of Chicago selected as first priorities. According to Mel Scott in his account of the history of city planning, “These elements [transportation and transit] of the plan reflected the interest of the members of the Commercial Club in the practical side of urban development.”<sup>136</sup> Michigan Avenue was intended to be a showcase, a grand boulevard that would draw tourists and local residents to the downtown businesses. In summarizing the initial projects to be implemented from the Plan, the promotional brochure titled *Chicago’s Greatest Issue* described the logic of supporting the Michigan Avenue project as such:

Attractiveness is a community asset shared by all. It is not believed that there can be any serious objection on the part of any citizen, either directly or indirectly affected, to an improvement so palpably in the interests of all as the completion of the boulevard link as proposed.<sup>137</sup>

---

<sup>134</sup> Chicago Plan Commission Executive Committee meeting minutes, 22 November 1920, Cc P69q 1920 c. 5, Municipal Reference Collection.

<sup>135</sup> Chicago Plan Commission Executive Committee meeting minutes, 22 April 1910, Cc P69q 1909/11 c. 2, Municipal Reference Collection.

<sup>136</sup> Scott, *American City Planning Since 1890*, 105.

<sup>137</sup> Chicago Plan Commission, *Chicago’s Greatest Issue: An Official Plan* (Chicago: Chicago Plan Commission, 1911), 27-29.

The commission knew that any funding vehicles, such as a bond or special assessment, would be subject to a public vote or be otherwise vulnerable to public opposition that could halt or block the projects. Referencing the need for public support of proposed widening of Twelfth Street, *Chicago's Greatest Issue* states that:

Every citizen of Chicago should aid with his influence and vote at the proper time in the realization of this improvement, thus insuring the success of the first practical step in carrying out the Plan.<sup>138</sup>

In a discussion at a closed Executive Committee meeting on January 13, 1911, the leadership of the commission considered the prospects of a hypothetical public vote on the Twelfth Street widening project. At this time, Chairman Wacker felt encouraged by a recent vote in favor of the Cook County Forest Preserve proposition wherein three million votes were cast in favor, believing it to be a promising indicator for a hypothetical vote on Plan of Chicago projects. But Mr. Bennett and Mr. Dunn of the commission pointed out that this project was different, with Alderman Dunn stating:

Yes, that was for the poor, but they would say if they passed this Twelfth street proposition the next thing would be put Michigan avenue across the river, and the city would vote against it because that is for the rich...the general public is against boulevards.<sup>139</sup>

The conclusion then was that public sentiment for the Plan of Chicago would need to be proactively developed, as the projects of the Plan would not directly or immediately benefit the citizens. While those citizens were perhaps more concerned with their housing or employment conditions, they would need to be educated on why they should support expensive public improvement ventures. Without public support, implementation of the

---

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>139</sup> Chicago Plan Commission Executive Committee meeting minutes, 13 January 1911, Cc P69q 1909/11 c. 2, Municipal Reference Collection.

projects illustrated in the Plan risked opposition from property owners and voters, the latter of which would be needed to acquire financing via municipal bond issues.<sup>140</sup>

By March 1911, Walter Moody had been officially brought on board as the Chicago Plan Commission's Managing Director, and was immediately tasked with executing an extensive public education and publicity campaign to teach the public about the Plan of Chicago and city planning as it was defined by the Plan. From his hiring through 1920, this campaign would indeed be extensive and unprecedented; no city then or since has matched Chicago's early efforts to promote city planning as led by Walter Moody. These efforts happened at all scales, from project-specific to citywide. For example, Moody compiled a list of every property owner on Twelfth Street and produced a petition in favor of the widening project to preempt any opposition petition that might arise.<sup>141</sup>

Walter Moody was a committed salesman and customized his messages about the Plan of Chicago specifically to his audience, incorporating the local and national issues of the moment. Given the concern about anti-boulevarding resistance surrounding the Twelfth Street project, together, he and Wacker swiftly met with the property owners to garner their support. In addition, over this initial decade, the Chicago Plan Commission issued a number of publications, the first of which was the aforementioned *Chicago's Greatest Issue*, which provided a synopsis of the Plan of Chicago. The commission published 165,000 copies of *Chicago's Greatest Issue* in 1911 and distributed it to property owners

---

<sup>140</sup> Walker, *The Planning Function in Urban Government*, 246.

<sup>141</sup> Chicago Plan Commission meeting minutes, 17 March 1911, Cc P69q 1909/11 c. 2, Municipal Reference Collection.

and renters paying \$25 or more in monthly rent, working early on to garner the positive perspective of the voters.<sup>142</sup>

*Wacker's Manual of the Plan of Chicago*, published in 1912 and edited by Moody was perhaps most well-known and far reaching of the commission's publicity pieces. *Wacker's Manual* aimed to educate its readers on the Plan of Chicago and the importance of a well-planned city; more important was the focus on establishing every citizen's civic duty to ensure the success of the implementation of the Plan of Chicago. This text was far-reaching, particularly as it was incorporated into the Chicago Public Schools' eighth grade civics education curriculum. As such, Moody and Wacker were confident that both the pupils – the future voters of Chicago – and their parents would be inspired by and loyal to the spirit of the Plan and the commission. Both of these key publications maintained the focus on city planning that aligned with that of the Plan of Chicago.<sup>143</sup>

Collectively, Charles Wacker through his enthusiastic leadership and Walter Moody with his public relations savvy were the spirit that drove much of the work of the Chicago Plan Commission in its first decade, setting its pace and acting as its most vocal advocates.<sup>144</sup>

---

<sup>142</sup> For example, his linking of the work of the Chicago Plan Commission to the Post-WWI focus on reconstruction and the employment of returning soldiers; "Reconstruction Platform of Chicago Plan Commission," *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, Illinois), Dec. 14, 1918, 6, accessed July 4, 2017: <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.uwm.edu/hnpchicagotribune/docview/174485656/C24D30A2DD4F4FA2PQ/1?accountid=15078>; Chicago Plan Commission meeting minutes, 17 March 1911, Cc P69q 1909/11 c. 2, Municipal Reference Collection; Chicago Plan Commission Executive Committee meeting minutes, 19 June 1911, Cc P69q 1911/13 c. 2, Municipal Reference Collection.

<sup>143</sup> Smith, *The Plan of Chicago*, 125; Moody, *Wacker's Manual of the Plan of Chicago*.

<sup>144</sup> Walker, *The Planning Function in Urban Government*, 241.

## **The Chicago Plan Commission's Authority and Scope**

Upon its creation, the Chicago Plan Commission's task was to examine and implement the Plan of Chicago, a plan that claimed comprehensiveness but focused primarily on improving the city for business and commerce. Nevertheless, the Plan was unprecedented in its vision, scope, and proposed impact. In order to carry out a mandate of this magnitude, some authority would need to be established in order to enable the commission to prevent the Plan from ending up on a shelf, dismissed as an artist's dream. This would be difficult given the commission's limitations as an advisory – and not legislative – body.

Recalling the political context of this time, machine politics would be at least partially influential regarding which institutional tools were perceived as most likely to be effective in implementing the Plan. It was understood by business that developing regulations to manage city planning and development was not a wise investment of resources, given the inability to enforce regulations. Often, the aldermen and ward bosses would grant variances for building regulations or simply fail to conduct proper inspections in exchange for a bribe or a vote. If the men of the Chicago Plan Commission focused on developing regulations to control congestion and guide development, they would play right into the hands of the boodlers. It was a given that the creation of regulations would not be sufficient, as the enforcement of those regulations was at the discretion of the politicians.<sup>145</sup>

Due to this reality, the legal system – primarily the city's ability to acquire land for public improvements – would become central to city planning in Chicago; this may explain the extensive appendix of the Plan of Chicago on the legal aspects of the plan. We can see

---

<sup>145</sup> Roddewig, "Law as Hidden Architecture," 383.



the consequences of this in the Chicago Plan Commission's binary focus on 1) the legal proceedings of the police power, excess condemnation, and eminent domain and 2) the previously mentioned extensive public education campaign to build public sentiment for the Plan of Chicago and gain eventual votes for bond issues. These two components – the legal system and the public – were the low-hanging fruit and most likely to be at least partially independent of the political machine.<sup>146</sup> Winning over the public would be an early and significant effort of the commission:

On the appointment of our Commission there was no question that one of the first essentials was to firmly establish the Commission in the public mind while, at the same time, keeping before the public a great benefit conferred by the members of this Club and giving the Plan to the people.<sup>147</sup>

In addition to gaining the trust of the public, the Chicago Plan Commission also saw the need to establish itself as the de facto clearinghouse wherein development projects had to be reviewed and approved to ensure their compatibility with the Plan of Chicago:

If the Plan of Chicago is to be altered, this should never be undertaken without careful and thorough study. No change in the plan should ever be made without the sanction of the Chicago Plan Commission, into whose hands the Plan of Chicago has been placed.<sup>148</sup>

Chairman Wacker declared that the commission should be the clearinghouse for all things related to the Plan of Chicago. This was reiterated by Edward Butler, the chairman of the Commercial Club's Plan Committee, in saying, "The city of Chicago is now practically committed to this Plan, and no important work of public improvement can be made

---

<sup>146</sup> Burnham and Bennett, *Plan of Chicago*, 127-156; Roddewig, "Law as Hidden Architecture," 392, supra note 81.

<sup>147</sup> Commercial Club Regular and Annual Meeting minutes, 11 April 1914, Box 4, Folder 3, Commercial Club records.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

without the approval of the Chicago Plan Commission, of which our Mr. Wacker is Chairman.”<sup>149</sup>

Out of the gate, Charles Wacker was confident that this would be the case. In November 1910, just one year after Mayor Busse appointed the commission, Wacker assured the Commercial Club that the Chicago Plan Commission was a respected entity and that all city development concerns were being vetted through it:

...I stepped in and said I thought if there was anything that belonged to the work of our Commission that that question should first be submitted to us, and I have insisted right along that our Commission must in no way be ignored. I am glad to say here tonight that there is not a body in the city of Chicago today that undertakes to go ahead on any improvement which can at all be brought within the scope of our work without first bringing it before us, which I think in itself is an achievement.<sup>150</sup>

However, despite this confidence and the critical need for the commission to have authority to be effective, the power to ultimately implement aspects of the plan would lie in Chicago’s legislative bodies, as has been noted. Ultimately, when the commission was created in 1909, it was “made a regular department of the city government, with limited functions comprising advisory, but not executive, power.”<sup>151</sup>

## **FIRST STEPS: STREETS, HIGHWAYS, AND PARKS**

Once the membership was appointed, the Chicago Plan Commission hit the ground running, holding its first meeting in November 1909, the same month of its official creation. In what follows, we will look at what their work entailed in its early years. As will be clear,

---

<sup>149</sup> Commercial Club Annual Meeting minutes, 09 April 1910, Box 3, Folder 2, Commercial Club records.

<sup>150</sup> Commercial Club meeting minutes, 12 November 1910, Box 3, Folder 3, Commercial Club Records, 1877-1938, Commercial Club records.

<sup>151</sup> Chicago Plan Commission meeting minutes, 04 November 1926, Cc P69q 1921/26 c. 2, Municipal Reference Collection.

the commission's work indeed stayed true to the final form of the Plan of Chicago, with a focus on the improvements of public space, declarations that their work would benefit all the citizens of Chicago, and the exclusion of pressing social issues such as housing.

### **Projects Undertaken from 1909 to 1926**

In its first five years between 1909 and 1914, the project focus of the commission remained true to the Plan of Chicago's City Beautiful roots. Three top priority projects – the widening of Twelfth Street (later Roosevelt Road), widening of Michigan Avenue, and the Lake Front improvement – were selected and would remain dominant in the commission's docket for at least its first decade. These projects focused on improving circulation for commercial traffic, creating convenience and beauty, transforming Michigan Avenue into a commanding and grand boulevard, and returning the lake front to the people for recreation and relaxation.<sup>152</sup>

The Twelfth Street and Michigan Avenue projects entailed gaining approval from the Board of Local Improvements, securing the passage of any necessary ordinances describing the project and the properties to be affected, organizing publicity campaigns leading up to any bond issue votes (which would need to be successfully passed), and then moving forward with a series of legal proceedings to acquire the land from property owners. The latter process was the most time consuming and entailed negotiating to define the extent of the public benefit of the project and any special assessment boundaries. The determination of the public benefit and special assessment boundaries would dictate how much the municipality would pay for the project, which of the adjacent property owners would be

---

<sup>152</sup> Burnham and Bennett, *Plan of Chicago*, 50, 100-104.

required to pay a portion of the project expenses, and how much those property owners would pay.<sup>153</sup>

In order to build the much-needed public sentiment for the Plan, Charles Wacker and Walter Moody were continually giving lectures on the Plan of Chicago and holding meetings with various organizations and representatives with an interest in the projects they were proposing. The commission went before a relatively wide variety of groups and organizations by way of hundreds of public lectures. The number of lectures given each year was impressive, often averaging at least one per week if not more. The audiences were relatively varied and included schools (pupils, teachers, and principals), social clubs (both men's and women's), churches, professional associations, and so forth. Lectures were also presented at events, such as expositions. Financed by the Commercial Club, the stereopticon lectures aimed to "imbue every man, woman, and child with the spirit of cooperation" and demonstrate "the possibilities of transforming Chicago into the most beautiful city in the world."<sup>154</sup> Mel Scott describes these public presentations:

...Moody developed a splendid lantern slide collection illustrating the Burnham plan and examples of fine planning throughout the world. Speakers using this collection gave as many as ninety lectures in school auditoriums in a single winter season. Moody made sure that there were capacity audiences by distributing twice as many tickets for each lecture as there were seats...Attendance at the slide lectures totaled approximately 175,000 in seven years.<sup>155</sup>

---

<sup>153</sup> Commercial Club meeting minutes, April 11, 1914, Cc P69 1914xa c. 2, Municipal Reference Collection.

<sup>154</sup> Chicago Plan Commission meeting minutes, 19 March 1912, Cc P69q c. 2, Municipal Reference Collection; "All to Know Chicago Plans," *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, IL), April 23, 1910, 3; "Club to Teach City Beauty," *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, IL), April 10, 1910, 1. Accessed September 10, 2017: <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.uwm.edu/hnpchicagotribune/docview/173446687/3C4F7DE2EFDD4F9EPQ/11?accountid=15078>

<sup>155</sup> Scott, *American City Planning Since 1890*, 140.

The press covered the publication of the Plan extensively, and shared Walter Moody's message that:

The idea as contained in the plan for creating order out of chaos in Chicago should be taken up by the entire clergy of the city, all school teachers in public, parochial and private schools, by the professors of all departments in our colleges, by every Chicagoan, neighbor to neighbor. Clerks in stores, factory employés, and laborers of all classes should catch the Chicago plan spirit and talk about it. It should have the indorsement[sic] of every club and organization of whatsoever nature in Chicago. It is the one Chicago issue that all Chicago can and should unite on. There is no politics in it, no 'cat in the bag' proposition; simply a sane, rational, broad business-like plan to harmonize some of the loveliness and unloveliness of physical Chicago.<sup>156</sup>

Despite these publicity efforts, both street-widening projects saw opposition factions emerge from property owners immediately following the publication of the plan; those in opposition were concerned about the commission's motivations and the effects that the project would have on them. The Twelfth Street property owners quickly organized meetings and the signing of petitions in strong opposition to what they understood to be the boulevarding of their street. In their view, boulevarding was something that was done for the wealthy and they were firmly against it. In the case of Michigan Avenue, the opposition of an organized group of property owners did not oppose the project in whole, but did demand some alterations from that which was proposed in Burnham's Plan.<sup>157</sup>

Even in its first year, the Chicago Plan Commission immediately began receiving letters from a variety of organizations and individuals requesting that the Chicago Plan

---

<sup>156</sup> "Moody 'Chicago Plan' Head," *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, IL), January 15, 1911, 7. Accessed September 10, 2017: <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.uwm.edu/hnpchicagotribune/docview/173533829/3C4F7DE2EFDD4F9EPQ/12?accountid=15078>

<sup>157</sup> Chicago Plan Commission meeting minutes, 04 February 1910, Cc P69q 1909/11 c.2, Municipal Reference Collection.

Commission take up this or that particular issue. Some of these items merely required redirection to the appropriate entity; for example, a letter about dumping on a piece of property was redirected to the city, a letter requesting the management of freight was referred to the Association of Commerce, and a letter about unclean alleys and speeding motorcycles was sent on to the Chicago Parks Commission. Other letters were relevant, but were related to projects that were not yet underway, such as the locating of the post office and detailed suggestions for the lake front; these were filed away for future reference. Many communications came from schools, societies, and social groups that requested a lecture on the Plan of Chicago, to which the commission was happy to comply. Finally, there were matters presented to the commission via written correspondence and in person to members that the commission leadership felt were outside their scope as defined by the Plan of Chicago, for which the secretary was directed to respond to the sender expressing as much. This included gas tanks, the location of undertakers, and sign boards.<sup>158</sup>

As mentioned, Burnham's Plan failed to address other pressing issues in the city such as housing conditions while it exhaustively addressed transportation, streets, parks, and other projects. The subsequent absence of housing in the work of the Chicago Plan Commission did not go unnoticed by interested parties. In October of 1910, the Society for Ethical Culture of Chicago and the Board of the University of Chicago Settlement (later Mary McDowell Settlement) wrote two letters to the Chicago Plan Commission related to housing. Each letter implored the commission to consider the pervasive issue of poor housing conditions and the negative effects it was having on the city as a whole. The letters

---

<sup>158</sup> Chicago Plan Commission Executive Committee meeting minutes, 22 April 1910, Cc P69q 1909/11 c.2, Municipal Reference Collection; Chicago Plan Commission Executive Committee meeting minutes, 18 October 1910, Cc P69q 1909/11 c.2, Municipal Reference Collection.

expressed a sense of urgency to resolve the problem before the costs to do so rose, the need for comprehensiveness in city planning, and the role of the commission as representing the city as a whole. The authors of one of the letters, Floyd R. Mechem, President and R. A. Millikan, Secretary of the Board of the University of Chicago Settlement, wrote:

While it is important to advance the commercial needs of the down-town district, and its radiating streets and avenues, it would be very unfortunate if your interest and practical knowledge could not be used in considering the housing of outlying districts, since the two questions are closely related.<sup>159</sup>

In closing, the letter asks the commission to appoint a sub-committee to consider the housing issue. The executive committee's consideration of their request was brief and uncomplicated. Alderman Long and the commission Secretary agreed that the commission was not in a position to take up the housing issue. With very little further discussion, Mr. Carr, a commission member, suggested:

...that the secretary write this organization, in as diplomatic language as he sees fit, to the effect that we are so much engaged at the present time with the physical condition of the streets and things of that kind, that it will be impossible for some time at least to take this up.<sup>160</sup>

Commission member Mr. Fisher and Charles Wacker each compare this request to appeals they deemed of similar import, including the aforementioned inquiries related to gas tanks, undertakers, and sign boards. Their determination was that they would write a letter stating that they did not have the time to get involved in or consider the matter. The

---

<sup>159</sup> Chicago Plan Commission Executive Committee meeting minutes, 18 October 1910, Cc P69q 1909/11. c.2, Municipal Reference Collection.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

Secretary finished the discussion by stating: "They do not expect this committee to do anything at all. They simply want it to get into the papers. That was the whole thing."<sup>161</sup>

But these firm boundaries regarding the limited scope of the commission did not apply to all requests and opportunities that came its way. In Charles Wacker's words:

We have always felt called upon to cooperate to the fullest extent with all other city departments and governmental agencies...in all matters of mutual interest, even though they were matters which might not come directly within the province of the Plan Commission...In no case have we ever refused any agency our aid and cooperation when it was requested. On the contrary, we have solicited invitations to be present at the meetings of other agencies, in order to safeguard the Plan of Chicago.<sup>162</sup>

One notable initiative that the commission undertook in its first three years that was not from the Plan of Chicago or limited to City Beautiful was their taking a position on the Juul Law, which was related to local taxation and had recently been interpreted by the Supreme Court in a way that was financially detrimental to the city of Chicago. It appears that the commission was willing to venture away from their Plan of Chicago focus, but only for those efforts that spoke their language – those that were related to the enabling of commercial prosperity – and not others. The Chicago Plan Commission clearly did not classify housing as a significant or mutual concern for the city at this stage, nor did they see any potential overlap between housing movement initiatives and city planning.<sup>163</sup>

In addition to the Association of Commerce, mentioned earlier as another entity invested in city planning initiatives, the City Club of Chicago is another important example of a group engaging in city planning work parallel to the Chicago Plan Commission. The City

---

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Chicago Plan Commission meeting minutes, 04 November 1926, CC P69q 1921/26 c.2, Municipal Reference Collection.

<sup>163</sup> Commercial Club meeting minutes, April 11, 1914, Cc P69 1914xa c. 2, Municipal Reference Collection.



Club was founded in 1903 largely as a counter to the corrupt political system of the time. Among the issues in which the City Club took an interest were both city planning and housing conditions. In fact, the City Club had in its employ an engineer and planner, Bion J. Arnold and, during a conflict with the Pennsylvania Railroad's construction of its new west side railway terminal, the City Council consulted with Mr. Arnold, seeking his planning expertise in crafting a compromise.<sup>164</sup>

Upon invitation, Walter Moody from the Chicago Plan Commission attended a meeting of the City Club's Committee on City Planning on May 26, 1914. He was asked a number of questions, most notably questions about why the Chicago Plan Commission was not addressing housing, how the commission processed incoming requests, and whether the Plan of Chicago was a tentative or suggestive document or if it was a final plan and not open to additional input or consideration. When asked about housing, Moody stated that "the Chicago Plan was essentially a street plan" but that "it was not a hard and fast plan and that any suggestion as to housing would be gladly received by the committee and if it were worthy would receive the commission's backing." Nevertheless, he also expressed that a group more familiar with the legal aspects of housing might be better able to respond to such requests; the response indicated that a broadening of the commission's scope to include housing was not likely. City Club members also inquired as to whether there was a

---

<sup>164</sup> "About," City Club of Chicago: Illinois' premier public affairs forum since 1903, accessed June 8, 2017: <https://www.cityclub-chicago.org/about>; Committee on City Planning meeting minutes, 14 July 1914, Box 16, Folder 1, City Club of Chicago records, Chicago Historical Society, Chicago (hereafter referred to as City Club records); Condit, *Chicago 1910-29: Building, Planning, and Urban Technology*, 267.

precedent wherein a city plan included housing, with Moody citing the Wrenn plan of London from 1666 as an example.<sup>165</sup>

At the next meeting of the Committee on City Planning, the City Club members expressed their dissatisfaction in how the Chicago Plan Commission was organized, specifically noting that it frequently “lost sight of” its general principles, becoming distracted by special cases. The City Club’s conclusion was that they would support the commission, but proceed with their own work, which they believed took a more broad approach to city planning. Exhibiting the type of joint approach to city planning and housing they desired in the commission, the City Club’s Committee on City Planning and a Committee on Housing Conditions would at times hold shared meetings, acknowledging the overlap between their two realms. The City Club demonstrated flexibility and an ability to evolve that stands in stark contrast to the rigidity that the Chicago Plan Commission was beginning to show. Further shedding skepticism on how city planning was moving forward in Chicago, one City Club member reminded the committee that Daniel Burnham’s similar plan for San Francisco had proved all but useless in rebuilding the city after the earthquake of 1906.<sup>166</sup>

By 1915, despite Charles Wacker’s confidence in the Chicago Plan Commission’s perceived authority, its true power would be tested significantly by the aforementioned west side terminal plans of the Pennsylvania Railroad Company. In essence, the Pennsylvania Railroad purchased a significant amount of land in downtown Chicago and

---

<sup>165</sup> Committee on City Planning meeting minutes, 26 May 1914, Box 16, Folder 1, City Club records.

<sup>166</sup> Joint Meeting of the City Club’s City Planning Committee and the Housing Committee meeting minutes, 05 April 1915, Box 16, Folder 6, City Club Records; City Club Committee on City Planning meeting minutes, 09 June 1914, Box 16, Folder 1, City Club records.

proposed the locating of a new railway terminal that would render portions of the Plan of Chicago impossible to carry out. The conflict was centered around Twelfth Street, one of the Chicago Plan Commission's priority projects; the railroad's proposed plan would have resulted in several elevated tracks crossing over the road the commission planned to improve. The commission's initial efforts to persuade the Pennsylvania Railroad to reconsider their plan were largely disregarded. The commission was ultimately compelled to go directly to the City Council to intervene, ultimately resulting in a revised plan that did not compromise the Twelfth Street improvement. As such, the Chicago Plan Commission was reminded of its dependence upon the City Council for its legitimacy.<sup>167</sup>

Between being occupied with the railroad terminal situation and quelling the opposition that arose around the Twelfth Street and Michigan Avenue projects, the Chicago Plan Commission did not take on any other major projects in its early years other than the lake front improvement, which entailed preserving the lake front as park space and the dumping of waste materials along the waterline to extend and increase park acreage. The handful of miscellaneous projects that the Chicago Plan Commission engaged in between 1909 and 1914 included aiding the city in the design of new bridges and a citywide design for downtown lighting, urging the County Board to make improvements to six different roads that aligned with the Plan of Chicago's Outer Roadway System, successfully supporting the adoption of a Forest Preserve Bill, making recommendations on excess condemnation legislation, and making recommendations regarding improvements to

---

<sup>167</sup> Chicago Plan Commission meeting minutes, 21 May 1913, Cc P69q 1911/13 c.2, Municipal Reference Collection.

Robey Street and Ashland Avenue. Each of these projects maintained the commitment to the limited, street-heavy focus of the Plan of Chicago.<sup>168</sup>

The firmness of the Chicago Plan Commission's view of what city planning should look like becomes even more apparent between 1914-1919. This can be seen in the commission's lack of significant engagement in the creation of Chicago's first zoning regulations. It would ultimately be the City Council rather than the Chicago Plan Commission that drove this initiative. Inspired by the first zoning ordinance in the nation being adopted by New York City in 1916, a Zoning Commission was created and the Glackin Law – which was Chicago's first iteration of a zoning law – was passed in 1919. The Glackin Law allowed for neighborhood-specific versus citywide zoning, the latter of which was what many, including the Plan of Chicago's co-author Edward Bennett, saw as necessary to implement the Plan. The Glackin Law fell short of this and merely allowed for the creation of neighborhood-specific zoning with the consent of 60 percent of the inhabitants of that neighborhood. This led to broad inconsistencies in land use regulations and was seen by some as legally and constitutionally unsustainable. The Glackin Law was subsequently repealed in 1921, soon to be replaced by Chicago's first zoning ordinance in 1923.<sup>169</sup>

As early as 1914, even the City Club was discussing zoning while the Chicago Plan Commission failed to; two members of the City Club's Committee on City Planning were appointed to a Zone Plan Committee to investigate newly emerging zoning systems in other cities. While Chairman Charles Wacker did serve on the Zoning Commission, the Chicago

---

<sup>168</sup> Commercial Club meeting minutes, April 11, 1914, Cc P69 1914xa c. 2, Municipal Reference Collection; The projects were recommended for South Park Avenue, Milwaukee Road, Joliet Road, Western Avenue, Archer Avenue, and Halsted Street.

<sup>169</sup> Roddewig, "Law as Hidden Architecture," 391; Joseph P. Schwieterman and Dana M. Caspall, *The Politics of Place: A History of Zoning in Chicago* (Chicago: Lake Claremont Press, 2006), 18, 20, 22.

Plan Commission did not in any way take the lead on the development of zoning in Chicago; furthermore, the commission made no monumental contributions to zoning in the city. This is significant, given the central role that zoning would ultimately play in city planning.<sup>170</sup>

In 1920, at a meeting marking its first decade of work, it is clear that the commission's accomplishments were still strictly City Beautiful-oriented projects. The list of completed and ongoing projects was, in fact, not much different than it had been in 1914. As they had for the previous decade, Roosevelt Road, Michigan Avenue, the Lake Front, the acquisition of forest preserves, and the West Side terminal dominated the list. Beyond that, the Chicago Plan Commission aided in the rehabilitation of the Illinois Central Railroad terminal; the widening or extension of Western Avenue, Ashland Avenue, and Robey Street; and the commencement of the widening and double decking of South Water Street (later Wacker Drive). The commission continued to measure the success and positive impact of these projects on the city in terms of increases in property values and city revenue and their potential to promote the "moral and physical standards" of Chicago's citizens. One decade into its institutionalization of city planning and the philosophy of City Beautiful was holding strong – it was still perceived that the improvement of public space towards facilitating commercial success was the best means towards the end of social transformation.<sup>171</sup>

In its 1920 report on its first ten years of progress, the Chicago Plan Commission cites a number of additional issues that were pertinent and demanded its attention. The majority of the twelve items listed were on par with the work the commission had done to

---

<sup>170</sup> City Club's Committee on City Planning meeting minutes, 12 May 1914, Box 16, Folder 1, City Club records; Walker, *The Planning Function in Urban Government*, 242, 254.

<sup>171</sup> Chicago Plan Committee meeting minutes, 09 April 1929, Cc P69 1920b c. 3, Municipal Reference Collection.

date: the widening, opening, or extending of streets; the locating of the new post office; developing the region's roadway network; and establishing canal-side boulevards. Two distinctive items that stand out in the report as important problems that were recognized as yet to be solved were housing and zoning: surprisingly, despite the absence of substantive engagement in these issues on the part of the commission, both appeared in the 1920 report.<sup>172</sup>

Recall that New York City had by this time passed its 1916 zoning ordinance and Chicago had passed its first iteration of a zoning law. As such, the mention of zoning is likely more indicative of the commission's awareness of the changes taking place in the national planning movement as cities were beginning to explore and adopt their first zoning ordinances, not evidence of its intention to take a leading role in such an effort. Again, the Chicago Plan Commission remained firmly committed to the Plan of Chicago and the definition of city planning that it had established for it.<sup>173</sup>

Given the commission's dismissal of housing to date, it is surprising to suddenly see housing mentioned by the commission as a planning problem yet to be solved; however, housing's mention was not accompanied by any substantive change in its perception of the scope of city planning. There is no further consideration of how the commission could or would engage with the housing issue in the city; the extent of the commission's acknowledgement of housing was the single sentence, "Continued support and

---

<sup>172</sup> Report titled *Ten Years Work of the Chicago Plan Commission, 1909-1919: A Resume of the Work on the Plan of Chicago*, Chicago Plan Committee meeting minutes, 09 April 1929, Cc P69 1920b c. 3, Municipal Reference Collection.

<sup>173</sup> Schwieterman and Caspall, *The Politics of Place*, 18, 20.

encouragement of the housing question.”<sup>174</sup> It is not clear or indicated how precisely the Chicago Plan Commission was supporting or encouraging the housing question in the city.

In contrast, the 1920 progress report provides pages upon pages of detailed information about which streets needed to be widened and where, the legislation required for particular projects such as the locating of the post office, and the specific ways in which the commission had supported each effort. No specific housing projects or initiatives were detailed or even mentioned, and no effort was made to educate the public on the importance of the housing question or even what it entailed. There was certainly no indication of a desire to seek the endorsement of any housing movement organizations, as there had been with the Association of Commerce.<sup>175</sup>

In its 1925 progress report, fifteen years in, the commission’s emphasis had still not changed much. Highlighted early in the report were the usual suspects in terms of street improvement projects: Michigan Avenue and South Water Street were dominant. Under the miscellaneous work and information provided in this fifteen-year snapshot, items such as the location of new airport landing fields and the new post office, constructing municipal buildings, supporting efforts to ensure adequate harbor facilities, zoning, and the history of the commission are emphasized, though zoning is again only briefly mentioned. The unwavering focus on business and commerce can yet again be seen in the language of this report, wherein the city is referenced as the “great municipal corporation known as Chicago” and the public is referred to as “the stockholder citizens.” The accomplishments of the commission’s work are denoted as profits, losses, receipts, and expenditures. On the

---

<sup>174</sup> Report titled *Ten Years Work of the Chicago Plan Commission, 1909-1919: A Resume of the Work on the Plan of Chicago*, Chicago Plan Committee meeting minutes, 09 April 1929, Cc P69 1920b c. 3, Municipal Reference Collection.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

whole, from 1909 to 1926, the Chicago Plan Commission held steady to its City Beautiful foundation and the definition of planning that Burnham's Plan established. Despite Moody's assurance to the City Club that the commission and the Plan were flexible, actual proceedings suggest that was not the case.<sup>176</sup>

### **Funding the Plan: Allocations, Assessments, and Bond Issues**

From the time of the Chicago Plan Commission's creation, it was anticipated that the City of Chicago would and should take on some and eventually all responsibility for city planning, most directly via appropriations for the operation of the commission. Robert Walker, in his book on the function of city planning, cites the Theory of Functional Accretion, stating that lay-boards like city plan commissions are meant to serve a transitional purpose in the development of new governmental services and activities. He says that, in this process, autonomous or semi-autonomous boards coordinate and advocate for the necessity of particular services – such as the creation of a comprehensive city plan – which a growing constituency sees as beneficial to the city at large. Most often, these new services and activities are eventually integrated into other governmental activities. This theory aligns with the expectations of the founding leadership of the Chicago Plan Commission.<sup>177</sup>

However, this was not the case in the first decades of formal planning in Chicago. Appropriations from the city between 1909 and 1926 varied by tens of thousands of dollars, going up and down from year to year. The lowest amount received from the city

---

<sup>176</sup> Report titled *The Plan of Chicago in 1925: Fifteen Years Work of the Chicago Plan Commission, 1910-1925*, November 1925, Cc P69 1925 c.4, Municipal Reference Collection.

<sup>177</sup> Walker, *The Planning Function in Urban Government*, 134.



during this time frame was just \$5,000, which was in the commission's second year and reflected a 33 percent decrease from its first year. The appropriations in the years 1924 to 1926 were the highest of this period at \$40,000 each; this would be the peak of the city's appropriation for the commission until the end of the 1930s. In fact, in 1916, the city Comptroller sought to zero out all appropriations to the commission. Again, in 1918, the Finance Committee declined the commission's \$30,000 appropriation request, citing shortages due to the war. In 1919, when the Finance Committee again proposed no funding for the commission, the *Chicago Tribune* drew attention to the city's slighting of the Plan of Chicago, noting that "for every dollar the city has spent public spirited citizens have contributed three."<sup>178</sup>

The "public spirited citizens" most likely referred to the members of the Commercial Club, which made significant financial contributions to both the creation and, later, implementation of the Plan of Chicago. As such, they ultimately maintained their direct engagement in city planning far beyond the Fair and publication of the Plan. Between 1915-1919 alone, according to their own account, Club members contributed \$181,050 towards the promotion of the Plan of Chicago, often collected via individual donations from its members. This amount does not include the initial funds the club invested in the creation of

---

<sup>178</sup> For the time frame studied herein, from 1909-1941; Walker, *The Planning Function in Urban Government*, 245; "Pike in Budget Cuts Out Plan and Rail Boards," *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, IL), Dec. 4, 1916. Accessed July 4, 2017: <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.uwm.edu/hnpchicagotribune/docview/174161152/63586EA7246141BD/PQ/36?accountid=15078>; "False Economy," *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, IL), Jun. 28, 1918, 6, Accessed July 4, 2017: <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.uwm.edu/hnpchicagotribune/docview/174365078/63586EA7246141BD/PQ/30?accountid=15078>; Oscar E. Hewett, "City Slight's 'Plan' Praised All Over The World," *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, Illinois), Mar. 6, 1919, 7. Accessed July 3, 2017: <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.uwm.edu/hnpchicagotribune/docview/174452028/85095E86E5E24F07P/Q/20?accountid=15078>

the Plan up until 1909, which has been reported to be \$100,000; these two figures alone amount to nearly \$300,000 in financial backing. For comparison, appropriations of the City of Chicago towards the Chicago Plan Commission during a similar period (1915-1918) totaled \$74,000.<sup>179</sup>

As a result of the minimal appropriations from the city, Chairman Wacker was forced to go before the Commercial Club with requests for more funding multiple times, until at least 1918. On each occasion, Wacker pushed the Commercial Club membership, reminding them of the fame the Plan of Chicago had brought to them and their obligation to see their project through:

It is our great aim to see successfully concluded at least the things we are now working on and the permanent establishment of the Plan of Chicago. This work calls for the united action, the financial support, the sympathetic encouragement, if you please, of every member of this Club...But if this work is to go forward as a Commercial Club project, the members must subscribe on a basis of at least \$25,000 per year.<sup>180</sup>

Walter Moody was not spared the humbling experience of returning to the Commercial Club to notify them of the lack of city funds and the need for additional support:

This continues to be hampering and embarrassing. The Commission was entirely without funds from July 1, 1918 until the first half (\$15,000) of the Commercial Club's subscription was received in March, but this was insufficient to replace the personal notes of the chairman given at the bank for the Commission's maintenance

---

<sup>179</sup> Commercial Club meeting minutes, 02 Apr. 1916, Box 6, Folder 32, Commercial Club records; Memorandum, Chicago Plan Commission meeting minutes, 04 November 1909, Cc P69q 1909/11 c.2, Municipal Reference Collection; Commercial Club meeting minutes, 20 April 1918, Box 5, Folder 5, Commercial Club records.

<sup>180</sup> Commercial Club meeting minutes, 11 April 1914, Box 4, Folder 3, Commercial Club records.

during the interval and the chairman will be obliged to continue borrowing money on his own paper for the Commission's further maintenance.<sup>181</sup>

The unreliability of municipal appropriations and extended dependence upon the Commercial Club indicates that, nearly one decade in, the commission and city planning were yet to be securely institutionalized within municipal functions and the Commercial Club maintained its influence over city planning. Efforts on other financial fronts were more fruitful for the commission. The voters proved to be more generous via affirmative votes on bond issues; it appears that the commission's extensive public education campaign had been a wise investment. Between 1912 and 1926, the public approved \$124,495,000 worth of bonds for Plan of Chicago related projects. All of the projects funded were for street improvements (i.e., Twelfth Street, Michigan Avenue, Ashland Avenue, Robey Street), forest preserves, or parks (i.e., Lincoln Park and South Parks).<sup>182</sup>

While these positive affirmations from the voters indicated the acceptance of city planning as crucial and the ability to move projects forward, the commission's sole reliance on the municipal bond market would prove to be problematic. After many years of positive votes for bond issues, it appears that there were growing concerns that the Plan of Chicago was becoming expensive for the city. In 1921, even Mayor Thompson turned on the commission and Wacker specifically, blaming their proposed public improvement projects for nearly \$3 million in expert fees paid by the city. In the Chicago Plan Commission's 1925 progress report, they take the opportunity to address concerns that the Plan was resulting in higher taxes for citizens. The commission insisted that any increase in taxes had been

---

<sup>181</sup> Commercial Club Annual Meeting minutes, 12 April 1919, Box 6, Folder 2, Commercial Club records.

<sup>182</sup> Walker, *The Planning Function in Urban Government*, 247-249.

but nominal and that other factors were to blame for any tax increases. The point was also made that any special assessments that had been utilized to finance projects were, in fact, not taxes; these were investments that were guaranteed to result in the coveted increase in property values.<sup>183</sup>

Politically speaking, in the seventeen years from 1909-1926, the Chicago Plan Commission experienced three mayoral administration changeovers. This included those of Mayors Fred Busse, Carter Harrison, Jr., William “Big Bill” Thompson, and William Dever. As with the Council, Chairman Wacker regularly expressed his appreciation for the support of each mayor. Recall however that these mayoral administration shifts took place within the context of machine politics in Chicago. The political machine during the administrations of these four mayors was referred to as the Council of the Gray Wolves due to their gray hair and reputation for being politically ruthless.<sup>184</sup>

Despite the fact that Busse, Harrison, Jr., Thompson, and Dever were very different in character and mayoral style, one consistency between their administrations is that none of them could ultimately control the Council of the Gray Wolves. This resulted in each mayor being either generally ineffective in the case of Busse, loyal to the machine due to its aid in getting them elected in the case of Harrison, Jr., or losing the machine’s support after a particular political failure in the case of Thompson. The Chicago Plan Commission was

---

<sup>183</sup> “Mayor Tries to Make Wacker Expert “Goat,”” *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, Illinois), Jun. 11, 1921, 9. Accessed July 4, 2017: <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.uwm.edu/hnpchicagotribune/docview/174856333/63586EA7246141BDPQ/27?accountid=15078>; “Bonding Bills Raise Tax Only 33c Upon \$100: Wacker Explains Status of Measure Aiding Improvements,” *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, IL): May 19, 1919, 22. Accessed February 25, 2018: <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.uwm.edu/hnpchicagotribune/docview/174455978/24C3ADEC23EB4EA4PQ/3?accountid=15078>

<sup>184</sup> Simpson, *Rogues, Rebels, and Rubber Stamps*, 50.

most directly affected by the tumultuous mayor-council relationship under Thompson, when all the bond measures they had recommended were voted down or decreased by the council and ultimately defeated by the public vote in 1928.<sup>185</sup>

## **THE DEATH OF MOODY AND RESIGNATION OF WACKER**

On the morning of November 22, 1920, Walter Moody unexpectedly died of a stroke, leaving Charles Wacker and the Chicago Plan Commission without their enthusiastic preacher of the gospel of the Plan of Chicago. In Wacker's words, speaking as both a colleague and a friend:

Mr. Moody loved Chicago and since 1911 consecrated his life to the promotion of the Chicago Plan. Many alluring offers made to him he declined with the statement that so long as Chicago needed and wanted his services he would not change his field of endeavor. Mr. Moody was a man of the highest principles; a man of lofty ideals; an aggressive spirit with zeal beyond measure, and an inspiration to all with whom he came in contact.<sup>186</sup>

The loss of Moody would certainly affect the volume and richness of the publicity of the Plan of Chicago in the first half of the 1920s. Just two noteworthy publications were released between his death and 1926.<sup>187</sup>

On November 4, 1926, after seventeen years of continuous service, Charles Wacker tendered his resignation as the first Chairman of the Chicago Plan Commission. Wacker's efforts undoubtedly established the Chicago Plan Commission in those early years, and plan commissions in other cities without such a strong figurehead – or the financial backing of

---

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 46-85, 78-79.

<sup>186</sup> Chicago Plan Commission Executive Committee meeting minutes, 22 November 1920, Cc P69q 1920 c.5, Municipal Reference Collection.

<sup>187</sup> These two publications were *An Appeal to Business Men* and *An S O S to the Public Spirited Citizens of Chicago*; Walker, *The Planning Function in Urban Government*, 240.

an organization like the Commercial Club – often struggled to make similar, if any, headway. In his roughly forty-page speech at his final meeting on November 4, 1926 – seventeen years and one day after the commission’s first meeting – Wacker gave his account of the life of city planning in Chicago up until his retirement. He reminded his audience of where city planning began, not only in Chicago but also across the country: the World’s Columbian Exposition, Chicago’s gift to the world in 1893. He recounted Daniel Burnham’s Plan of Chicago and its timelessness; in Wacker’s view, Daniel Burnham, with his planning ‘genius,’ had been able to anticipate the future needs of the city like no other. Wacker remained dedicated to the views that were manifest in Burnham’s Plan.<sup>188</sup>

Wacker reflected on the skepticism and public apathy that had greeted them when the Plan of Chicago was first proposed, noting how far they had progressed. True to form, he also reiterated the perceived ability for commercial success to transform the city as well as the democratic and egalitarian nature of the Plan of Chicago:

History has taught us that the demand for better surroundings, better utilities, better public improvements, and more comfort, will follow in the footsteps of increased commercial activity and wealth. This is not a plan particularly for the rich and the aristocratic; without a city plan they can get beauty, comfort and health in their homes in the city and in the country too. This plan is primarily for the benefit of those that cannot afford to leave the city and who cannot afford to get that which this plan proposes to give to every inhabitant of the city of Chicago, be he rich or poor.<sup>189</sup>

Yet, the City Beautiful focus remained through to Wacker’s final oration to the commission, signally that there was no questioning or reconsideration of the scope of city planning as it had been defined by the movement under his watch, a scope that emphasized

---

<sup>188</sup> Scott, *American City Planning Since 1890*, 141.

<sup>189</sup> Chicago Plan Commission meeting minutes, 04 November 1926, Cc P69q 1921/26 c.2, Municipal Reference Collection.

business priorities and neglected housing. The measure of success was still increased property values, even if it was presented alongside claims of humanitarian gains:

I maintained then and I still maintain that whenever an improvement enhances the value of property more than it costs, then it is a good business investment and not an extravagance. Greatly increased property values have followed every Chicago Plan improvement, and if a fair and equitable assessment is made against these increases the city can derive a much greater income and the owner, too, is greatly benefited...The Plan of Chicago aims simply at the moral uplifting and physical beautifying of Chicago for the good of not one class of people or of one section of the city, but for the good of all Chicagoans—for the good of all Chicago. The physical and moral deterioration of the human race under the bad conditions of city life is one of the great problems of the age...there are certain districts in which misery, vice, and early death are congested. Those sections furnish an unanswerable indictment of the conditions under which we permit some of the people to exist...A city built on rational and orderly lines means more comfort, more health, and more opportunity for the physical and moral development of its people.<sup>190</sup>

Would this moment in the Chicago Plan Commission's history – the complete changeover in its driving leadership – be identified and seized by the commission as an opportunity to reconsider the scope of planning in Chicago? This will be explored in the following chapter.

## **CONCLUSION**

As we can see from examining the first decade and a half of the Chicago Plan Commission, its approach to city planning was established before its creation and reinforced through its mandate and initiatives, resulting in an emphasis on business priorities and the neglect of housing. The philosophy that beautification and public space were key to city improvement was demonstrated and revered via the World's Columbian Exposition. This viewpoint was then adopted by the businessmen that were affiliated with

---

<sup>190</sup> Chicago Plan Commission meeting minutes, 04 November 1926, Cc P69q 1921/26 c.2, Municipal Reference Collection.

the leadership of the Fair's organization, which allowed for this perspective to be translated into the Plan of Chicago. In its creation, the Chicago Plan Commission was explicitly tasked with studying and implementing the Plan of Chicago, effectively committing it – and city planning in Chicago – to a City Beautiful foundation and, more specifically, to the Chicago envisioned in Burnham's Plan. Furthermore, the Commercial Club was granted the task of selecting the majority of the Chicago Plan Commission's membership, resulting in a commission packed with mostly men experienced in business and commerce and a dearth of expertise in other social matters such as housing. Later, that lack of housing expertise would be cited as a justification for the commission's exclusion of housing, though the leadership had had the opportunity to include it in its recommendation of hundreds of individuals to fill membership slots. This sequence of events served to further solidify city planning's neglect of housing and other social issues facing the city; the options available in the Plan of Chicago were limited to City Beautiful-caliber improvements of a scale and scope that did not leave room for alternative definitions of comprehensive planning.

So, as envisioned by Merchants and Commercial Club members, the momentum that city planning had gained in Chicago since the World's Columbian Exposition continued. The newly minted Chicago Plan Commission poured its efforts into promoting city planning and the Plan of Chicago; they set out working towards the completion of City Beautiful improvements primarily in the downtown or 'Loop' district, starting with Twelfth Street, Michigan Avenue, and the lake front. They developed partnerships with and were open to suggestions that aligned with this view of city planning, and were unwilling to engage in those that did not. This led to a limited approach, which was further exacerbated by a lack



of authority and reliable legitimacy. Ultimately, one of the greatest consequences to Chicago was city planning's exclusion of other pressing issues despite external pressure to the contrary; most notable of these issues was the lack of quality housing.

In the following chapter, we will learn more about who *was* addressing housing in the city, despite its exclusion from city planning. We will also see whether the shift in leadership following Charles Wacker's resignation provided an opportunity for a shift in city planning's trajectory in Chicago.

## **IV. HOUSING MUST BE IMPROVED...BUT SOMEBODY ELSE SHOULD DO IT**

### **INTRODUCTION**

As we saw in the previous chapter, the Chicago Plan Commission adopted and was wedded to a firm definition of city planning that excluded a number of significant issues facing Chicago at the time. One of the most important of these was housing; despite Daniel Burnham's more substantial acknowledgment of housing and other social issues in his earliest notes and drafts of the Plan of Chicago, these components were all but eliminated from the final version. Thus, a City Beautiful focus took center stage in the Plan, with civic centers, street widenings, and public spaces dominating; this left no room for housing despite calls for its inclusion by outside groups and claims towards the Plan's comprehensiveness and the citywide benefits that would be realized upon its implementation. This preoccupation was further reinforced with the creation of the Chicago Plan Commission, as it was specifically tasked with studying and implementing the Plan of Chicago, rather than the study and implementation of city planning in general. In addition, the membership of the commission was overwhelmingly made up of men with experience and knowledge in business and commerce. As a result, city planning was defined as the Plan of Chicago and prioritized improving the city for business and commerce; this fixed mandate caused the Chicago Plan Commission to be unresponsive to changes in ideas about cities both locally and nationally and unable or unwilling to think more broadly about what city planning could and should be.

Despite the Chicago Plan Commission's neglect of housing and missed opportunities to form links and partnerships with housing groups, there was a growing, if struggling, housing movement in Chicago during that time. Actors in the city planning movement that

engaged in housing included other groups similar to the Commercial Club – most notably the City Club – that were more nimble than the commission in actively defining and redefining what city planning and city development entailed. Through its committees on housing and city planning, the City Club was not wedded to the City Beautiful commitments of the Plan of Chicago. As such, they were more flexible and able to engage in zoning and housing efforts at a time when the Chicago Plan Commission was not.

By 1926, the commission had lost its two commanding figureheads – Managing Director Walter Moody, who died in 1920, and its chairman Charles Wacker, who resigned his post in 1926. This chapter will examine the city planning and housing movements in Chicago in the decade following Wacker’s departure to determine whether this significant change in leadership would be an opportunity that the commission would act upon to rethink city planning and its relationship to housing.

More specifically, this chapter will examine the work and approach to city planning of the Chicago Plan Commission and the degree to which it engaged with the housing movement from Charles Wacker’s resignation, through the beginning of the Great Depression, up to the mid-1930s. We will see that this shift in leadership did not manifest as a broadening of the commission’s definition of city planning to encompass the growing pressures for new solutions to housing; to the contrary, the Chicago Plan Commission’s focus became even more narrow and its investments in commerce- and transportation-related work increased, in part due to a significant increase in automobile usage during these years. This reinforced the prioritization of street-related projects and the continued exclusion of housing, at least until 1933, when we see the Chicago Plan Commission

suddenly and intensely take up housing as an issue due to changes in the local, state, and national context.

Before examining the Chicago Plan Commission after 1926, however, this chapter will provide more detail on the Chicago Plan Commission's claims – despite clear evidence to the contrary – that there was more to city planning than just transportation and commerce. Furthermore, an overview of Chicago's housing movement as it developed alongside that of city planning will be presented.

### **City Planning's Elusive 'Humanitarian Side'**

*"I have always laid great stress upon the humanitarian side of our work..."*  
- Charles Wacker<sup>191</sup>

Recall that, as illustrated in the previous chapter, the Chicago Plan Commission's focus was on street and other commerce-related improvements; however, while there was an unwillingness to venture into projects that were not within the realm of City Beautiful, the commission was eager to promote its work as more than merely business-oriented and cosmetic. The commission would frequently proclaim the duality of the benefit of the projects it undertook: its leaders maintained that this work was both commercial and humanitarian in its contribution to the city and its citizens. According to the commission, on one hand, improving the streets and railway terminals would naturally improve the city

---

<sup>191</sup> Chicago Plan Commission meeting minutes, 04 November 1926, Cc P69q 1921/26 c.2, Municipal Reference Collection.

for business. On the other hand, the lake front, forest preserves, and bathing beaches were addressing the citizens' need for health, happiness, and well being.<sup>192</sup>

Despite the reality of its commercial focus as seen in the projects undertaken between 1909 and 1926, in its first decades the commission waffled back and forth between taking a detached stance, admitting that social matters were beyond their scope, and insisting that their work was directly relevant to those same social issues. For example, demonstrating what can be seen as a contradictory stance wherein city planning disengages with yet is critical to pressing social issues, Charles Wacker stated the following at a full commission meeting on February 13, 1913:

Through this organization we are making it clear, in every neighborhood, and in every part of this city, that the Plan of Chicago is an All-Chicago issue, that it is not a scheme for the benefit of the rich man, nor a patronizing and paternal plan for bestowing relief and comfort upon the poverty stricken...is not advanced as a complete cure for all our civic ills, nor does this Commission provide a vehicle for carrying forward all civic reforms. To some of those reforms other organizations are properly devoting attention, with our entire sympathy and encouragement. But our work is clear cut and sharply defined. It is to promote the Plan of Chicago. Thus, when one person asks us, why this proposal is not a part of our plan, and another asks us why that idea has not been incorporated into it, we tell them that the Plan of Chicago is basic and really underlies the majority of the great problems underlying the city. We are trying to make it clear that the Plan of Chicago is a business project of the highest order, and that the benefits which will accrue from its realization will distribute themselves in equal degree among all classes of our people...Our work is being carried out in a spirit of fairness to every citizen. We aim to hear all interests. We hold our doors open to every man who wishes to enter...We have no axes to grind and we serve no private interests.<sup>193</sup>

In 1918, under its proposed post-WWI Reconstruction Platform, Chairman Wacker took special care to ramp up his emphasis on the social side of their efforts to the

---

<sup>192</sup> Chicago Plan Commission meeting minutes, 13 February 1913, Cc P69q 1911/13 c.2, Municipal Reference Collection.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

commission membership; here he insists that the commission's work is not only technical in nature, but also humanitarian, as if it was not the absence of such social efforts that was the issue, but merely their under-emphasis:

...we have always presented to you plans and documents of a technical character. I do not believe we have even presented to you the humanitarian and social arguments we use in pushing forward the Chicago Plan.<sup>194</sup>

At this same meeting on December 20, 1918, Chairman Wacker read from a document entitled *Seed Thoughts for Sermons*, a text distributed to the city's clergy for integrating into their Sunday sermons on the Chicago Plan Commission-declared Plan of Chicago Day, January 19, 1919. This document and Wacker's description of it played strongly on the purported humanitarian side of the Plan of Chicago and the commission's work:

As the best humanitarians hold that man builds upon the basis of character, so it is that cities in their physical planning, as it affects their surroundings, must provide for the finer things that tend to make the mind as well as the body rich. The city plan, in view of these conditions, becomes one of the most important and far-reaching influences of the times...City planning underlies all commercial and social problems...it affects the happiness and prosperity of all our citizens and of millions yet to have a home among us...Proper housing, proper sanitation, air and sunlight are the first rights of humanity, and when we permit them to be denied we must accept responsibility for the inevitable result...Commercially, the plan has to do with the regular arrangement of the streets within the city...Socially, it has to do with adequate provision for the public health. This is gained through the best location of parks and playgrounds, and the opening to light and air of crowded housing districts. A proper city plan is the foundation for all social and commercial advance...While the wealthier class of citizens in any community can build up beautiful residential sections on well laid out avenues and boulevards, what will become of those who have neither organization nor money to aid them in intelligently planning the most meager comforts of ordinary home surroundings? The interests of the inhabitants of the most unfortunate districts must be safeguarded...<sup>195</sup>

---

<sup>194</sup> Chicago Plan Commission meeting minutes, 20 December 1918, Cc P69q 1911/13 c.2, Municipal Reference Collection.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

*Seed Thoughts for Sermons* argued that city planning, and the Plan of Chicago, was concerned with safeguarding the health of all of its men, women, and children. Unless, apparently, that involved improving degrading and deplorable slum housing conditions and the inadequate sewer and water facilities that accompanied them.<sup>196</sup>

When it made a good sales pitch or justification, housing would make an appearance in the commission's publications and press, asserting the humanitarian-not-just-technical side of the Plan of Chicago and the work of the commission. In the various components of the Reconstruction Platform, housing appeared alongside the employment of returning soldiers as a critical issue in need of attention. Yet, again, this platform became vague when it came time to detail how precisely the Chicago Plan Commission was working to address such issues. Though unemployment – an issue decidedly more closely linked to commerce – was treated with attention and detail, housing, along with zoning, got merely the following: “These problems are of large importance, but require special study.”<sup>197</sup>

Despite the insistence on the social and humanitarian benefits of the Plan of Chicago, we saw that the final year of Charles Wacker's tenure was marked with no less than thirty street improvement projects in addition to the big-ticket projects such as Michigan Avenue, Roosevelt Road, and South Water Street. At the time that Wacker was emphasizing city planning's humanitarian nature, pages upon pages of its 1925 report were dedicated to the extensive detailing of projects that were City Beautiful in nature, outlining the specific recommendations made, work completed to date, work still pending, legislation required and passed, and so forth. Each of these main sections was also well

---

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

illustrated with maps and snapshots of work in progress, current conditions, and envisioned improvements. The sustained and ever-increasing urgency to relieve traffic congestion was omnipresent. No such detail is provided for the commission's stated humanitarian interests.<sup>198</sup>

As such, despite the claims of a broader interest in the well being and day-to-day experiences of the poorer citizens of the city, the substance of what the commission invested its time and efforts in stayed true to the established focus on business priorities. Housing was not mentioned at all as a project of the Chicago Plan Commission in its 1925 report, not even a superficial acknowledgement of slum housing as a significant problem in the city; if the commission was supporting housing efforts in the city at that time, it did not warrant even the brief mention that it received in its Reconstruction Platform.<sup>199</sup>

In his 1926 farewell speech upon his resignation from the Chicago Plan Commission, Wacker implied that the Plan of Chicago and the commission had, in fact, always maintained a concern for housing and that slum conditions and a plan for housing fell within the scope of city planning and the commission's work. In re-visiting the first major publication of the commission, *Chicago's Greatest Issue*, which came out in 1911 and served as a summary document of the full Plan, he notes that housing, like public improvements, was critical to solving the city's problems, despite earlier arguments that the commission did not have the capacity in time or expertise to engage with housing:

This booklet sets forth in strong terms that if we are to become prosperous we should now direct our attention earnestly to solving the many perplexing problems which have crowded in upon us seemingly at once: The building of a subway, the construction of an outer harbor, the realization of a proper housing plan, and the

---

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> Report titled *The Plan of Chicago in 1925: Fifteen Years Work of the Chicago Plan Commission, 1910-1925*, November 1925, Cc P69 1925 c.4, Municipal Reference Collection.



development of the city as a whole. The Plan of Chicago affords the solution of practically all of these things...Slums must be wiped out, and in their stead must be created districts made healthful by sunshine, invigorating by fresh air, and pleasant by places of recreation.<sup>200</sup>

This shows that, while a housing plan and slum clearance fell within the claims of city planning's priorities at the time of the Plan's publication, neither was acted upon from that time through to Wacker's resignation. It is possible that this more open acknowledgement of the housing issue on the part of Wacker was made possible by the creation that year of the Chicago Housing Commission; this new entity could now be responsible for the housing issue that the Chicago Plan Commission was unable and unwilling to take on due to the business-centric focus of its mandate, priorities, and membership. Moments later in his speech, Wacker held up the Chicago Housing Commission – which would ultimately be short-lived,<sup>201</sup> never allowing for it to become a true partner and parallel to the Chicago Plan Commission – as its counterpart for whom it proclaimed its support when it came to housing:

The Chicago Plan Commission has consistently maintained that city planning, zoning, and housing were interdependent and should be developed concurrently, but that each component part of this trio was sufficiently important to deserve a separate organization. We have in Chicago today the Chicago Housing Commission. Membership in a national movement for more and better homes, which has been started by an organization of public officials and citizens, is open also to Chicago people.<sup>202</sup>

---

<sup>200</sup> Chicago Plan Commission meeting minutes, 04 November 1926, Cc P69q 1921/26 c.2, Municipal Reference Collection.

<sup>201</sup> The Chicago Housing Commission existed for just one year and only met four times during that period; Philpott, *The Slum and the Ghetto*, 254.

<sup>202</sup> Chicago Plan Commission meeting minutes, 04 November 1926, Cc P69q 1921/26 c.2, Municipal Reference Collection.

As we have seen, while hundreds of Chicago's residents were living in overcrowded and poorly constructed housing, both the Fair and the Plan of Chicago offered no solutions. While housing was often invoked when listing the many justifications for comprehensive city planning, it was only briefly mentioned in the Plan of Chicago, calling for the need for slum removal. Further, there was no effort made to incorporate housing expertise or a housing perspective into the commission's membership, nor was there an effort to obtain the support or sanction of any housing-related entities. In 1926, we can see that this perfunctory treatment of housing remained consistent in the implementation of the Plan and institutionalization of city planning via the Chicago Plan Commission – which may at this stage have been more appropriately named the Chicago Transportation and Commerce Commission. Before we examine whether and how the Chicago Plan Commission's focus changed or remained the same with the change in leadership, some background on who *was* working to improve housing and how will be provided.

## **THE HOUSING MOVEMENT**

As mentioned, there were other pressing issues in Chicago that were neglected in the design and presentation of the Fair and the Plan of Chicago it inspired: poverty, degrading slum housing conditions, and ethnic and racial tensions were some of the most severe. In addition to overcrowding as well as poor light and ventilation, slum housing conditions in Chicago also often meant no sewer connections in homes, with multiple families sharing outdoor toilet facilities that were unsanitary at best. In the slums and tenements of Chicago, people lived in aged, small, and poorly constructed buildings, often with smaller shed-like structures built in the alleyways. The residents often co-habited

with horses, pigs, and other livestock. Mortality rates in the slums were higher for both children and adults.<sup>203</sup>

Furthermore, due to the unprecedented population growth of the city, there was an unmanageable housing shortage. The city's tenements were precariously overcrowded with one family per room in structures intended for one family per dwelling. One to two stories on average, a Chicago tenement typically held three families, each an average of five people in size. More than half of these dwellings had three rooms or less; three-quarters had insufficient light and ventilation. Hundreds of bedrooms were without windows and only one-quarter of families had a water closet. Bathtubs were rare, as was heating during the cold winters. Conditions for the city's black citizens were worst of all, and typically came at a higher cost to their residents, as they were limited in housing location options due to discriminatory practices. It was not until 1878 that Chicago's housing problem was formally documented, when the Department of Housing counted nearly 5,000 tenements in the city.<sup>204</sup>

The momentum that continued on after the Fair wherein prominent individuals in the city contemplated expanding the planning of the 'White City' to the real city of Chicago presented an opportunity to address Chicago's housing problems. Yet, as we have seen, history and city planning did not unfold that way as the City Beautiful approach of the Fair was adopted by and reinforced within the Plan of Chicago and, subsequently, the Chicago Plan Commission. Nevertheless, the private sector, civic groups, and wealthy

---

<sup>203</sup> Lawrence M. Friedman, *Government and Slum Housing* (New York: Arno Press, 1978), 32-33; Margaret Garb, *City of American Dreams: A History of Home Ownership and Housing Reform in Chicago, 1871-1919* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 41.

<sup>204</sup> Philpott, *The Slum and the Ghetto*, 12-39, 114-115, 150.

philanthropists were, for several decades, struggling to find solutions that significantly improved housing for the city's poorest residents.

### **Chicago's Housing Movement**

The housing movement in Chicago began not long before the stirrings that led to the bid to host the Fair. Largely inspired by the early iterations of public health as a response to epidemics and poor sanitation, surveys of housing conditions were being done in Chicago in the later decades of the nineteenth century. Efforts to improve housing in Chicago that emerged from the late 1800s through 1930 included the creation of settlement houses, which aimed to improve the education, morality, and civility of the working class; the construction and operation of housing communities by wealthy industrialists and philanthropists that were intended to be affordable to poorer citizens; and the creation or revision of legislation, largely related to minimum building standards and regulations.<sup>205</sup>

All of these efforts had one thing in common: they shared the presumption that housing in Chicago – and nationally – was inherently an enterprise of the private sector. As such, any initiative to intervene in the crises of housing availability and livability would have to come either from socially-conscious volunteers, like those of the settlement movement, or from businessmen, civic-minded or otherwise. In the case of housing regulations, which would have to be passed and enforced by the municipality, such regulations were often advocated for by the housers, who then worked to monitor their enforcement, or lack thereof.

---

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., 14

The most famed example of how the settlement movement manifested in Chicago was Hull House, Jane Addams' settlement house in the Near West Side, which was established in 1889 and provided a number of social services for the residents of Chicago's worst slum. The deplorable living and working conditions they observed inspired Hull House and the broader settlement house movement; their goal was to provide social organization through the provision of bathing facilities, cultural events, childcare, and the like. Many of the individuals it attracted as settlement workers became very active in a range of reform issues, including housing and advocating for the provision of recreational space, workers' rights, and educational programs. In fact, Hull House settlement workers aided in the completion of a housing survey in its environs in 1893, the same year of the Fair. Jane Addams encouraged others, including the University of Chicago, to start settlement houses as well. In 1894, the university did so, establishing the University of Chicago Settlement – later called the Mary McDowell Settlement – in the “Back of the Yards” neighborhood, managed by the Board of the University of Chicago Settlement. Recall from the previous chapter that the Trustees of the University of Chicago Settlement would go on to express their concern about the exclusion of housing from the Plan of Chicago to the Chicago Plan Commission not long after the latter entity's creation, to no avail.<sup>206</sup>

The 1893 survey, the results of which were published in the 1894 report “The Slums of Great Cities,” was part of a comparative study of New York City, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Chicago. The report contributed to a fledgling but growing body of data and maps that illustrated the realities of the slums in Chicago, particularly highlighting a mix of land uses

---

<sup>206</sup> Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull-House*, 11, 86-102; Philpott, *The Slum and the Ghetto*, 21-22; “University of Chicago Settlement,” Virginia Commonwealth University Libraries Social Welfare History Project, accessed July 11, 2017.  
<http://socialwelfare.library.vcu.edu/settlement-houses/university-chicago-settlement/>

and ethnicities as well as the low wages and high rents of their residents. The staff of Hull House continued to collect even more details of the neighborhood surrounding the settlement, publishing *Hull House Maps and Papers* in 1895. But it was not until a 1901 study by sociologist Robert Hunter entitled “Tenement Conditions in Chicago” that the municipality finally responded to the growing awareness of the slums by updating long-outdated municipal housing codes.<sup>207</sup>

Robert Hunter would, shortly thereafter, become the director of an organization called the City Homes Association, created in 1899 by a number of settlement workers aiming to improve housing conditions. The City Homes Association would expand upon earlier studies, collecting extensive data on the city’s slum conditions, in light of the city’s unwillingness to do so. Nevertheless, between the continuation of data collection by the settlement workers, organizations such as the City Homes Association, and the University of Chicago, the realities of the housing conditions of the city were being documented and publicized, resulting in an increasing awareness of the extent of the crisis and growing pressure in both the public and private sectors to find solutions.<sup>208</sup>

The settlement movement, though significant and widespread in Chicago, ultimately never made a substantial impact on the housing situation for Chicago’s slum dwellers. In fact, some of the initiatives of the settlement workers – most notably the demolition of substandard buildings in the slums and their replacement with playgrounds – actually decreased the availability of housing and displaced the already desperate residents with no provisions for their relocation.<sup>209</sup>

---

<sup>207</sup> Philpott, *The Slum and the Ghetto*, 22-23, 26.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., 27-29; Garb, *City of American Dreams*, 166-167.

<sup>209</sup> Philpott, *The Slum and the Ghetto*, 96-97.

Regarding the construction of housing for the working and poorer classes, early efforts in the late 1870s by industrialists to provide housing for their workforce had been largely unsuccessful due to their heavy-handed and paternalistic approach. The most well known example of this was Pullman, which failed in the early 1890s after its residents went on strike when wages were cut and rents were held steady. In the 1880s, the Department of Labor called on the private sector – the city’s capitalists – to build model tenements to address the dire housing conditions that were just beginning to be acknowledged. The Citizens’ Association, a group of civic-minded businessmen, looked into the issue and confirmed that a housing crisis did indeed exist.<sup>210</sup>

Other efforts by businessmen to build housing communities were also unsuccessful, for a variety of reasons. It was a priority that these projects make a return on investment; they did not aim to be merely charitable ventures. This was difficult to do as the costs of housing – both for materials and labor – were increasing. Several projects that promised affordable units were unable to deliver, with the ultimate costs to the eventual residents being 50 percent or more above expectations. The result of this was that the buyers were those of more moderate means and the original target market – the poorly housed workers and their families from the slums – was effectively excluded from the communities intended for them.<sup>211</sup>

Some projects never even got off the ground, such as Mary McDowell’s planned model tenement in 1912. Though she made some progress in securing land and developing a plan, she was unable to attract sufficient private investment to make it happen. Another

---

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 3; Garb, *City of American Dreams*, 41.

<sup>211</sup> Radford, *Modern Housing in America: Policy Struggles in the New Deal Era* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 11, 21.

project, the Marshall Field Garden Apartments backed by the Field Estate and located on the North Side, suffered from vacancies and cost overruns due to a precarious proximity between a notorious Italian slum, the wealthy Gold Coast, and an expanding black community combined with an unwillingness to sell units to black residents when the desired white residents failed to emerge. Private interests in the housing issue would continue to arise periodically, but a profitable solution to the issue consistently eluded business interests.<sup>212</sup>

Legislatively, there was little to no effort in the late 1800s to acknowledge or address housing conditions. One exception was the creation of an ordinance requiring the use of fireproof building materials in the city center after the 1871 fire that devastated the city. Into the 1900s, legislative efforts such as building code regulations fell victim to the political machine as they produced “four-flush” legislation, backed by the aldermen solely for their use in soliciting bribes for variances to or lax enforcement of building requirements. Furthermore, even when such regulations were effective, they merely prevented the worst housing but did not promote the construction of high-quality housing. Often, an unanticipated consequence of increased building standards set through regulations was that housing became even less affordable for the poor, as their wages did not increase to meet the higher housing costs associated with better quality.<sup>213</sup>

After years of attempts to alleviate the crises of housing shortages and slum conditions through the settlement movement, private developments, and regulations that were largely advocated for by the housers and inconsistently enforced by the municipality,

---

<sup>212</sup> Philpott, *The Slum and the Ghetto*, 53-54, 206-209, 268-279; Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*, 14, 263.

<sup>213</sup> Philpott, *The Slum and the Ghetto*, 13, 104; Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*, 73-74; Radford, *Modern Housing in America*, 11.



it was becoming clear that the private and non-profit sectors alone could not solve Chicago's problems in this arena. Keep in mind that, during these years, the Chicago Plan Commission was continually adding public improvement projects to its docket – dozens of street improvements, the lake front improvement, and park projects – to deliver on the Plan of Chicago's promises to improve the city for all of its citizens, to make them happier, healthier, and more prosperous. They would, on occasion, acknowledge the housing crises in passing, expressing the severity of the problem and sending its well wishes to housing reformers and advocates. In the end, as we saw in the previous chapter, improving housing was not deemed to be within the scope of city planning as it was defined by the Plan of Chicago and institutionalized by the Chicago Plan Commission.

It was not until the Great Depression hit when the possibility of government intervention in the housing movement was seriously considered. In 1931, President Herbert Hoover convened a Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership to generate potential solutions to the housing problems in cities throughout the country. This signaled a significant shift in the role of government in what had previously been considered strictly a private enterprise. As the federal government aimed to invest in public works projects and stimulate a recovery, there were newly available funds for slum clearance and the construction of public housing.<sup>214</sup>

In 1932, a bill was introduced to enable the creation of the Illinois Housing Commission, which was created that year and would be eligible to borrow money from the federal Reconstruction Finance Corporation – also created in 1932 – for the rehabilitation

---

<sup>214</sup> “Herbert Hoover: Statement Announcing the White House Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership,” The American Presidency Project, accessed March 25, 2018: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=22804>

of the city's tenements. In 1933, the Illinois Housing Commission passed an act that enabled the creation and oversight of limited-dividend or not-for-profit housing corporations – a program that was ultimately short-lived and preceded direct government construction of public housing – which was amended in 1934 and retitled “An act in relation to housing.”<sup>215</sup> Each of these events were in response to newly emerging initiatives by the federal government to intervene in the various crises of the Depression, including unemployment and housing issues. As we will see later in this chapter, these events would also link city planning and housing in a way that persistent housing issues and pleas from housing advocates and other civic-minded entities had been unable to.<sup>216</sup>

### **The National Division Between City Planning and Housing**

The division between housing and city planning was not unique to Chicago. Contrary to the division between the two movements from day one in Chicago, the national housing and planning movements were united in their earliest years. Benjamin Marsh, representing the Committee on Congestion of Population, was one of the primary organizers of the first national conference on planning and congestion, held in Washington, D.C. in 1909, the same year that Burnham's Plan of Chicago was published. Initially, this paralleled the town planning movement in the European cities that U.S. planners admired, where housing and planning were historically linked. The members of the National

---

<sup>215</sup> Chicago Plan Commission, *Annual Report of the Chicago Plan Commission: Twenty-fourth Annual Report for the Year 1933*, Cc P69q 1926/34 c.3, Municipal Reference Collection; Radford, *Modern Housing in America*, 92-96.

<sup>216</sup> “Offers Bill in House to Create Illinois Housing Commission,” *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, IL), Nov. 16, 1932, 8. Accessed July 11, 2017: <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.uwm.edu/hnpchicagotribune/docview/181324335/CE470477C08646F2PQ/2?accountid=15078>

Conference on City Planning and those of the National Housing Association were often one and the same, and the two groups were initially closely connected.<sup>217</sup>

This relationship would not be sustained, as a division between the national housing and planning movements occurred between 1910 and 1911. The cause for the division was centered on the relationship and power dynamics between a handful of leaders in the two movements: including Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., Benjamin Marsh, and Lawrence Veiller. As the city planning movement was emerging and finding its identity, there were clear differences of opinion on what that identity would be.<sup>218</sup>

As noted, Benjamin Marsh, the outspoken leader of the congestion movement, had organized the convening of the first National Conference on City Planning and Congestion. With his focus on congestion, Marsh had a broad view on planning's identity that was centered on social welfare and housing improvement. Olmsted viewed planning differently and perceived Marsh and the congestion movement as a threat to planning as he saw it, which was more focused on aesthetics, beautification, and design. He feared that the congestion movement would detract from what he saw as a more effective view of planning's future; he believed that social welfare was indeed an issue, but not one that required such focus as Marsh aimed to achieve. Olmsted set out on a deliberate effort to oust Marsh from the leadership of the national conference, an effort that would be successful.<sup>219</sup>

---

<sup>217</sup> Peterson, *The Birth of City Planning in the United States*, 244-255; Walker, *The Planning Function in Urban Government*, 11-12.

<sup>218</sup> Peterson, *The Birth of City Planning in the United States*, 244-255; Walker, *The Planning Function in Urban Government*, 11-12.

<sup>219</sup> Peterson, *The Birth of City Planning in the United States*, 244-255.

By the third national conference in 1911, “congestion” had been removed from its title. Olmsted also infused the conference with engineers, architects, landscape architects, lawyers, and municipal representatives to ensure a strong counter to attendees from the congestion movement. That divergence set the planning and housing movements on distinct and separate trajectories; the division of the conference established this separation at an institutional level.<sup>220</sup>

There was a small group of detractors at the 1911 conference that decried Marsh’s ouster and drew attention to the growing dominance of professionals and businessmen. This group attempted to hold planning’s feet to the fire and keep the social focus alive, delivering a letter to Olmsted expressing their complaints. They also pointed to Lawrence Veiller who, despite his own focus on eliminating slum tenements in New York, had participated in the exclusion of Marsh allegedly in order to boost his own organization’s success and prevent Marsh from marring his rigid and business-focused view of how housing should be approached. The letter accused Veiller of pushing housing out of the planning discourse “so as to control it in his own organization.”<sup>221</sup> But the damage had been done and housing was effectively shut out of the national planning movement. The view was established that city planning, though it may intersect with housing issues, was clearly independent from them. As such, there was no pressure or expectation from the national city planning movement that housing or other social issues be included in local city planning in Chicago or elsewhere.<sup>222</sup>

---

<sup>220</sup> Peterson, *The Birth of City Planning in the United States*, 244-255; Marcuse, “Housing in Early City Planning,” 161-163; Walker, *The Planning Function in Urban Government*, 11-12.

<sup>221</sup> Peterson, *The Birth of City Planning in the United States*, 253.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*, 246-255.

## **The Chicago Plan Commission After Wacker and Moody, 1926-1934**

As we saw in the previous chapter, the early to mid-1920s was a period of transition for the Chicago Plan Commission in terms of leadership. With the death of Walter Moody in 1920 and the resignation of Charles Wacker in 1926, the commission would undergo its first change in chairmanship since its creation in 1909. More importantly, this signified the loss of two men who had established and carried forward the drive to establish loyalty to the Plan of Chicago and its brand of city planning in all of Chicago's citizens.

Eugene S. Taylor would succeed Walter Moody as Manager of the commission; Taylor had been a commission member since its early years. Charles Wacker's replacement – the second chairman of the Chicago Plan Commission – would be James Simpson. Simpson's experience and background included a chairmanship on the board of Marshall Field & Co.; chairman and directorships at "the Commonwealth Edison Company, the Public Service Company of Northern Illinois, the Commonwealth Subsidiary corporation, and the Public Service Subsidiary corporation; federal reserve bank director; director of the New York Central Railroad; director of a steel and iron products distributor, A. M. Castle & Co."; and chairman/director for Samuel Insull's Super Power company and United Gas and Electric corporation. He occupied some of these positions as he concurrently led the Chicago Plan Commission. Simpson epitomized the hard-working, self-made businessman that was ubiquitous within the politics and business of Chicago at the time.<sup>223</sup>

In addition to the appointment of a new chairman, the Chicago Plan Commission also gained two vice-chairmen: Albert A. Sprague and Michael Zimmer. Simpson, Sprague,

---

<sup>223</sup> "James Simpson, Utilities Chief, Dies," *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, IL), Nov. 26, 1939, 1-2. Accessed July 14, 2017: <http://archives.chicagotribune.com/1939/11/26/page/1/article/james-simpson-utilities-chief-dies>

and Zimmer had all been members of the commission since it was created in 1909. Colonel Albert Sprague's fortune came from a grocery corporation; he also served as director of several large companies, including Marshall Field & Co. and the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. Michael Zimmer was a public servant, serving as warden of Cook County Hospital. He had also served as alderman, sheriff, and city controller.<sup>224</sup>

Hugh Young, the Chicago Plan Commission's Chief Engineer, had been brought on in 1920; the commission now had not only its appointed volunteer members, but also a growing professional staff. Hugh Young would come to play a prominent role in the commission and in city planning and development-related work throughout the city. In addition to his twenty-five years as Chief Engineer for the commission, Young acted as a consulting engineer for a number of entities in the city, both public and private.<sup>225</sup>

## **Projects Undertaken**

In 1924, after fifteen years of inconsistent appropriations that often signaled a lack of support from the municipality – including some years when they were threatened with zero funds – the Chicago Plan Commission's municipal funding changed for the better. From 1924 until 1932, the commission received \$40,000 per year from the City Council, the largest amount since it had been created in 1909. It appears as though the city had finally

---

<sup>224</sup> "Col. Sprague, 69, Politician and Grocer, Is Dead," *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, IL), Apr. 8, 1946, 3. Accessed July 14, 2017:

<http://archives.chicagotribune.com/1946/04/08/page/3/article/col-sprague-69-politician-and-grocer-is-dead>; Parke Brown, "Zimmer to Quit Post as County Hospital Head," *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, IL), Nov. 29, 1937, 1. Accessed July 14, 2017: <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.uwm.edu/hnpchicagotribune/docview/181983182/2589A82588D44D94PQ/1?accountid=15078>

<sup>225</sup> Chicago Department of City Planning, *The Chicago Plan Commission, A Historical Sketch, 1909-1960*, F38HP C4P4, Chicago Historical Society.

fully and formally adopted the Plan of Chicago and the Chicago Planning Commission as its own.<sup>226</sup>

Meanwhile, the Chicago Plan Commission pressed on in its efforts. Between the years 1926 to 1932, the work of the commission was almost exclusively related to transportation, predominately streets and highways. This historical focus on streets and highways was reinforced, at least in part, by a drastic increase in automobile usage. *The Chicago Tribune* in 1927 cited an increase from 60,000 automobiles in the city to over 400,000 in just ten years; the increase in automobiles was outpacing the increase in population.<sup>227</sup>

As was noted, the Chicago Plan Commission – particularly Walter Moody and Charles Wacker – would at times waffle between plainly stating that the Plan of Chicago was a plan for streets and commerce and making arguments to the contrary, asserting that the Plan was humanitarian in nature and addressed the city’s social as well as spatial challenges. In the years between Wacker’s resignation and the early 1930s however, any arguments that the Plan of Chicago and the Chicago Plan Commission’s work was humanitarian ceased.

Gone was the mention of housing, even if superficial; the commission held to its default Plan of Chicago focus on public improvements and reaffirmed its inability to broaden the scope of city planning. The Chicago Plan Commission not only continued but expanded its transportation-centric concentration. The number of streets on the

---

<sup>226</sup> Walker, *The Planning Function in Urban Government*, 245.

<sup>227</sup> Blaine S. Smith, “Figures Traffic Jams Costing Ten Millions A Day,” *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, IL), Jan. 30, 1927, E8. Accessed July 16, 2017: <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.uwm.edu/hnpchicagotribune/docview/180814647/817A2418CC804097P/Q/2?accountid=15078>

commission's docket of projects during this time period was never less than forty, with some years having over sixty ongoing and completed street-related projects in the works. In 1928 in fact, the commission's emphasis on transportation was pointed out in a meeting of the Executive Committee, with an attendee noting that the Chicago Plan Commission had gained notoriety nationally and internationally for "the city planning achievements which you have brought to pass in the way of improved transportation facilities."<sup>228</sup> Even the Chicago Plan Commission's reputation had become centered upon transportation.

Some of the streets being improved were holdovers from the commission's earliest years: Michigan Avenue, Roosevelt Road, Wacker Drive, Ashland Avenue, and others. Many of the streets were new additions, including Blackwell Street, Catalpa Avenue, Post Place, Silverton Way, and Van Vlissingen Road. Additional projects were transportation-related, though not street-specific, such as the straightening of the river and efforts to increase the city's bonding power in order to acquire the financing needed for additional public improvements.<sup>229</sup>

All non-transportation projects were either civic sites – such as the post office, a civic/convention center, and the Board of Trade Building – or cultural – such as the Shedd Aquarium, Museum of Science and Industry, planetarium, and zoological gardens. Despite growing concern that the city's zoning code was in need of revision, any mention of zoning in annual reports during this time merely repeated the account of the creation of zoning in

---

<sup>228</sup> Chicago Plan Commission meeting minutes, 09 March 1928, Cc P69q 1926/34 c.3, Municipal Reference Collection.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid.



Chicago and the presence of Charles Wacker and Walter Moody on the Zoning Commission.<sup>230</sup>

Interestingly, the meetings of the Executive Committee and the full commission began to take on a format during this time that was distinct from that under Walker's leadership. As mentioned, the Chicago Plan Commission brought a Chief Engineer on staff by the name of Hugh Young in 1920; Young would serve in this capacity until 1945. During Charles Wacker's tenure, Wacker himself did much of the talking and presentation during the meetings. He was prone to lengthy and thorough descriptions of the work that was being done and its importance, often taking on a preaching and propaganda-laden tone. Under Simpson, however, it was often Chief Engineer Young that was speaking. It became routine for Simpson to ask Young for updates on projects, wherein the latter would proceed to give highly technical presentations on a particular street widening or highway extension project. Many of these presentations were accompanied by equally technical reports that provided extensive details on the history of the project, its current status, estimated or actual costs, and any negotiations or legislation affiliated with it. This signaled the growing professionalization of city planning, which was no longer a new venture, as well as its increasingly technical nature.<sup>231</sup>

The Chicago Plan Commission again demonstrated that – contrary to its claims of limited time and expertise in response to pressure to engage with housing – it was indeed willing to stray from the specific projects outlined in the Plan of Chicago, but only towards those projects that fit its established priorities. One such issue that consumed much of the

---

<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

<sup>231</sup> John D. Fairfield, *The Mysteries of the Great City: The Politics of Urban Design, 1877-1937* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1993), 136-137.

commission's attention during this period was that of traction, which refers to Chicago's street railway system. The traction issue had been before the city since the early 1900s, primarily entailing a question of how to manage and coordinate the city's system of railways, including streetcar lines and proposed subways.<sup>232</sup>

After several decades of proposals to improve the traction situation failing to gain the requisite support of the voters, businessmen, or politicians – including municipal ownership, municipal construction with private operation, and a certificate-based financing scheme – a solution originating from the commission's chairman, James Simpson, was the first ordinance to gain sufficient backing to be signed into law. This scheme would create a comprehensive transportation system, operated by a management corporation and overseen by a local commission. Though this was the only traction solution that was passed via ordinance during three decades of searching for a solution, it too would fail to be implemented due to legal obstacles presented by the real estate industry and financial difficulties that impeded the creation of the new corporation. Nevertheless, this illustrates that the Chicago Plan Commission was capable of taking on complex, difficult, and time-consuming tasks beyond those dictated in the Plan of Chicago, but practice shows that its willingness to do so was limited to issues that fell within the realms of transportation, business and commerce, and public space.<sup>233</sup>

### **The Waning Significance of the Chicago Plan Commission**

Despite accomplishing a long list of street improvement and civic projects, signs of the Chicago Plan Commission's faltering began to emerge during the post-Wacker/Moody

---

<sup>232</sup> Gosnell, *Machine Politics*, 142-144.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*

years. During this time period, the commission was waning internally; the largely inactive membership was dwindling in size as well as significance to the Executive Committee. Meetings with the full commission became less and less frequent, with one meeting per year being the norm and one year being skipped altogether due to lack of funding. At one such rare gathering of the full commission, there were just forty-four members present, less than the fifty required for a quorum. By 1928, the total membership of the commission on record had dipped to 281, nearly sixty less than its original size.<sup>234</sup>

Furthermore, the emphasis on public lectures was steadily decreasing from its peak when the Chicago Plan Commission was presenting the Plan of Chicago to the public weekly or more. In 1926, the commission presented forty-four lectures to over 10,000 audience members; in 1930, just four years later, only seventeen lectures were presented to a scant 1,500 audience members. The annual reports of 1931, 1932, and 1933 make no mention of public lectures at all. Public skepticism was increasing during these years as well, following increasing corruption highlighted by a lawsuit against the mayor and director of the Board of Local Improvements alleging bloated payments to real estate assessors involved in the valuation of properties subject to condemnation proceedings for street improvement projects. This decreasing public trust in the mayoral administration was illustrated in the complete failure of all bond issues on the ballot in both the spring and fall of 1928, a failure that had direct consequences for the Chicago Plan Commission due to its heavy reliance on the bond market for project financing.<sup>235</sup>

---

<sup>234</sup> Roster, Chicago Plan Commission meeting minutes, 27 June 1927, Cc P69q 1926/34 c.3, Municipal Reference Collection; Chicago Plan Commission meeting minutes, 09 March 1928, Cc P69q 1926/34 c.3, Municipal Reference Collection.

<sup>235</sup> The Chicago Plan Commission issued a combined annual report for the years 1931 and 1932 due to lack of funding for the commission as well as public improvement projects;

As noted in the previous section, appropriations for the Chicago Plan Commission had finally seen an increase in the late 1920s, signaling an upturn in the city's ownership of city planning as a municipal function. However, this new sense of ownership may have had some detrimental consequences for the commission and city planning. In its 1931 publication *A Sixteen-Year Record of Achievement*, the Board of Local Improvements of the City of Chicago publicized the Plan of Chicago accomplishments that had been realized; however, the phrasing of much of the text fails to credit the Chicago Plan Commission for its role in the work:

The famous "Plan of Chicago," drafted by D. H. Burnham, for the reorganization and development of the city along logical lines, was given its first start toward practical fulfillment by the Board of Local Improvements under Michael J. Faherty.<sup>236</sup>

As for the Chicago Plan Commission, according to the publication, their work "was finished when they looked over the drawings and recommended them to the Board of Local Improvements." In John Faherty's own words: "I mention these things here so that you may know that I have done more for the Chicago Plan Commission work, and suffered more, than all the rest of the people who had anything to do with it."<sup>237</sup>

The Board of Local Improvements appears to give itself credit for accomplishing the Plan of Chicago's City Beautification projects. This may be interpreted as inconsequential,

---

Chicago Plan Commission, *Seventeenth Annual Report of the Chicago Plan Commission for the Year 1926*, Cc P69q 1926/34 c.3, Municipal Reference Collection; Chicago Plan Commission, *Twenty-first Annual Report of the Chicago Plan Commission for the Year 1930*, Cc P69q 1926/34 c.3, Municipal Reference Collection; Chicago Plan Commission, *22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> Annual Reports for the Years 1931 and 1932*, Cc P69q 1926/34 c.3, Municipal Reference Collection; Chicago Plan Commission, *Annual Report of the Chicago Plan Commission: Twenty-fourth Annual Report for the Year 1933*, Cc P69q 1926/34 c.3, Municipal Reference Collection; Walker, *The Planning Function in Urban Government*, 246-251.

<sup>236</sup> Chicago Board of Local Improvements, *A Sixteen-Year Record of Achievement, 1915-1931* (Chicago: A.E. Burnett, 1931), I-II, VI.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*, VII-XII.

but given the diminishing role of the commission, it can also be seen as further indication of the questionability of the commission's relevance. There was a theme throughout the document: that Michael Faherty was a visionary who studied the Plan of Chicago and the Board of Local Improvements was the entity that subsequently drove the City Beautiful projects from the Plan forward. Most significant though is the report's neglect of the critical work that the commission did in the years 1909-1915, claiming that the city "waited" to implement the Plan of Chicago until 1915. There is no reference to the extensive public education campaign conducted by Wacker and Moody and financed by the Commercial Club in the initial years after the Chicago Plan Commission was created.<sup>238</sup>

In contrast, historian Mel Scott describes the significance of those early years in the subsequent ability to implement Plan of Chicago projects:

Had the voters not approved bonds for the improvement of Twelfth Street at an election in November, 1912, Wacker and Moody would have believed that they had failed to convince the public of the practicality of the plan. Wacker and Moody reasoned that if their fellow Chicagoans could not appreciate the importance of improving Twelfth Street...they would not support further efforts to put the plan into effect. In the crucial test of public acceptance of the plan, the voters had given the bonds a large majority, fortifying the plan commission for additional labors.<sup>239</sup>

Scott also suggests that the Chicago Plan Commission and those leading the city planning movement were becoming increasingly concerned that city planning was not being integrated into other municipal functions. Their view was that, short of such integration, city planning could never gain the broad acceptance it needed to be truly and comprehensively influential.<sup>240</sup>

---

<sup>238</sup> Chicago Board of Local Improvements, *A Sixteen-Year Record of Achievement, 1915-1931* (Chicago: A.E. Burnett, 1931).

<sup>239</sup> Scott, *American City Planning Since 1890*, 139.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

By this time, the city was increasingly associating the Plan of Chicago and the Chicago Plan Commission with public works projects, as opposed to being part of a comprehensive plan for the city's development. As such, when the funding available for such projects began to diminish during the Great Depression, so did the value of the commission; there was no need for an active commission and technical staff if there were no active public works projects. The commission failed to shift its focus or view of city planning beyond this perception, and began to stagnate. As a result, the luxury of increased support from the City Council by way of appropriations turned out to be short-lived. In 1933, after nine years of \$40,000 annual allocations, the commission received only half that amount – just \$20,000. In 1934, appropriations fell to their lowest, just \$1,000; the commission was only able to function by using funds remaining from the previous year. The Chicago Plan Commission was withering.<sup>241</sup>

### **From No Housing to All Housing**

In the midst of its dwindling relevance, the Chicago Plan Commission's Annual Report for 1933 presents a shocking and unanticipated change – it was one hundred percent dedicated to housing. After twenty-four years of an overwhelming emphasis on City Beautiful-related projects from the Plan of Chicago and pages upon pages of detailed descriptions of the dozens of road and throughway improvements being advocated by the Chicago Plan Commission, the 1933 Annual report had not a single mention of streets, not one mention of highways. In its introduction, the report stated:

---

<sup>241</sup> Walker, *The Planning Function in Urban Government*, 245, 261.

During 1933 the Chicago Plan Commission focused its attention upon a series of studies related to the rehabilitation of blighted districts, slum clearance and low-cost housing; and presents its findings in this report.<sup>242</sup>

The thirty-page report began with a lengthy explanation of the problems of housing being experienced in the city, defining 'blight' and the consequences of it. Blighted neighborhoods were described as formerly desirable residential districts that had become rundown, where property values were low and the only hope for property owners was the promise of an increase in future values. Such areas could be recognized by the extent of the rehabilitation they demanded, particularly when it was clear that the depth of the problem could not be solved by private enterprise and, thus, required public intervention. Blight brought with it "vice, crime and shiftlessness," said the report; blight led to slums, which are a "social liability." The Chicago Plan Commission declared that it was Chicago's civic duty, therefore, to ensure that blighted areas did not degenerate into slums.<sup>243</sup>

According to the report, Chicago was suffering from many blighted areas, but most of them had not yet reached slum conditions – meaning there was an opportunity to save them and an urgency to do so before they deteriorated beyond saving. The solution: clear out the old structures and replace them with new, affordable housing projects that would improve the lives of those living in blight both socially and economically. None of these views were necessarily new to housing in Chicago, but they were certainly new to the Chicago Plan Commission.<sup>244</sup>

---

<sup>242</sup> Chicago Plan Commission, *Annual Report of the Chicago Plan Commission: Twenty-fourth Annual Report for the Year 1933*, Cc P69q 1926/34 c.3, Municipal Reference Collection.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid.

The 1933 report did not overlook the exclusion of housing from the Chicago Plan Commission's work up to that point. The report noted that it was logical to have expected the Plan of Chicago to address housing, but that its patrons had simply chosen to focus instead on the "public domain" alone. In conciliation, the report gave a nod to attempts that were made to address the housing issue in Chicago, citing in particular the Marshall Field and Michigan Boulevard Garden Apartments projects, though both had by that time failed in their goal to provide housing to low income residents of the so-called blighted areas. The report committed to a fact that was a new admission in both the public and private sectors after decades of failed attempts to improve Chicago's housing crises: private business could not solve housing issues, "because low-cost housing does not offer an attractive field for commercial enterprise."<sup>245</sup>

Why, after over twenty years of completely excluding housing from its repertoire, was the Chicago Plan Commission engaging so extensively in the issue in 1933? The answer, at least in part, may be found in the 1933 Annual Report itself. The document cited the 1932 creation of the Illinois Housing Commission and its subsequent passing of state legislation the following year as the reason for the commission's sudden focus on housing. The legislation was titled "An act to provide for the organization, management and regulation of housing corporations" or the State Housing Act. It was amended in 1934 and retitled "An Act in relation to housing."<sup>246</sup>

While the state act was being developed, the Commercial Club was contemplating which entity might take on housing in the city, considering whether it – or its members

---

<sup>245</sup> Ibid.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid.; "HOUSING (310 ILCS 5/) State Housing Act.," Illinois General Assembly. Accessed July 14, 2017: <http://www.ilga.gov/legislation/ilcs/ilcs3.asp?ActID=1423&ChapterID=29>



though a separate body – could be the best organization for the task. The opportunity for the Commercial Club to jump to the forefront – through the Chicago Plan Commission – came via an important clause in Illinois’ “Act in relation to housing,” which stated the following:

The plans and specifications (of the limited-dividend housing construction permitted by the act) shall be submitted to the city plan commission, if such there be, of the city, village or incorporated town in which the housing project is located. Such commission shall return the plans and specifications to the board within fifteen days after their receipt by the commission, together with such statements and recommendations as the commission may desire to make. It shall be within the discretion of the board to adopt or to reject any or all of such recommendations.<sup>247</sup>

As such, the chair of the Commercial Club – then Daniel Burnham, Jr., the son of the visionary behind the Plan of Chicago – asked the staff of the Chicago Plan Commission to conduct a study of the city’s housing situation. The Chicago Plan Commission was able to increase its technical staff through financial resources provided by the Illinois Emergency Relief Commission and later by its successor the Federal Civil Works Administration, both entities having been created to intervene in the increasingly dire conditions of the Great Depression. Staffing levels were thus increased from just three – a level it had been reduced to as a result of the depleted municipal appropriations during the Depression and was the bare minimum needed to keep the commission running – to seventeen people committed solely to its new housing-related responsibilities. The Chicago Plan Commission then got to work, partnering with the University of Chicago, as the latter had been collecting data on housing in the city for many years. They conducted extensive studies of the housing situation in an area of the city that housed about forty percent of the city’s population,

---

<sup>247</sup> Chicago Plan Commission, *Annual Report of the Chicago Plan Commission: Twenty-fourth Annual Report for the Year 1933*, Cc P69q 1926/34 c.3, Municipal Reference Collection.

producing data and maps that were described in the 1933 Annual Report and put on display at the commission's headquarters.<sup>248</sup>

The resulting maps illustrated land use; population distribution by race, nationality, age, sex, and density; home ownership rates; building age; rental values; zoning; transportation; and value of both land and structures. The goal of the data collection and mapping was to identify sites that were eligible for housing project construction and where such projects were deemed necessary and feasible; the State Housing Act required that housing projects enabled under it be in areas where affordable and adequate housing – both in quantity and quality – was not already being provided by the private market and where existing conditions made new housing imperative for the health, safety, and well-being of the people.<sup>249</sup>

Despite the dedication of the annual report to housing and the resulting data and maps, the Chicago Plan Commission's meetings were still focused on transportation-related projects. There was yet to be any discussion in the meetings of the Executive Committee or the full commission regarding the housing research being done. It appears that this was solely the work of the commission's newly acquired technical staff, operating independently from the status quo projects of the commission. Nevertheless, the Chicago Plan Commission, through a legislated mandate and the technical staff made possible by the federal government, took its place in Chicago's housing movement. At this stage, the work itself was limited to the collection of data and production of maps; regardless, it appears as though the Chicago Plan Commission was poised to reconsider the boundaries

---

<sup>248</sup> Ibid; The area studied was bordered by Belmont Avenue to the north, 63<sup>rd</sup> Street to the south, Kedzie Avenue to the west, and Lake Michigan and Cottage Grove Avenue to the east.

<sup>249</sup> Chicago Plan Commission, *Annual Report of the Chicago Plan Commission: Twenty-fourth Annual Report for the Year 1933*, Cc P69q 1926/34 c.3, Municipal Reference Collection.

of city planning in Chicago as they had defined it, given the state's legislative action, which clearly saw housing as being within city planning's jurisdiction.<sup>250</sup>

## **CONCLUSION**

We have seen in this chapter that there was a growing, yet struggling, movement working to address Chicago's housing issue during a time when the Chicago Plan Commission was either unwilling or unable to do so. As the commission continually expanded its work, adding more and more street improvement and civic space projects to its docket, even taking the lead on finding a new solution to the extremely complex and politically-charged traction issue, it continued to resist an extension of its repertoire to include housing or other social issues facing the city while becoming increasingly technical in its operations. In the meantime, the local housing movement made several attempts to improve housing, largely through private and non-profit sector initiatives including settlement houses, model tenements and communities, and pressure on the municipality to establish and enforce minimum standards and regulations.

Finally, in the early to mid-1930s, it became clear that public intervention was needed in housing. Concurrently, with the decrease in public works projects and city appropriations combined with its legacy of inflexibility and lack of adaptability, the Chicago Plan Commission's significance was waning. Suddenly in 1933, we see the Chicago Plan Commission take up an intense focus on studying and comprehending the housing issue, particularly seeking to define and map blight – and the corresponding threat of slum development – in the central district of the city; this new interest was galvanized by a

---

<sup>250</sup> Proceedings of the Chicago Plan Commission, November 30, 1926 to July 24 1934, Volume 6, Cc P69q 1926/34 c.3, Municipal Reference Collection.

changing view of the role of the federal government in housing and the availability of resources for public housing ventures – largely from the federal government via programs to stimulate employment and intervene where the private sector had failed to find solutions to persistent housing issues.

The next chapter will examine where this turn of events led the Chicago Plan Commission, city planning, and the housing movement during the remainder of the 1930s. We will see if the infusion of government support and changing views on the government's role in housing would lead to a substantive inclusion of housing in city planning.

## V. HOUSING NEEDS PLANNING...BUT DOES PLANNING NEED HOUSING?

### INTRODUCTION

As we have seen, by the early 1930s, the Chicago Plan Commission had largely lost the legitimacy and momentum that it had once had. The commission's decline was most poignantly illustrated by the drastic decrease in municipal appropriations; in 1934, a mere \$1,000 was allocated to the commission and it was only through the use of unspent funds from the previous year that it was able to retain a core staff.<sup>251</sup>

The effects of the Great Depression, particularly in the early 1930s, certainly contributed much to the breakdown of the commission and city planning in Chicago; municipal bond issues that had funded the implementation of large proportions of Plan of Chicago and other commission projects were becoming more and more rare. This exacerbated a more significant underlying problem: the City Council had come to hold the view that the Chicago Plan Commission was merely involved with public improvement projects. As such projects decreased due to financial constraints, so did the value of the commission to the city. Furthermore, periods of public distrust made favorable votes on bond issues less certain. The membership of the Chicago Plan Commission became increasingly less active and there were years when the leadership did not even bother to convene the group for a meeting. Illustrated presentations to the public to educate them on the Plan of Chicago and its implementation, once a City Plan Commission hallmark, dwindled into nonexistence.<sup>252</sup>

---

<sup>251</sup> Walker, *The Planning Function in Urban Government*, 245.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*, 261.

Though this was a significant fall from the Wacker/Moody years, we can see that the seeds of this breakdown were planted early in the commission's life. While the stagnation of the commission and its ability to implement Burnham's Plan of Chicago could be seen as merely a symptom of difficult economic times both locally and nationally, some define this period as a consequence of the commission's narrow definition of city planning that was established in its early City Beautiful days. As Robert Walker concludes in his 1941 study of city planning:

It has already been suggested that the weakness of the Chicago Plan Commission lay in its failure to progress beyond the stage in city planning represented by the Burnham Plan. One aspect of this preoccupation was its reluctance to accept housing and evolving concepts of "social planning" as a legitimate part of planning.<sup>253</sup>

Despite the persistent rigidity in its conceptualization of city planning and its role in it however, we saw that in 1933 the commission suddenly and intensely took up housing as an issue, conducting an extensive survey of blighted areas in the city. This is largely due to new federal intervention into the housing issue, which included funding and legislation that translated into a state housing act that tasked the Chicago Plan Commission with the review of housing plans made by newly enabled housing corporations.

Meanwhile, the housing movement was pressing on. In 1934, a new entity emerged that would have a significant impact on city planning in Chicago and the Chicago Plan Commission, both in terms of breathing life back into the two and influencing a new perspective on city planning and role for the commission in it. In that year, the Metropolitan Housing Council (MHC) was created with the goal of developing a comprehensive housing program for the city of Chicago. "Led by Executive Director

---

<sup>253</sup> Ibid., 262.

Elizabeth Wood, it wasted no time in advancing its three primary objectives for improving the city's housing stock: enforcing standards, collecting statistics, and promoting neighborhood planning."<sup>254</sup> MHC's efforts would quickly include a deliberate and persistent effort to draw housing under the auspices of city planning and the Chicago Plan Commission.<sup>255</sup>

This chapter will examine the Chicago Plan Commission's newfound relationship with housing that began in 1933. We will see that the commission's 1933 Annual Report and blight study was not an anomaly but rather the beginning of a new engagement with housing that, despite some ebb and flow, would be significant. MHC's attempts to more permanently weld the housing and city planning movements together will then be explored. This objective required a persistent effort over at least five years, and culminated in 1939 with the complete re-creation of the Chicago Plan Commission. We will determine whether the combination of government policy and resources that engaged the Chicago Plan Commission in housing in 1933 and MHC's subsequent efforts to remake the commission were the factors needed to change the trajectory and broaden the scope of city planning in Chicago.

## **THE CHICAGO PLAN COMMISSION**

As we saw in the previous chapter, in 1933 the Chicago Plan Commission unexpectedly took up housing as an important issue that fell within its realm. After nearly

---

<sup>254</sup> "History," Metropolitan Planning Council, accessed June 3, 2017.

<https://www.metroplanning.org/about/History.html>

<sup>255</sup> Report titled *Metropolitan Housing Council: Activities 1934-1937*, Box 70-783, Folder [70-568], Metropolitan Planning Council records, Special Collections, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago (hereafter referred to as Metropolitan Planning Council records).

two and a half decades of barely acknowledging the crises of substandard housing, the commission dedicated its entire 1933 annual report to the topic. Furthermore, in that year, the commission participated in an extensive survey of 'blighted' areas of the city in response to a new mandate in state legislature; this legislation was created during a time when the federal government was intervening in cities to enable the construction of public housing projects. This federal effort began with a short-lived program to promote limited-divided corporations, an initiative that was quickly ended and replaced with direct government construction of housing. Support for the Chicago Plan Commission came in the form of a temporary yet significant increase in staff, which was dedicated to collecting and analyzing data on the land and structures in the core of the city. There was a new urgency that became a top priority: stop blighted areas from further degrading into slums.<sup>256</sup>

The Chicago Plan Commission's Chief Engineer, Hugh S. Young, and the newly acquired technical staff primarily conducted this work. Meanwhile, in the routine, if far less frequent, meetings of the commission and its Executive Committee all appeared to be business as usual. The main topics of discussion remained related to transportation and civic space projects: street widenings, bridges, museums, and parks. But this would soon change, as the theme of the 1933 Annual Report would turn out to be an indicator of bigger transformations to come. In fact, this was just the tip of the iceberg; the Chicago Plan Commission of the City Beautiful era was on its way out and a 'new' Chicago Plan Commission was on its way in.<sup>257</sup>

---

<sup>256</sup> Radford, *Modern Housing for America*, 92-99.

<sup>257</sup> Proceedings of the Chicago Plan Commission, November 30, 1926 to July 24 1934, Volume 6, Cc P69q 1926/34 c.3, Municipal Reference Collection.



## Changing Leadership and an Identity Crisis

In contrast to the 1933 Annual Report that was fully encompassed by housing, the commission's publication *The Chicago Plan in 1933* lists over sixty roads and highways in its accomplishments. There was no mention of housing in this report of city planning's first quarter century, despite the blight survey being undertaken that same year by Chief Engineer Hugh Young and his federally funded technical staff. Just a dozen non-transportation projects were mentioned, nearly all of which were cultural institutions including the Adler Planetarium, the Field Museum of Natural History, and the Shedd Aquarium.<sup>258</sup>

The year 1935 brought another change in leadership as James Simpson resigned as chairman and Colonel Albert A. Sprague, one of the commission's two vice-chairman, took his place. By the first meeting held in June 1935 – a now-rare meeting of the full commission – we begin to see that the shift in focus that was seen in the 1933 Annual Report was spreading to the commission and its Executive Committee. Much of the discussion, led by the newly appointed chairman Colonel Sprague, was about the role of the Chicago Plan Commission and its inability to operate on the \$1,000 annual appropriation it had received from the city. Money for street improvements had dried up in the Depression as bond issues appeared to be a thing of the past. This change in context pushed the Chicago Plan Commission to rethink city planning and its role in it.<sup>259</sup>

What the commission would get involved in from this point forward depended upon where the money was. Chairman Sprague reported on recent meetings he had attended

---

<sup>258</sup> Report titled *The Chicago Plan in 1933*, Cc P69 1933 c.3, Municipal Reference Collection.

<sup>259</sup> Proceedings of the Chicago Plan Commission of the City of Chicago, June 31, 1935 to December 31, 1939, Volume 7, Cc P69q 1935/39 c.2, Municipal Reference Collection.

with Daniel Burnham, Jr., then president of the Chicago Regional Planning Association, about a potential merger of the two entities. Sprague expressed his view that it did not seem feasible for the commission to expand its territory beyond the city; unless, of course, consolidating or working with the regional entity could result in cost savings. He appointed a sub-committee to explore the possibility.<sup>260</sup>

The Chicago Plan Commission's laser-sharp focus on the Plan of Chicago appears to have disintegrated as well. In Chairman Sprague's words:

Personally, I do not think that that [local improvements] has been or ever should be the chief object of the Chicago Plan Commission. Of course, when the time is ripe for proposing the widening of additional streets, then the plan commission should proceed as in the past...<sup>261</sup>

Making it clear that there was a shift away from the old Chicago Plan Commission occurring, Young quotes a colleague from the American Society of Civil Engineers' Planning Division, Russell Black, in describing what planning should not be: "Planning is not promotion and plans should not be used primarily as the instruments of promotion."<sup>262</sup> This appears to be a direct rejection of the Chicago Plan Commission of the past, given the predominance of publicity and promotion under Charles Wacker and Walter Moody's leadership.

What would the Chicago Plan Commission's chief objective be now that public improvements were hindered by the impact of the Great Depression on the availability of local financing and as city planning's identity was being reconsidered? Again, Chairman

---

<sup>260</sup> Chicago Plan Commission meeting minutes, 21 June 1935, Cc P69q 1935/39 c.2, Municipal Reference Collection.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid.

Albert Sprague indicates that sources of financial resources should be seriously considered in this regard:

On the other hand there are right now many questions that an organization composed of the kind of men who make up the Chicago Plan Commission should pass upon—particularly those public improvements for which the federal government is now lending and granting money...<sup>263</sup>

Hugh Young, the commission's Chief Engineer, deliberated the next steps of the Chicago Plan Commission in a 1935 presentation titled "The Future Planning of Chicago." This was clearly a moment of transition for the Chicago Plan Commission and city planning, and the commission was compelled to reconsider the role and shape of both. In his speech, Young is perhaps the first to openly concede city planning's identity crisis. In his view, the early momentum of city planning carried it during the decades before the Great Depression; its newness kept it going, but at the core it was destined to falter because, in his words:

...accomplishment in construction was unduly stressed with respect to newness and extent of cost rather than with respect to economic value, utility and fitness in the general scheme of city development. Achievement was confused with planning progress and accomplishment. Because of this general misconception, planning was not appreciated in itself as a real economic measure. It was to be expected, therefore, that public officials, although seriously interested in city planning, would be indifferent to its financial support when budgets were being cut to the minimum and the municipal bond market was collapsing. It was largely for this reason that planning was shelved during the period of economic stress.<sup>264</sup>

Checking street projects off the commission's to do list was accepted as a sign that planning, as it was being delivered in Chicago, was a success. However, Hugh Young suggests that the projects had lost their connection to the overall vision of the city; this

---

<sup>263</sup> Ibid.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid.

then led to a disconnection between municipal allocations to the commission and the outcomes and results – in terms of economic benefits – of the projects being implemented.

Young also testified as to the revitalized interest in city planning, fully attributed to the availability of federal dollars: “Now, city, county and state governments are feverish in their efforts to devise immediate plans so that they can participate in the five-billion-dollar federal work relief program.”<sup>265</sup> In the Chief Engineer’s view, the top two ranking opportunities for the Chicago Plan Commission in this new climate were 1) a proposed Land Use Survey – which will be discussed in more detail below – that promised temporary employment for hundreds if not thousands and 2) housing, two fields where significant amounts of federal funding could then be accessed. In general, Hugh Young envisioned the commission’s future role as a provider of data and assessments of the current and projected conditions in the city based on extensive technical studies and surveying. More significant, however, was that the Land Use Survey – having been developed by the Metropolitan Housing Council, as we will see below – offered a ready-made plan that had the potential to be approved for federal funding.<sup>266</sup>

Despite these new ventures, the commission’s decline had not yet been halted; from 1935 to 1938, the Chicago Plan Commission continued to stagnate. The last year that the full commission would convene that decade was in 1935; not a single meeting of either the Executive Committee or the full commission was held in 1937. The Executive Committee met only seven times between 1936 and 1939. Following the annual report of 1933 with its housing focus, another annual report would not be seen until 1938.<sup>267</sup>

---

<sup>265</sup> Ibid.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid.

<sup>267</sup> Walker, *The Planning Function in Urban Government*, 244

In the presence of a weak commission that was doing limited city planning at best, other groups began carrying out their own versions of city planning. In 1937, Elizabeth Wood of the Chicago Housing Authority – and previous director of the Metropolitan Housing Council – stated that the commission needed a clear definition of powers and the city needed a plan that was flexible. But what concerned her most was “all the planning that is going on without reference to the Plan Commission.”<sup>268</sup> In 1938, it was the City Planning Committee of the Junior Association of Commerce, not the Chicago Plan Commission, that was promoting a city planning exhibit that took place in Chicago that year. Public improvements were being done by a variety of groups including the Park District, Board of Education, Chicago Housing Authority, public library, and the state and county highway departments, with no central coordination.<sup>269</sup>

The commission itself recognized these duplicative and scattered planning efforts as well. In 1935, Hugh Young stated before the full commission that:

Because of insufficient funds it has been impossible for the technical staff of the Plan Commission to continue planning work on a scale adequate to meet the needs of the various sections of the city. As a result, many individuals and local organizations are developing plans for local projects. For instance, at least eight different plans have been proposed for the west side superhighway. There are many conflicting views as to desirability and practicability of plans for various other public improvements. Sectionalism is developing. Administrative bodies are taking the initiative. For the good of Chicago this scattered effort must be united under one leadership and that leadership must be supported.<sup>270</sup>

---

<sup>268</sup> Metropolitan Housing Council Governors and Delegates meeting minutes, 30 September 1937, Box 2-783, Folder [2-8], Metropolitan Planning Council records.

<sup>269</sup> Metropolitan Housing Council meeting minutes, 27 October 1937, Box 2-783, Folder [2-8], Metropolitan Planning Council records; Memorandum to the City Planning Committee, Box 2-783, Folder [2-9], Metropolitan Planning Council records.

<sup>270</sup> Chicago Plan Commission meeting minutes, 21 June 1935, Cc P69q 1935 c.2, Municipal Reference Collection.

The transition from the old to the new commission would take some time; the Chicago Plan Commission did not evolve that quickly. But it was clear to many that the general effectiveness and value of the Chicago Plan Commission was coming under question.

### **THE METROPOLITAN HOUSING COUNCIL**

A new player in the housing movement in Chicago was the Metropolitan Housing Council (MHC), an entity created in 1934. MHC's objective was, at its core, housing-centric; its founding mission was to "formulate a comprehensive housing program for Chicago and help carry it out by bringing together the planning and activities of public and private organizations."<sup>271</sup> MHC was a civic organization that believed that the complexity of the housing issue meant that there was not one single solution. As such, it engaged in a variety of initiatives. Some of MHC's main objectives were to establish and enforce minimum housing standards; build up a public demand for higher quality housing; educate the general public and community associations on building and zoning codes; encourage and facilitate the reporting of code violations; work with public and private entities on the creation of new housing; ensure the conservation of existing, yet struggling, areas of the city before they deteriorated further; support and strengthen neighborhood associations as advocates for their communities; and act as a representative of the housing movement in Chicago at the national scale.<sup>272</sup>

---

<sup>271</sup> Report titled *Metropolitan Housing Council: Activities 1934-1937*, Box 70-783, Folder [70-568], Metropolitan Planning Council records.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*

MHC hit the ground running upon its creation in 1934, aggressively tackling the housing issue and undertaking a multi-scalar effort to improve it. MHC had the benefit of the lessons learned by the previous half century of housing efforts in the city. It knew that the city's housing issue was complex and that the success and sustainability of its work would depend upon many factors. Furthermore, the leadership and Board of Governors of MHC were often well-known and influential members of Chicago society. Elizabeth Wood, MHC's first leader, would go on to head the Chicago Housing Authority. Ferd Kramer, who followed in Wood's footsteps, was a developer, former president of the Chicago Real Estate Board, and head of one of the most prominent real estate firms in the city. While Kramer tended to "exercise influence quietly behind the scenes," he was deliberate in his selection of the Board of Governors membership. He would strategically place individuals with political power and stature on the Board, a factor that likely contributed to MHC's eventual successes in reshaping city planning.<sup>273</sup>

MHC was yet another organization that was engaging in city planning in the void left by the Chicago Plan Commission. In situations where the institutions critical to creating and implementing a housing plan for Chicago either did not exist – in the case of a housing authority before 1937 – or was not functioning as intended or needed – in the case of the Chicago Plan Commission – MHC often played the role of those organizations. For example, MHC started a neighborhood planning demonstration project in the Englewood District in 1936. A copy of its 1936 Annual Report and newsletter were also sent to the American Society of Planning Officials (ASPO) by the ASPO Executive Director, who stated that:

---

<sup>273</sup> Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*, 102, 107, 204, 229.

It can be fairly said that the Council has been the most active and progressive citizen agency in Chicago which has attempted to develop and foster an adequate planning (including housing) program for that community.<sup>274</sup>

MHC's Women's Division examined the state of city planning education in local schools in 1937. The organization also developed relationships with neighborhood groups to educate them on city planning, zoning, and building regulations at a time when the Plan Commission's public education efforts were notably absent. Despite MHC's willingness to take on the roles of absent or inadequate institutions, its long-term objective was ultimately to stimulate or support the creation of those institutions rather than take on those tasks permanently. MHC frequently engaged in self-reflection, asking whether the work it was doing could or should be done by any other entity. If the answer was yes, the organization worked to eventually transfer those duties back to where they believed they rightfully belonged.<sup>275</sup>

As we will see below, MHC was working throughout the latter half of the 1930s to galvanize support for a comprehensive Land Use Survey in order to collect data needed to develop a comprehensive master plan for the city, a plan that was critically needed to ensure that its efforts to improve housing would be successful and sustainable. Though MHC likely could have undertaken such an effort on its own, it maintained the view that

---

<sup>274</sup> Walter H. Blucher, Executive Director American Society of Planning Officials (ASPO) to ASPO members, 14 February 1936, Box 70-783, Folder [70-569], Metropolitan Planning Council records.

<sup>275</sup> Report Titled *Metropolitan Housing Council: Activities 1934-1937*, Box 70-783, Folder [70-568], Metropolitan Planning Council records; Report titled *Activities in 1938: Fifth Annual Report of the Metropolitan Housing Council of Chicago*, Box 70-783, Folder [70-568], Metropolitan Planning Council records; Report titled *A joint report of the Housing Committee of the Chicago Council of Social Agencies and the Metropolitan Housing Council*, Box 2-783, Folder [2-8], Metropolitan Planning Council records; Metropolitan Housing Council Board of Governors meeting minutes, 24 June 1940, Box 2-783, Folder [2-9], Metropolitan Planning Council records.



such a significant and citywide data collection endeavor should fall under the auspices of city planning and, thus, the City Plan Commission. As such, it viewed the Land Use Survey not only as a vehicle for obtaining data that would enable the creation of a necessary and updated city plan, but also a means for strengthening the Chicago Plan Commission and redefining city planning in a more comprehensive and encompassing way.

### **Housing Needs Planning...**

Very early in its existence, MHC recognized that effective city planning was critical to solving the city's housing problems:

It is an uncomfortable fact that the merit of all public works and public and private housing in a city is directly dependent on the extent and merit of the work done by the city planner...If our housing projects are to be of permanent benefit, if our private residential investment is to be secure, and if our city budgets eventually are to achieve some degree of stability, it is imperative that our city planning be not only well thought through and practical, but also durable.<sup>276</sup>

In the view of MHC, any housing efforts it was making, no matter their success, needed to fit within a larger consideration of the city's future trajectory. Furthermore, information was needed about the presence or absence of supporting amenities in planning housing improvements. This included the location and need for transportation, schools, parks, and so forth.

It was clear that, given its history of maintaining a focus on the Plan of Chicago mandate, the City Beautiful projects it was tasked with realizing, and its exclusion of issues associated with a more broad view on city planning such as housing and zoning, that the Chicago Plan Commission was not in a position to perform the role that MHC envisioned for

---

<sup>276</sup> Report titled *Report of the Activities of the Metropolitan Housing Council for 1940*, Box 70-783, Folder [70-568], Metropolitan Planning Council records.

it – the role it depended upon the commission to perform. MHC saw the failure of the Chicago Plan Commission as generally two-fold: it was operating under a grossly outdated mandate and organizational structure and it was not granted the validation and resources that it required to properly fulfill its potential as the leader in city planning in Chicago. So, from its very founding, MHC set out to remake and strengthen the Chicago Plan Commission, both directly and indirectly. This effort would continue to be a significant task of MHC for the rest of the 1930s.<sup>277</sup>

### **Efforts to Revive the Chicago Plan Commission**

As mentioned, it was clear that 1) MHC needed city planning and a strong and able Chicago Plan Commission in order for its work to be successful and 2) the Chicago Plan Commission in its current state was not capable of fulfilling its mandates, however insufficient they were to realizing true comprehensive planning. In its first half-decade, MHC would set out to ameliorate this, primarily through attempts to merge with the Chicago Plan Commission, by developing a land use survey that would serve as a vehicle for elevating the commission's profile, and, ultimately, through efforts to completely remake and acquire formal recognition of the commission.

---

<sup>277</sup> Ibid.

### ***Formally Merging City Planning and Housing***

In the first years of its existence, MHC made an effort to institutionalize housing as a component of city planning via the creation of a Housing Division of the Chicago Plan Commission.<sup>278</sup> This work is described in a summary of MHC's activities:

The Council has spent considerable time and effort to secure a housing division in the Chicago Plan Commission. This situation is now much more hopeful because of the active interest of the Plan Commission, of whose executive committee the Council's president, Alfred Shaw, is a member. Preliminary studies have already been made of the agencies concerned with various phases of planning in the city, their relationship to each other and to the Plan Commission, as a basis for securing whatever legislation and budget are necessary to enable the Commission to do more comprehensive planning.<sup>279</sup>

The proposed merger would result in MHC effectively becoming an institutionalized advisory council that was supervised by and formally reported to the commission. The objective was to bring "to the Plan Commission such a body of public opinion already organized and already vitally interested and informed on one of the most important phases of city planning, that is, housing."<sup>280</sup> MHC cited similar arrangements that were successful in other cities, including New York, Philadelphia, and Buffalo.

The proposed merger would see MHC functioning essentially the same as it already was, maintaining its own committees and actively exploring various housing issues. It would preserve the existing membership in order to sustain its robust network of contacts and resources. Regarding financing, "the source of their [MHC's] budget may be from

---

<sup>278</sup> Report titled *Metropolitan Housing Council: Activities 1934-1937*, Box 70-783, Folder [70-568], Metropolitan Planning Council records.

<sup>279</sup> Report titled *Activities of the Metropolitan Housing Council*, Box 155-783, Folder [155-1424], Metropolitan Planning Council records.

<sup>280</sup> Memorandum on the merger of the Metropolitan Housing Council into the Chicago Plan Commission, Box 155-783, Folder [155-1427], Metropolitan Planning Council records.

individual or organization contributions made for this purpose, and from dues of the Advisory Council.”<sup>281</sup>

There does not appear to be any response to these efforts on the part of the Chicago Plan Commission, and discussions about forming a housing division seem to have stopped with MHC as there is no record of the issue in the commission’s meeting minutes of the time. By 1938, MHC’s attempts to establish a housing division under the Chicago Plan Commission by merging the two entities had failed. The former did see some progress as a result of its efforts, as “it is more and more realized that planning for the city as a whole and planning for housing has to go together” and the commission was duly taking on more responsibility in that regard.<sup>282</sup>

### ***The Land Use Survey***

In 1934, MHC, recognizing the need for a comprehensive city plan within which its housing efforts could fit, proposed an extensive Land Use Survey in order to gather data and information on the current conditions in the city upon which a new master plan – one that included housing – could be based. An updated city plan “must be based on thorough knowledge of such things as possible sources of employment or inhabitants, trends of population and transportation, as well as the financial structure of the neighborhood

---

<sup>281</sup> Ibid.

<sup>282</sup> Report titled *Metropolitan Housing Council: Activities 1934-1937*, Box 70-783, Folder [70-568], Metropolitan Planning Council records; Metropolitan Housing Council Board of Governors meeting minutes, 28 May 1937, Box 2-783, Folder [2-8], Metropolitan Planning Council records.

itself.”<sup>283</sup> The response to the proposed survey was initially positive; that same year, MHC’s proposed Land Use Survey was endorsed by the City Council.<sup>284</sup>

MHC also saw the Land Use Survey as a vehicle that could both strengthen the Chicago Plan Commission and formally unite city planning and housing. While MHC originally envisioned itself as the entity overseeing the Land Use Survey with an advisory committee that would include the Chicago Plan Commission and the Regional Planning Association, it quickly shifted to advocating that the Chicago Plan Commission take the lead. In fact, MHC consistently maintained the view that all city planning proposals – including those related to housing, which it saw as a clear part of comprehensive planning – should be coordinated by the Chicago Plan Commission. The comprehensiveness of the Land Use Survey was far greater than that of the Plan of Chicago; it aimed to examine sub-standard areas of the city, rate neighborhood quality, assess real estate values and neighborhood purchasing power, consider existing zoning, locate centers of employment and where the corresponding workers were residing, and track movement of the population and racial trends, social characteristics, and other “fundamental principles of city growth.”<sup>285</sup> More importantly, it would engage the Chicago Plan Commission directly in the pre-plan assessment, whereas with the Plan of Chicago the plan development process had already been completed prior to the commission’s creation.<sup>286</sup>

---

<sup>283</sup> Metropolitan Housing Council Newsletter, Vol. III, No. I, 15 February 1936, Box 70-783, Folder [70-569], Metropolitan Planning Council records.

<sup>284</sup> Council News Letter, Vol. I, No. 14, 8 November 1934, Box 108-783, Folder [108-981], Metropolitan Planning Council records.

<sup>285</sup> Chicago Plan Commission meeting minutes, 21 June 1935, Cc P69q 1935/39 c.2, Municipal Reference Collection.

<sup>286</sup> Report titled *Activities of the Metropolitan Housing Council*, Box 155-783, Folder [155-1424], Metropolitan Planning Council records; Report titled *Land Use and Housing Plan for Metropolitan Chicago*, Box 70-783, Folder [70-569], Metropolitan Planning Council records.

Furthermore, MHC saw the Land Use Survey as just the beginning of comprehensive data collection; it envisioned the creation of an official statistical bureau to be housed under the Chicago Plan Commission, one that would keep the Land Use Survey up to date via the perpetual collection of data. MHC recognized the value that the data produced by the survey would have to a broad audience – including the city, utilities, banks, neighborhood associations, and others – and proposed that some of those groups take part in funding the proposed statistical bureau.<sup>287</sup>

Though the Land Use Survey was developed and proposed by MHC, it insisted that the commission be the coordinating body, an insistence that would ultimately result in a delay of several years of the survey's initiation and completion. MHC's proposed Land Use Survey first came under the commission's radar in 1935, when the potential for almost a million dollars in funding from the federal government to undertake it became available. That year, at a June meeting, the commission's Chief Engineer Hugh Young provided an extensive presentation on the proposed survey, describing the value that the resulting data would have for the commission and a number of public and private entities. The cost would be just under one million dollars and would likely come with over 3,500 new temporary personnel, provided via the federal Works Progress Administration (WPA). This was an opportunity to do significant work, obtain much needed information on the conditions in the city, and acquire the financing to do it, but it was an opportunity that would be lost if

---

<sup>287</sup> Metropolitan Housing Council Board of Governors meeting minutes, 10 October 1938, Box 2-783, Folder [2-8a], Metropolitan Planning Council records.

the commission did not seize it. The resulting master plan for the city would be truly comprehensive, to include even housing.<sup>288</sup>

Despite its early interest in and endorsement of the Land Use Survey, the Chicago Plan Commission would back away from the task by 1936; the only explanation for this that the historical data examined suggests is that a lack of capacity on the commission's part caused the withdrawal.<sup>289</sup> From the perspective of MHC:

When the Plan Commission decided it would not go through with its superintending, the Council found itself in the difficult situation of having to do a large part of its work all over again. The action of the Plan Commission has made it exceedingly difficult to get the Survey established under other auspices. Nevertheless, the Council must continue its efforts to urge the Mayor to set up a special commission to direct whatever can be accomplished under present limitations.<sup>290</sup>

MHC persisted, never giving up its vision of a strong Chicago Plan Commission that would lead the way toward comprehensive study of the city and the development of a new master plan. MHC "believed the survey should be under the Commission's direction, as the material was basic to sound city planning."<sup>291</sup> Finally, in 1938, the Chicago Plan Commission found itself reconsidering taking on the supervision of the Land Use Survey. Chairman A. A. Sprague, at an April meeting that year, stated:

In the past three or four years two attempts have been made to get the Chicago Plan Commission to sponsor a Land Use Survey of Chicago and Cook County. Federal funds amounting to around a million dollars were available upon both of those occasions, but...after careful investigation by the staff and myself it was evident to

---

<sup>288</sup> Chicago Plan Commission meeting minutes, 21 June 1935, Cc P69q 1935/39 c.2, Municipal Reference Collection.

<sup>289</sup> Chicago Plan Commission Executive Committee meeting minutes, 16 December 1936, Cc P69q 1935/39 c.2, Municipal Reference Collection; Chicago Plan Commission Executive Committee meeting minutes, 26 April 1938, Cc P69q 1935/39 c.2, Municipal Reference Collection.

<sup>290</sup> Metropolitan Housing Council Newsletter, Vol. III, No. I, 15 February 1936, Box 70-783, Folder [70-569], Metropolitan Planning Council records.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid.

us that the right kind of job could not be done at either of these times, and that it would be a waste of money to try to carry on the survey under conditions then existing. Therefore I did not, upon either occasion, call a meeting of the Executive Committee to consider the matter.<sup>292</sup>

In this third proposal, the corresponding request for federal funds was for over two million dollars and Chairman Sprague agreed that the Chicago Plan Commission would take on the responsibility of survey supervision.

Upon further discussion, the Chicago Plan Commission proposed that it would be best to divide the proposed survey into smaller portions. It agreed that, if the city received the funds and this became a WPA project – to which the city would contribute \$10,000 towards the commission’s 1938 appropriation for the work – it would start with a blighted district study, building on the 1933 survey. The Chicago Plan Commission seemed wary of its ability to deliver on the much larger survey that MHC envisioned. Again, Chairman Sprague:

I feel, in making this blighted district study, that we can do something of real value. Further that it is better to start this fact-finding survey in a small way, as we shall do in connection with the blighted district study, and then have it expand later on into a comprehensive land use survey; rather than to start in a big way and then perhaps tumble over.<sup>293</sup>

Mr. Shaw, a commission member that also sat on MHC, noted the numerous agencies that were advocating for the Chicago Plan Commission to take the lead on the Land Use

---

<sup>292</sup> Chicago Plan Commission Executive Committee meeting minutes, 16 December 1936, CC P69q 1935/39 c.2, Municipal Reference Collection; Chicago Plan Commission Executive Committee meeting minutes, 26 April 1938, Cc P69q 1935/39 c.2, Municipal Reference Collection.

<sup>293</sup> Chicago Plan Commission Executive Committee meeting minutes, 16 December 1936, Cc P69q 1935/39 c.2, Municipal Reference Collection; Chicago Plan Commission Executive Committee meeting minutes, 26 April 1938, Cc P69q 1935/39 c.2, Municipal Reference Collection.



Survey. This included the Association of Commerce, the Real Estate Board, and the Illinois Society of Architects.<sup>294</sup>

Following extensive discussion on the scaled down blighted district study and the concept of public housing, the commission agreed to move forward. However, shortly after that meeting, the City of Chicago usurped that decision; the Chicago Plan Commission would have to take on the more comprehensive survey:

...the blighted district study as outlined above should not be made as a separate undertaking, but should be incorporated in the more comprehensive project. It therefore directed that the \$10,000 appropriated to the plan commission for the blighted district study be used as part of the sponsor's contribution toward defraying the cost of the land use survey.<sup>295</sup>

With the persistence of MHC and the insistence of the City of Chicago – and seemingly against its own will – by way of a comprehensive Land Use Survey funded largely by the federal government, the Chicago Plan Commission was slowly beginning to rise again as a significant player in city planning in Chicago.

### ***Remaking the Chicago Plan Commission***

By the late 1930s and following the failed efforts to merge with the commission as its new Housing Division, MHC set upon a new endeavor to reinvigorate the Chicago Plan Commission: it intended to fully replace the old commission with a new one by passage of a city ordinance. This move would not only provide an opportunity to reshape the commission and its scope by more precisely articulating its role, but would make it a legally

---

<sup>294</sup> Chicago Plan Commission Executive Committee meeting minutes, 16 December 1936, Cc P69q 1935/39 c.2, Municipal Reference Collection.

<sup>295</sup> Chicago Plan Commission Executive Committee meeting minutes, 26 April 1938, Cc P69q 1935/39 c.2, Municipal Reference Collection.

recognized entity in Chicago's city government. Recognizing the need to obtain the Commercial Club's cooperation in any reorganization of the Chicago Plan Commission, MHC consulted with the organization that had initiated the commission's original creation in the development of a proposal to reorganize, with MHC primarily weighing in on what the scope of the new commission's duties should be. In an early meeting in 1939, MHC proposed minimum requirements for the new iteration of the commission, to include that all improvement plans be reviewed by the commission, that the commission be responsible for rezoning, that all commission reviews be subject to a time limit, and that all appointed commission members be selected from a newly-created planning advisory board.<sup>296</sup>

In 1938, MHC drafted an ordinance "designed to increase the authority and influence of the Plan Commission." Concurrently, it was understood that the Commercial Club was drafting their own proposal for the commission's reorganization. Discussions internal to MHC and external with the Commercial Club ensued, debating the details of commission size and representation of city agencies via ex-officio positions. While a smaller commission in terms of membership size was desirable with the majority of the appointments being laypersons, there were external demands that would likely keep the commission size larger than the national average of less than ten members. Ferd Kramer of MHC warned that:

---

<sup>296</sup> Report titled *Activities in 1938: Fifth Annual Report of the Metropolitan Housing Council of Chicago*, Box 70-783, Folder [70-568], Metropolitan Planning Council records; Metropolitan Housing Council meeting minutes, 23 September 1938, Box 2-783, Folder [2-8a], Metropolitan Planning Council records; Metropolitan Housing Council Board of Governors meeting minutes, 23 January 1939, Box 2-783, Folder [2-8a], Metropolitan Planning Council records.

There would be more likelihood of the officials of the constituted governmental bodies blocking any plan for increased powers for the Plan Commission, unless they were to be represented on the Commission.<sup>297</sup>

Both MHC and the Commercial Club proceeded to iron out their proposals for the reorganization of the Chicago Plan Commission, each aiming to include details that served their organization's objectives. At the Commercial Club's urging, the discussion was "not too wide spread," in that it did not involve a large number of groups beyond their two organizations. MHC was cautious, and careful to "take no action which would be at cross purposes with the efforts of the Commercial Club."<sup>298</sup> Discussions within and between the two organizations appear to have continued through the rest of 1938 and into 1939, expanding to include consideration of membership and a new chairman, with hopes of identifying someone well known that would be a trusted public figure.<sup>299</sup>

Its efforts to draft an ordinance that would be acceptable to the City Council were successful. On July 12, 1939, the City Council nearly unanimously passed an ordinance that effectively eliminated the existing Chicago Plan Commission and created a new one in its place. That year, MHC celebrated the accomplishment, stating in its 1939 Annual Report that:

Thus for the first time a citizens' organization will be established by ordinance as an official part of Chicago's government and designated as the official planning body of the city. It will also be the first time that any specific powers have been delegated to a planning agency.<sup>300</sup>

---

<sup>297</sup> Metropolitan Housing Council meeting minutes, 23 September 1938, Box 2-783, Folder [2-8a], Metropolitan Planning Council records.

<sup>298</sup> Metropolitan Housing Council Board of Governors meeting minutes, 10 October 1936, Box 2-783, Folder [2-8a], Metropolitan Planning Council records.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid.; Metropolitan Housing Council Board of Governors meeting minutes, 22 January 1940, Box 2-783, Folder [2-9], Metropolitan Planning Council records.

<sup>300</sup> Report titled *Reporting 1939*, Box 70-783, Folder [70-568], Metropolitan Planning Council records.

The renewed commission's role would still be advisory only, with ultimate decision-making power in the hands of the City Council. In place of the original 238-person full commission and twenty-eight member executive committee were a smaller twenty-six member commission and a large City Planning Advisory Board. Of the twenty-six members of the new commission, fourteen would be appointed by the mayor and the remaining twelve would be representatives from various city agencies, serving in an ex-officio capacity. These ex-officio members would include:

The Mayor; the President of the Board of Local Improvements; the President Pro Tem. of the City Council, the Commissioner of Subways and Traction, the respective presidents of the Chicago Park District, the Board of Cook County Commissioners, and the Board of Trustees of the Sanitary District; and the chairmen of the following standing committees of the City Council: Housing, Local Transportation, Buildings and Zoning, Traffic and Public Safety, and Judiciary and State Legislation.<sup>301</sup>

The new City Planning Advisory Board would be made up of 261 citizens and officials, with 200 being appointed by the mayor and the remaining being ex-officio public officials. The ex-officio membership of the advisory board would include all fifty members of City Council as well as:

Corporation Counsel, the Commissioner of Buildings, the Commissioner of Public Works, the City Engineer, the Chairman of the Zoning Board of Appeals, a representative of the state of Illinois to be designated by the Governor, the respective presidents of the Board of Education, the Public Library Board, and the art Commission of Chicago, and the respective chairmen of the Chicago Housing Authority and the Chicago Recreation Commission.<sup>302</sup>

---

<sup>301</sup> Report titled *Annual Report of the Plan of Chicago for the Year 1939*, Cc P69r 1938/46 c.5, Municipal Reference Collection.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid.

Finally, after thirty years, the Chicago Plan Commission had been given official legal status, having been created via ordinance as opposed to a mere resolution:

Passage of this ordinance gives the commission legal status, something which it has not previously had. Beyond that, it confirms the role of the Plan Commission as a municipal agency...<sup>303</sup>

This ordinance also mandated that the commission hold meetings at least once a month and submit an annual report to both the mayor and the City Council. The City Planning Advisory Board was mandated to meet at least once per quarter and the Chicago Plan Commission was required to submit its suggestions and reports to them prior to being advanced to the City Council.<sup>304</sup>

Among the recreated commission's mandated responsibilities was the creation and recommendation of a comprehensive plan for the city, the ability to revise that plan as warranted, the review of all development plans, and the task of providing information to and conducting surveys for the City Council upon request. Most importantly though, in terms of the relationship between city planning and housing, was that the ordinance included language specifically directing the commission to cooperate with the Chicago Housing Authority on "the location of housing projects and the elimination of sub-standard housing conditions."<sup>305</sup> However, rezoning and neighborhood planning were not included as one of the commission's legislated responsibilities, despite MHC's hopes.<sup>306</sup>

In the reorganization, there would be a complete changing of the guard; not only would the commission's size be significantly reduced but, with the exception of the staff –

---

<sup>303</sup> Ibid.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid.

<sup>305</sup> Ibid.

<sup>306</sup> Metropolitan Housing Council Board of Governors meeting minutes, 13 February 1938, Box 2-783, Folder [2-8a], Metropolitan Planning Council records.

including Chief Engineer Hugh Young and the Office Manager Eugene Taylor – none of the appointed members of the Executive Committee would be retained in the new Chicago Plan Commission. Though MHC had succeeded in reorganizing the commission and drawing housing into its newly defined scope of city planning, the work was not yet done. MHC recognized the importance of the individuals to be selected for the new commission and emphasized to Mayor Edward J. Kelly. MHC wanted “vigorous new blood in the personnel of the commission.”<sup>307</sup> Perhaps in an acknowledgement of the older age and rigidity of past membership, MHC’s President, Ferd Kramer, called for “vigorous men young enough to have a heavy stake in their city’s future, yet old enough to have balance and judgment.”<sup>308</sup> The membership could make the difference between maintaining the status quo and “the new Plan Commission [becoming] the sparkplug of Chicago’s rejuvenation.”<sup>309</sup>

Though the new ordinance had been passed in July, the complete appointment of the membership by Mayor Kelly was still pending three months later. The City Planning Advisory Board membership would finally be appointed in November 1939; the membership of the new Chicago Plan Commission would not be appointed until early 1940. Beyond the initial appointment of the members of the new Chicago Plan Commission that year, all subsequent appointees were required to be selected from the City Planning Advisory Board.<sup>310</sup>

---

<sup>307</sup> Report titled *Reporting 1939*, Box 70-783, Folder [70-568], Metropolitan Planning Council records.

<sup>308</sup> Ibid.

<sup>309</sup> Ibid.

<sup>310</sup> “180 Appointed as New Chicago Plan Advisors,” *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, Illinois), Nov. 5, 1939, SW2. Accessed August 11, 2017: <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.uwm.edu/hnpchicagotribune/docview/175422952/B31F6D32FE944581PQ/1?accountid=15078>; Chicago Plan Commission, *Annual Report of the Plan of Chicago for the Year 1939*, Cc P69r 1938/46 c.5, Municipal Reference Collection; Chicago Plan

The appointed membership of the first commission was not remarkably distinct from the original, as it too predominantly included wealthy white businessmen, architects, and so forth. However, there were some new occupations represented: a member was a political science professor from the University of Chicago, the chairman was a civil engineer, and the vice-chairman was an economics professor. In 1940, a nationwide search for an experienced city planner was conducted to identify and hire an Executive Director for the Chicago Plan Commission. Theodore T. McCrosky was ultimately selected, coming from an impressive career as a city planning consultant in China and many years in various planning positions in New York City.<sup>311</sup>

The membership of the City Planning Advisory Board, on the other hand, exhibited a greater degree of distinction from the membership of the old Chicago Plan Commission. While the familiar professions of the law, real estate, architecture, industry, merchandise, and business were still well represented, there were several notable additions in the Advisory Board's representation. Most significant was the inclusion of labor representatives, individuals from the American Society of Planning Officials, women, and at least one black man. While debating whether it was practical or valuable to create another large city planning body in the proposed advisory board, it was argued within a meeting of MHC's Board of Governors that the City Planning Advisory Board might make it possible "to

---

Commission, *Annual Report of the Chicago Plan Commission*, 1940, Cc P69r 1938/46 c.5, Municipal Reference Collection.

<sup>311</sup> "City Planning Personnel to be Unchanged," *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, Illinois), Dec. 15, 1949, 27. Accessed August 8, 2017: <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.uwm.edu/hnpchicagotribune/docview/176495017/8BB6CB7522BC4D07PQ/1?accountid=15078>

give outside representation to neighborhood organizations and minority groups which might not otherwise be represented in the Plan Commission itself.”<sup>312</sup>

Finally, after five years of effort to stimulate the Chicago Plan Commission, MHC had realized significant progress in getting the commission and city planning closer to where it needed it to be to enable more effective housing efforts. And after nearly thirty years, the municipality formally recognized city planning as a legitimate and important component of city government.<sup>313</sup>

### **THE “NEW CHICAGO PLAN COMMISSION”**

Between the years 1934 and 1939 – largely driven by MHC – the commission was completely transformed from an unwieldy body of over two hundred businessmen focused on traffic circulation and public space projects to a more lean, twenty-six member commission – two members less than the original commission’s twenty-eight member Executive Committee. As we will see below, this new commission became deeply engaged in an extensive and comprehensive land use survey, studying the city as a collection of neighborhoods as opposed to one homogenous unit, and once again delivering dozens of public lectures.

As a result of these changes, the commission’s view of city planning was becoming more comprehensive. In its 1941 publication “The Chicago Plan Commission: Facing the Future,” the commission defines city planning as “the job of working out now what things the people will be needing next year and in the years to come, to make the city a healthier

---

<sup>312</sup> Metropolitan Housing Council Governors meeting minutes, 13 February 1938, Box 2-783, Folder [2-8a], Metropolitan Planning Council records.

<sup>313</sup> Arthur Bohnen, written comments on the City Planning Ordinance, Box 493-783, Folder [483-4095], Metropolitan Planning Council records.



and better place to live and work.”<sup>314</sup> The commission articulates this work as ensuring the provision of the right types of housing in the right locations, schools, playgrounds, commercial developments, streets, transportation, and public buildings. While comprehensive street and superhighway plans were still in its repertoire, they stood alongside other interests such as housing and rezoning as peers; no longer were they the dominant and overwhelming focus of the Chicago Plan Commission’s work. In addition, the publication emphasized the importance of going beyond just proposed projects by thinking through the realities of implementation, stating that “[c]ity planning also includes legal and financial ways and means for getting the things that are needed.”<sup>315</sup> Most importantly though was the commission’s description of its own role, as follows:

The function of the Plan Commission, therefore, is the coordination of thinking and recommendations for future improvements—public and private. The “comprehensive plan” is thus the product of this coordinating process...<sup>316</sup>

As seen above, the crux of this transformation was seen in July 1939, when the original commission was officially replaced via the passing of an ordinance by City Council. But MHC had influenced the Chicago Plan Commission and city planning in other ways as well.<sup>317</sup>

---

<sup>314</sup> Chicago Plan Commission, *Facing the Future with the Chicago Plan Commission*, Cc P69 1941 c.5, Municipal Reference Collection.

<sup>315</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>317</sup> Chicago Plan Commission, *Annual Report of the Plan of Chicago for the Year 1939*, Cc P69r 1938/46 c.5, Municipal Reference Collection.

## **A New Kind of Planning**

In addition to its involvement in the restructuring of the Chicago Plan Commission in terms of legal status, size, and mandated relationship with housing, it appears that MHC also influenced the shape of city planning as viewed by the new commission. City planning was evolving as a profession and practice, moving away from the top-down City Beautiful era that produced the World's Columbian Exposition and Daniel Burnham's Plan of Chicago. Experiences over the previous decades stimulated a sense of openness to new and different ways of approaching a city and its challenges. The Chicago Plan Commission's reorganization – and the events leading up to it – provided an opportunity to change and flex in terms of city planning's identity and definition, which contrasted with its earlier rigidity. Within this period of transition, we will see that some of MHC's concepts on city planning were integrated to varying degrees into the new city planning and new Chicago Plan Commission.

### ***The Neighborhood as Base Unit***

Recall that Daniel Burnham's Plan of Chicago looked at the city as one conglomerate; Burnham had certainly studied the city extensively, but it was from a distinctively top-down perspective, almost as a detached man observing the city from a distant hill:

From their office atop the Railway Exchange Building Burnham and his chief assistant, Edward H. Bennett, and their five draftsmen could scan a vast fan-shaped agglomeration stretching far beyond the 190 square miles embraced by the municipality of Chicago.<sup>318</sup>

---

<sup>318</sup> Scott *American City Planning Since 1890*, 103.

The projects in the Plan of Chicago were grand in scale and the only smaller subunit of the city that was identified was the downtown or Loop district. Furthermore, the Plan of Chicago was arguably not informed by extensive data collection, at least not to the degree that MHC's Land Use Survey was. Again, historian Mel Scott reports that:

At the time Burnham and Bennett were preparing their plan hardly any of the so-called planning experts troubled themselves much about social data as a basis for planning.<sup>319</sup>

MHC, in contrast, emphasized the importance of the neighborhood unit in its view of the city and city planning. MHC's September 1934 newsletter pointed out the need to plan by neighborhoods, not citywide or lot-by-lot. MHC had established its own Committee on Neighborhood Revitalization that, as part of its core activities, studied neighborhoods as distinct entities, examining the activities taking place, and working to bolster existing neighborhood associations.<sup>320</sup>

MHC's view of a good comprehensive plan required that it be based upon an intricate and in-depth knowledge of the neighborhoods in the city, their access to resources such as employment, and "the financial structure of the neighborhood itself."<sup>321</sup> The design of the Land Use Survey reflected this focus on the neighborhood unit, as it sought to identify patterns of blight and other phenomena, patterns that would aid in the

---

<sup>319</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>320</sup> Council News Letter, Vol. I, No. 14, 8 November 1934, Box 108-783, Folder [108-981], Metropolitan Planning Council records; *Metropolitan Housing Council: Activities 1934-1937*, Box 70-783, Folder [70-568], Metropolitan Planning Council records.

<sup>321</sup> Metropolitan Housing Council Newsletter, Vol. III, No. I, 15 February 1936, Box 70-783, Folder [70-569], Metropolitan Planning Council records.

identification of neighborhood units that could then be planned for.<sup>322</sup> The reasons for this neighborhood focus was to stabilize and strengthen them:

When such a neighborhood plan is directed by a competent planning commission it should be in a position to bring to the neighborhood certain municipal contributions, such as recommendations for the vacation of unessential streets and alleys, to secure protection against nuisances such as railroad tracks, or to secure land for parks and playgrounds or other community facilities and also the insistence on the improvement of commercial or industrial properties whose improved appearance would greatly benefit the desirability of the neighborhood.<sup>323</sup>

MHC experimented with neighborhood planning as well. "In 1936 the Metropolitan Housing Council initiated planning activities in one particular neighborhood, the Englewood District, which had the potential to serve as a demonstration to other communities as to what could be accomplished through neighborhood planning."<sup>324</sup> MHC worked to get neighborhood groups more engaged in city planning and zoning, educating them on how existing and revised zoning and building codes affected them. MHC also built a sentiment among those neighborhood associations that there was a need for the Chicago Plan Commission to be more inclusive in working with them. This was certainly a contrast to the early Chicago Plan Commission's interactions with smaller scale units within the city, which largely entailed working with small business associations or organized opposition groups associated with a specific improvement from the Plan of Chicago that they were attempting to implement, such as the Twelfth Street (Roosevelt Road) and Michigan Avenue widening projects. The commission certainly never spoke to the public on the

---

<sup>322</sup> Chicago Plan Commission meeting minutes, 8 July 1940, Cc P69q 1940/45 c.5, Municipal Reference Collection.

<sup>323</sup> Metropolitan Housing Council Newsletter, Vol. III, No. I, 15 February 1936, Box 70-783, Folder [70-569], Metropolitan Planning Council records.

<sup>324</sup> Report titled *Metropolitan Housing Council: Activities 1934-1937*, Box 70-783, Folder [70-568], Metropolitan Planning Council records.

critical need for quality housing or the importance of supporting the housing movement, proactively or otherwise.<sup>325</sup>

Stabilizing and conserving neighborhoods was MHC's mission, and they integrated that view of city improvement into their efforts to strengthen the Chicago Plan Commission in order to enable those efforts:

Support for strengthening the Chicago Plan Commission and the further development of the Chicago Plan to make possible the replanning and rebuilding of our blighted areas, and the protection of good, established neighborhoods.<sup>326</sup>

With the focus on the neighborhood in data collection came the discussion of neighborhood improvement – as opposed to the general city improvements of the Plan of Chicago that promised eventual trickle-down benefits to all the citizens of the city; the latter claim was made despite most of the projects being commerce- or transportation-centric and limited to the downtown area. MHC believed that, by working from an informed foundation based on data and a continually updated understanding of neighborhood conditions, the Chicago Plan Commission would develop “a new type of city planning which will have a regard for neighborhood residential development as well as planning for public works.”<sup>327</sup>

The Chicago Plan Commission did in fact pick up the neighborhood focus of MHC; this gradually emerged in their work and rhetoric. When the Land Use Survey was first

---

<sup>325</sup> Report titled *Report of the Activities of the Metropolitan Housing Council for 1940*, Box 70-783, Folder [70-568], Metropolitan Planning Council records; Report titled *Activities in 1938: Fifth Annual Report of the Metropolitan Housing Council of Chicago*, Box 70-783, Folder [70-568], Metropolitan Planning Council records.

<sup>326</sup> Report titled *Metropolitan Housing Council: Activities 1934-1937*, Box 70-783, Folder [70-568], Metropolitan Planning Council records.

<sup>327</sup> Metropolitan Housing Council Newsletter, Vol. III, No. I, 15 February 1936, Box 70-783, Folder [70-569], Metropolitan Planning Council records.

brought before the commission in 1935, Chief Engineer Hugh Young touted the value it would have to many groups, neighborhood associations included. By the fall of 1940, the state was deliberating legislation for neighborhood improvement, with one example being a proposed Neighborhood Re-Development Corporation Bill. The commission began aiding in the identification of specific neighborhoods for more detailed study and potential “demonstration planning.”<sup>328</sup>

By the summer of 1940, the Chicago Plan Commission was working to create neighborhood “master maps.”<sup>329</sup> That same year, the commission took on a demonstration neighborhood planning project when it picked up the WPA Woodlawn Conservation Project. This project aimed to develop a neighborhood planning technique that could be replicated in other Chicago neighborhoods. The work entailed collecting extensive data on the physical and economic conditions of the community. From that data-informed base, the feasibility of specific neighborhood improvement projects could be determined.<sup>330</sup>

In 1941, the commission published an educational brochure specifically on neighborhood redevelopment. By that same year, the commission’s staff included a Neighborhood Planning unit that included five city planners and a delineator.<sup>331</sup>

---

<sup>328</sup> Chicago Plan Commission meeting minutes, 21 June 1935, Cc P69q 1935/39 c. 2, Municipal Reference Collection; Chicago Plan Commission meeting minutes, 19 November 1940, Cc P69q 1940/45 c.5, Municipal Reference Collection.

<sup>329</sup> Chicago Plan Commission meeting minutes, 6 August 1940, Cc P69q 1940/45 c.5, Municipal Reference Collection.

<sup>330</sup> Chicago Plan Commission meeting minutes, 19 December 1940, Cc P69q 1940/45 c.5, Municipal Reference Collection.

<sup>331</sup> Chicago Plan Commission meeting minutes, 18 September 1941, Cc P69q 1940/45 c.5, Municipal Reference Collection; Chicago Plan Commission, *Rebuilding Old Chicago—City Planning Aspects of the Neighborhood Redevelopment Corporation Law* (Chicago: Chicago Plan Commission, 1941), 2.

### ***Planning as a Process, Not a Product***

There has been a long-standing debate both historically and in contemporary city planning about whether the core focus of city planning is product or process, ends or means. Is it the actual city plan that is most important, the creation of a clear outline for a city's future development and implementing it? Or is the process that which city planning is really about, the gathering together of various interests, articulating needs and desires, negotiating conflicts and constraints, and arriving at consensus? As will be shown below, there is evidence of this dichotomous view of city planning in Chicago in the 1930s, where we will witness a shift from viewing city planning as a product to adopting an increased appreciation for the process.

In one example of this, we see that the Chicago Plan Commission – particularly after it acquired sufficient staff that was largely technical in its functions – spends most of its time collecting and analyzing data as opposed to promoting a specific plan. Under the old commission, Daniel Burnham and the Commercial Club's Plan Committee did the data collection and analysis that identified the problems to be solved and the solutions that would solve them. As such, any studies or reports that the old Chicago Plan Commission undertook were focused on the details of implementation of the predetermined projects in the Plan, not for the commission to assess or define problems and solutions *carte blanche*. In the 1930s, however, we see that data collection and analysis is driven by the need to understand the situation at hand and to inform the eventual plans that would be made. We see this perspective clearly in MHC's Land Use Survey justification: no durable plan for the

improvement of neighborhoods or the city can be done without a clear understanding of existing conditions.<sup>332</sup>

At times, this dichotomy is presented as a direct rejection of the old City Beautiful views of city planning, placing the last nail in its coffin. Arthur Bohnen, a consultant for the Chicago Housing Authority and original member of the City Plan Advisory Board created in 1939, in articulating his thoughts on city planning, stated:<sup>333</sup>

Behind all recent planning enactments is a recognition of the fact that planning is a process and not the preparation of a pictorial presentation of a City Beautiful. [There has been] a failure to recognize planning as an instrumentality for the solution of civic problems currently known and constantly appearing...the City of Chicago does not need only a pictorial presentation of its future, we have it available in the Burnham Plan, 1909-1939...let us continue with the adoration of the City Beautiful, the Chicago plan of 1909, until such time as the community might be prepared to recognize the importance of planning as an integrated, continuous, important and essential function of government and not confuse it with the product of architectural ingenuity reduced to pretty renderings only to become the ikons[sic] of another generation of Chicago's school children.<sup>334</sup>

We can also see this shift in thinking via contrasts that are made between the new and old commissions, usually used to point out flaws in and limitations to the less inclusive

---

<sup>332</sup> Chicago Plan Commission meeting minutes, 18 September 1941, Cc P69q 1940/45 c.5, Municipal Reference Collection; Chicago Plan Commission, *Rebuilding Old Chicago—City Planning Aspects of the Neighborhood Redevelopment Corporation Law* (Chicago: Chicago Plan Commission, 1941), 2; Chicago Plan Commission, *Annual Report of the Chicago Plan Commission, 1940*, Cc P69r 1938/46 c.5, Municipal Reference Collection; Chicago Plan Commission, *Facing the Future with the Chicago Plan Commission*, Cc P69 1941 c.5, Municipal Reference Collection.

<sup>333</sup> "180 Appointed as New Chicago Plan Advisors," *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, Illinois), Nov. 5, 1939, SW2, accessed July 5, 2017: <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.uwm.edu/hnpchicagotribune/docview/175422952/1E4A492026D14DC6PQ/2?accountid=15078> ; "Two Chicagoans Are Placed on Housing Bodies," *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, Illinois), Feb. 13, 1938, 18, accessed July 5, 2017: <http://archives.chicagotribune.com/1938/02/13/page/18/article/two-chicagoans-are-placed-on-housing-bodies>.

<sup>334</sup> Arthur Bohnen, written comments on the City Planning Ordinance, Box 493-783, Folder [483-4095], Metropolitan Planning Council records.



view of city planning in the past. In its 1940 Annual Report, the first annual report after its 1939 reorganization, the Chicago Plan Commission describes its approach to city planning and developing a new city plan:

In all that it does, the commission wishes to emphasize that the resulting plans will not be the product of a small staff working alone, nor yet merely the views of an advisory group of citizens, but rather the considered judgment of all the agencies and organizations, official or civic, who are represented on the commission and the Advisory Board, reinforced by advice from other groups and individuals. In this way, by thinking together and working together in a spirit of mutual collaboration, it is hoped that the commission may be able to achieve a new Plan that will represent a true consensus of opinion as to the long term needs of the city of Chicago.<sup>335</sup>

MHC also saw the value in the city planning process in terms of developing relationships with neighborhood groups and government agencies. As such, it pushed the Chicago Plan Commission to be recognized as the coordinator of all things city planning, which would position the commission in a way that would foster more frequent interfacing with other groups. The benefits to city planning were two-fold in this regard. First, engaging with an active and informed public would generate the expectations and accountability that would force the commission to fulfill its mandate. Second, that same public was more likely to support and contribute to the efforts of the commission if they received cooperation in return. As such, persistent engagement with and between government and non-government groups was not only vital to success, but would fuel a productive and mutually beneficial dynamic.<sup>336</sup>

The commission picked up this perspective, at least in its definition of city planning and its role in it. In its 1941 publication "The Chicago Plan Commission: Facing the Future,"

---

<sup>335</sup> Chicago Plan Commission, *Annual Report of the Chicago Plan Commission, 1940*, Cc P69r 1938/46 c.5, Municipal Reference Collection.

<sup>336</sup> Report titled *Activities in 1938: Fifth Annual Report of the Metropolitan Housing Council of Chicago*, Box 70-783, Folder [70-568], Metropolitan Planning Council records.

the commission had redefined and reasserted itself, projecting the identity of a coordinating body as MHC proposed:

The best way to plan for Chicago is to consult with the government departments and agencies, elected representatives of the people, and private groups and individuals, so as to gather together knowledge of detailed needs of all kinds for all the parts of the city.<sup>337</sup>

The Plan Commission now saw its role as that of coordinator and the plan as the product of those coordinating efforts.

### ***Public Participation***

Another area in which MHC's views on city planning can be seen incorporating into the 'new' Chicago Plan Commission – though to a lesser degree – is that of public participation. MHC was perhaps ahead of its time in this regard, as public participation would not become central to city planning nationally until the civil rights tensions of the 1960s made it essential.

Tying into MHC's efforts to raise the commission's profile, it also envisioned the Chicago Plan Commission as an information resource for citizens. By 1938, the commission itself reported that "[t]he public has come to regard the Chicago Plan Commission as a source of civic information, and during the year now closing a large number of citizens obtained much information with regard to city planning, zoning, housing and public improvements."<sup>338</sup> MHC also advocated on behalf of the Chicago Plan Commission in this

---

<sup>337</sup> Chicago Plan Commission, *Facing the Future with the Chicago Plan Commission*, Cc P69 1941 c.5, Municipal Reference Collection.

<sup>338</sup> Chicago Plan Commission meeting minutes, 14 December 1938, Cc P69q 1935/39 c.2, Municipal Reference Collection.

regard through its own work, aiming to build a public view of the commission and city planning as being relevant to them and of value to the city.<sup>339</sup>

While the old Chicago Plan Commission certainly held the view that the success of the Plan of Chicago's implementation and city planning overall depended upon informed citizens and a strong sense of civic duty, MHC's view on civic engagement was quite distinct. The commission of the past saw civic participation predominantly as affirmative votes on bond issues that would fund its various public improvement projects. MHC viewed more direct citizen participation in city planning as a means towards "increased well-being of fellow citizens."<sup>340</sup> MHC believed that building citizenship and support for various city improvement initiatives should include engaging citizens with each other and the policy-making process.

Mirroring its view of city planning as a process as opposed to a product, MHC thought that citizens should be involved in the process of city planning and that, if possible, they should share "their own ideas of what constitutes desirable living accommodations." MHC believed that housing projects would benefit from a strong public relations campaign, in terms of gaining the support of neighborhood residents.<sup>341</sup> From MHC's perspective, the Chicago Plan Commission in its ideal form would be a means for citizens to have an "effective and desirable role in the contemporary planning operations of a big city."<sup>342</sup>

---

<sup>339</sup> Report titled *Activities in 1938: Fifth Annual Report of the Metropolitan Housing Council of Chicago*, Box 70-783, Folder [70-568], Metropolitan Planning Council records.

<sup>340</sup> Report titled *Report of the Activities of the Metropolitan Housing Council for 1940*, Box 70-783, Folder [70-568], Metropolitan Planning Council records.

<sup>341</sup> Report titled *Metropolitan Housing Council of Chicago, "Where Are We In Public Housing?"*, Box 155-783, Folder [155-1424], Metropolitan Planning Council records.

<sup>342</sup> Report titled *Evaluation Paper: Chicago Plan Commission or the Official Citizen Body in the Planning Process*, Box 476-783, Folder [476-3937], Metropolitan Planning Council records.

To an extent, the coordinating role of the new Chicago Plan Commission hinted at more direct engagement of the public – wherein the commission itself worked with a variety of groups and organizations – that contrasted with the more detached, trickle-down benefit view of the old commission. Furthermore, the reorganization of the Chicago Plan Commission from an unwieldy and largely symbolic, 328-member entity driven by a 28-member Executive Committee into a 26-member commission with a 261-member advisory board provided an opportunity for more grassroots-level representation in city planning. As previously mentioned, it was argued that maintaining a large advisory board opened the opportunity for representation from various neighborhood groups that were not likely to have representation on the commission itself. This is quite a shift in the definition of representation from the old commission, wherein having wealthy businessmen from each of the city’s fifty wards was accepted as sufficiently corresponding to the entire citizenry of Chicago.

### **...BUT DOES PLANNING NEED HOUSING?**

While so much was achieved towards integrating housing with city planning in the late 1930s, the Chicago Plan Commission soon strayed from maintaining a distinct focus on housing. In 1939, the Chicago Plan Commission did explore getting directly involved in the development of a housing project. The proposed project, however, was for “high-grade” housing of the type that people relocated to the suburbs for on a piece of property owned by the Sanitary District, not for housing in low- or middle-income areas.<sup>343</sup>

---

<sup>343</sup> Chicago Plan Commission Executive Committee meeting minutes, 10 January 1939, Cc P69q 1935/39 c.2, Municipal Reference Collection.

As we saw in 1933, the Chicago Plan Commission began its engagement with housing via a survey of the city's blighted districts. Defining, identifying, and eliminating blight was a national endeavor during these years, efforts that aimed to prevent blight from deteriorating into slums that were likely beyond saving. MHC's efforts to revive the commission were driven by a desire to conduct a thorough Land Use Survey that would produce data from which the commission could fulfill its duty of proposing a master plan for the city. MHC and others working towards maintaining minimum housing standards and ensuring the availability of affordable, decent housing for all of Chicago's citizens could then work within the context of that master plan. But by 1943, the commission had yet to develop a new master plan for the city.<sup>344</sup>

The Chicago Plan Commission maintained its focus on studying blighted areas of the city after its reorganization in 1939, examining those areas in order to improve them and prevent them from becoming slums. However, there was a view both nationally and locally that the objective was not necessarily to maintain or improve the housing in such blighted areas. The goal was to determine the best and highest use for the land in those locations. As early as 1935, prominent city planners at the national level such as L. Segoe, Walter H. Blucher, and Russell V. Black were discussing the "fundamental principles" of housing policy. These principles stated that new housing should not necessarily be rebuilt in slum, blighted, and problematic areas. Hugh Young quotes L. Segoe, who stated:

Many of the people in this country are still under the delusion that the rehabilitation of blighted areas involves only new housing in those areas. If we approach the problem of rehabilitation properly, it would become apparent that the best use of

---

<sup>344</sup> Meyerson and Banfield, *Politics, Planning & the Public Interest*, 53, 53-54 supra note (unnumbered); Report titled *The Metropolitan Housing Council of Chicago: Its Background, Its Accomplishments, Its Program*, Box 70-783, Folder [70-569], Metropolitan Planning Council records.

property in many communities might be for commercial or industrial purposes or for parks and open spaces.<sup>345</sup>

While not stated explicitly, this language and repeated insistence that housing was not to be the assumed “best and highest use” implies that housing, particularly that for the lower classes, was not a driving priority. For as much as it had changed, the Chicago Plan Commission and city planning were still focused on property values; low and lowering property values were a problem to be addressed, and ensuring property value maximization – not ensuring a net increase in housing – was the ultimate goal.

The Chicago Plan Commission also began to shift back to supporting private intervention in housing, though this time with government support, despite the past failed efforts of the private market to solve housing problems that we learned about in the previous chapter. In 1940, a new law on urban redevelopment was being considered at the state level. This law would enable private interests to utilize, with restrictions, eminent domain in development projects. Theodore McCrosky, the commission’s Executive Director, publically and emphatically endorsed the legislation. In a 1941 publication titled “Rebuilding Old Chicago,” the commission explains that many of the residents of blighted and slum areas could not be served by public housing nor the traditional private housing market, as they were neither very low nor very high income.<sup>346</sup> The publication argues that private intervention, with the collaboration of the government, was needed:

---

<sup>345</sup> Chicago Plan Commission meeting minutes, 21 June 1935, Cc P69q 1935/39 c.2, Municipal Reference Collection.

<sup>346</sup> Chicago Plan Commission meeting minutes, 06 September 1940, Cc P69q 1940/45 c.5, Municipal Reference Collection; “Planning Chief Supports Bill to Clear Slums,” *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, Illinois), Dec. 20, 1940, 33, accessed August 8, 2017: <https://search-proquest->

Private investment institutions, working hand in hand with local architects and contractors, backed by a sound city planning program and the constructive provisions of the Neighborhood Redevelopment Corporation Law, can now get to work on the job of rebuilding Chicago's old districts. The measure of success achieved will be the reestablishment of property values and the national recognition that Chicago has pointed the way toward solving the housing problem by local cooperation and local enterprise.<sup>347</sup>

In 1941, the Neighborhood Redevelopment Corporation Law was passed by the state. One goal of this law was to open the door for private developers to do the work of rehabilitating blighted areas. That same year, the commission articulated its policy on slum clearance and redevelopment, emphasizing the economics of its slum clearance program.<sup>348</sup>

In its proceedings in 1940 and 1941, the first years after the 1939 reorganization, blight redevelopment is the only regular item of discussion within the Chicago Plan Commission. As we saw above, it was clear that this was a program to eliminate blight, which would mostly involve the removal of substandard housing but would not necessarily replace it with new housing unless it was determined to be the most profitable use for the land. In 1941, the Chicago Plan Commission listed its tools for addressing slum and blighted areas as "the police power, the taxing power, the power of eminent domain, the mapping and planning power, and the power to finance specific types of improvements..."<sup>349</sup>

Most discouraging is that the Chicago Plan Commission does not appear to recognize the role that MHC played in its revitalization at a time when the former was waning and

---

[com.ezproxy.lib.uwm.edu/hnpchicagotribune/docview/176463620/16D421CCC37D4246PQ/4?accountid=15078](http://com.ezproxy.lib.uwm.edu/hnpchicagotribune/docview/176463620/16D421CCC37D4246PQ/4?accountid=15078)

<sup>347</sup> Chicago Plan Commission, *Rebuilding Old Chicago*, 3, 6.

<sup>348</sup> Chicago Plan Commission, *Chicago Plan Commission, Annual Report 1941*, Cc P69r 1938/46 c.5, Municipal Reference Collection; Chicago Plan Commission meeting minutes, 02 July 1941, Cc P69q 1940/45 c.5, Municipal Reference Collection.

<sup>349</sup> Chicago Plan Commission meeting minutes, 02 July 1941, Cc P69q 1940/45 c.5, Municipal Reference Collection.

ineffective. The commission makes no mention of MHC and its efforts to revive and strengthen the Chicago Plan Commission in references to the Land Use Survey or otherwise.<sup>350</sup> In fact, in its 1940 Annual Report, the Chicago Plan Commission takes credit for garnering public interest in housing, the development of the Land Use Survey, and presumably its own resulting revitalization:

...the plan commission took an active part in zoning in Chicago; helped stimulate public interest in the housing problem...and initiated the Land Use Survey now in progress. At this point a demand arose for the official establishment of the Chicago Plan Commission; as an intrinsic part of the city government; for the re-constitution of the commission with a smaller membership in the interests of efficiency; and for the preparation of a new city-wide master plan to meet contemporary needs.<sup>351</sup>

No mention of the Metropolitan Housing Council can be found. In 1940, Chief Engineer Hugh Young outlines the seven elements of a master plan, the creation of which is one of the reorganized commission's main tasks. The seven elements include streets, parks, public reservations, zoning, sites for public buildings, routes for public utilities, and harbors and waterways. Note that there is no mention of housing or any component that is clearly related to housing.<sup>352</sup>

## **CONCLUSION**

As we saw in this chapter, the Chicago Plan Commission and city planning in Chicago underwent a significant transformation between the years 1934 to 1941. Coming into

---

<sup>350</sup> Chicago Plan Commission Executive Committee meeting minutes, 16 December 1936, Cc P69q 1935/38 c.2, Municipal Reference Collection; Chicago Plan Commission, *Annual Report of the Chicago Plan Commission for the Year 1939*, Cc P69q 1935/38 c.2, Municipal Reference Collection.

<sup>351</sup> Chicago Plan Commission, *Annual Report of the Chicago Plan Commission, 1940*, Cc P69r 1938/46 c.5, Municipal Reference Collection.

<sup>352</sup> Chicago Plan Commission meeting minutes, 06 August 1940, Cc P69q 1940/45 c.5, Municipal Reference Collection.



1933, the commission was floundering, having lost its legitimacy and almost all of its municipal appropriations. The Great Depression had obliterated the municipal bond market, effectively eliminating the progress of all active public improvement projects and taking the commission's value along with it. But 1933 and 1934 brought the opportunity for change in the form of new stimulation that held promise for the Chicago Plan Commission: federal funding and resources for housing and employment efforts and the Metropolitan Housing Council, which aimed to strengthen the commission and city planning to the benefit of the housing movement.

The Chicago Plan Commission would continue to stagnate for several more years, finally responding to opportunities to reinvent itself in 1938, when it committed to taking on the supervision of MHC's Land Use Survey. This was followed by the commission's complete reorganization in 1939 into a smaller entity with all new membership. We see the influence of MHC in the commission's new and more broad view on city planning, which included closer examination of neighborhoods, a focus on the process of planning versus the product, and recognition of the importance of more substantive public participation.

The inclusion of housing however was not as clear, as the Chicago Plan Commission focused on blight redevelopment more than deliberate efforts to improve or increase housing. The emphasis was on removing low value structures, most often residential, in blighted and slum districts and identifying the best and highest use for the land. The subsequent Neighborhood Redevelopment Corporation Act opened the field for private interests to take advantage of eminent domain to implement their redevelopment plans. This was contrary to MHC's vision for a comprehensive housing plan with which city planning was intertwined.

Arthur Bohnen, a consultant for the Chicago Housing Authority and original member of the City Plan Advisory Board, believed that the 1939 ordinance recreating the Chicago Plan Commission had not gone far enough. In his view, the City Council should be delegating the review of capital improvement proposals, budget items, and zoning to the commission. From his perspective:

The Plan Commission can be the agency through which the City Council informs itself of the relationship of proposed capital and other improvements in the community to the existing state of affairs.<sup>353</sup>

Reflecting upon the commission under the Wacker/Moody years when its success was dependent upon the personalities of a few individuals, Bohnen argued that an effective commission needed not just dynamic personalities, but “duly authorized mechanisms of government through which to function.”<sup>354</sup> This was not the nature of the ordinance creating the new commission.

It is clear that the Chicago Plan Commission made significant progress towards a more comprehensive interpretation of city planning and the implementation of it in the latter half of the 1930s. This was certainly progress when compared to the commission’s early and complete exclusion of housing from its repertoire. However, the Chicago Plan Commission’s future impact on housing and social issues in the city would not always prove to be positive or productive. The commission would at times struggle to clearly define ‘blight’ when classifying neighborhoods or areas as such; at one stage, they would be accused of labeling blocks as blighted due to the mere presence of black residents. In other

---

<sup>353</sup> Arthur Bohnen, written comments on the City Planning Ordinance, Box 493-783, Folder [483-4095], Metropolitan Planning Council records.

<sup>354</sup> *Ibid.*

instances, the Chicago Plan Commission fully ignored the black population, despite the fact that the housing problem and race problem were inseparable.<sup>355</sup>

The Chicago Plan Commission's renaissance in 1939 was driven by the need for both housing and planning to be aligned for either to be successful. Despite this and the commission's mandate to work with the Chicago Housing Authority by providing data for the selection of public housing sites, this duty was not always fulfilled. By the latter half of the 1940s, the Chicago Plan Commission and the Chicago Housing Authority were rarely working together.<sup>356</sup>

It also appears that the commission's transformation to an entity that conducted extensive studies and provided reports on statistics and conditions would also be detrimental to its city planning capabilities. Often, the 'plans' produced by the Chicago Plan Commission following its reorganization would be largely descriptive, generally lacking any recommendations or guidance on the future direction or development of the city. Shifting away from any involvement with the specifics of project implementation, the commission moved to data collection and proposal review only and ultimately became passive and unwilling to commit to definitive proposals.<sup>357</sup>

By the late 1940s, the Chicago Plan Commission also appears to have recessed back to a view that the private market should largely provide housing. They re-adopted the assumption that, upon construction of new housing, the older housing would subsequently become available for lower income residents and solve shortage issues, a view that had

---

<sup>355</sup> Philpott, *The Slum and the Ghetto*, 116-120; Meyerson and Banfield, *Politics, Planning & the Public Interest*, 30 (footnote, designated by an asterisk), 35; Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*, 207.

<sup>356</sup> Meyerson and Banfield, *Politics, Planning & the Public Interest*, 58.

<sup>357</sup> *Ibid.*, 56-58, 192.

proven to be flawed decades earlier. This was a return to much earlier and outdated modes of thinking about the provision of housing that relied on an over-simplified understanding of race, class, and the housing market in Chicago. In general, the commission distanced itself as far from the race issue as it could.<sup>358</sup>

Furthermore, the commission shifted back into its old preferences for prioritizing the interests of the businessmen of the city. Some of its members would serve their own special interests, either via their professional and financial stakes in development projects that were subject to commission approval or through their desire to keep the black population out of districts in which they had investments. Some local financial institutions were not shy about their intentional efforts to get their selected representatives appointed to the Chicago Plan Commission, solely in order to ensure that their interests were prioritized.<sup>359</sup>

Eventually, the Chicago Plan Commission would devolve further, catering to City Hall and the requests of aldermen, including the labeling and un-labeling of blighted areas on demand rather than based on consistent criteria, which politicized its role in city planning and development. Given its advisory status and the limited authority that came with it and its dependence upon municipal allocations, it appears that the Chicago Plan Commission would forever be vulnerable to usurpation by politics.<sup>360</sup>

There were good reasons why the Plan Commission could not readily make a comprehensive plan of the kind described in the ideology of the city planning movement.

---

<sup>358</sup> Ibid., 63, 132.

<sup>359</sup> Ibid., 56, 83, 107, 116; Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*, 228.

<sup>360</sup> Meyerson and Banfield, *Politics, Planning & the Public Interest*, 201-202, 238; Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*, 207, 103, 147-148.

Power to make fundamental decisions affecting city development, although resting penultimately in the City Council and the state legislature, was widely disbursed:

...In our pluralistic society power over such matters is widely scattered...To make a comprehensive plan which would be achieved—if not achievable we would not term it a “plan”—would mean subordinating all of these decision-makers, public and private, to a single intention—an impossibility so long as power is widely dispersed and powerholders have conflicting ends.<sup>361</sup>

In the next chapter, we will revisit the full trajectory of the Chicago Plan Commission from its creation in 1909, through the Wacker/Moody years, across changes in leadership and the Great Depression, and beyond its deterioration and recreation in the 1930s. Through this review, we will identify the main arguments and contributions of this research to a better understanding city planning and the conditions under which it is likely to change or remain static.

---

<sup>361</sup> Meyerson and Banfield, *Politics, Planning & the Public Interest*, 274-275.

## VI. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

City planning in Chicago followed a narrow trajectory in its first decades; this path was based on a definition of city planning that claimed comprehensiveness and benefits for all while overlooking issues such as housing that addressed the immediate needs of many of its citizens. The history of city planning's birth in Chicago provides insight into why its scope was limited; the actors behind its birth and institutionalization were wealthy businessmen – many of whom were members of the Commercial Club of Chicago – whose interests lie in developing the city in ways that improved conditions for business and commerce. Their views largely aligned with the City Beautiful movement, which envisioned clean, orderly, and symmetrical urban utopias and was based on a belief that aesthetic order would naturally produce healthy and happy citizens. The philosophy behind City Beautiful was made three dimensional via the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition (the Fair), which was supported by the members of the Commercial Club. In the early 1900s, the Commercial Club pursued the idea of creating a city plan for Chicago and hired Daniel Burnham to do so. Their vision was that such a plan would make Chicago into the 'White City' of the Fair itself, a beautiful and clean city without congestion and without problems.

Daniel Burnham's Plan of Chicago was subsequently published in 1909; the Commercial Club continued to set the course of city planning in Chicago by initiating the creation of a plan commission to implement the plan and by playing a significant role in the selection of the commission's membership. The Chicago Plan Commission would hold firm to the approach to city planning that it was prescribed – one directly linked to the Commercial Club's plan as articulated in the Plan of Chicago – from its creation in 1909 to the early 1930s. This approach maintained a focus on business and commerce, though a

number of groups called for the inclusion of other pressing issues such as housing. At that time, the motivation for city planning to expand its scope to be more genuinely comprehensive was present, but the opportunity to do so was not. While the commission was establishing itself and city planning as institutions in Chicago, a growing housing movement was struggling to make an impact on the substandard and lack of housing in the city. By the time of the Great Depression, it was becoming clear that the private market alone could not solve Chicago's housing problems.

Beginning in the late 1920s, the significance of the Chicago Plan Commission began to wane. Municipal bond issues were becoming a thing of the past due to public distrust of government and the increasingly strained financial conditions of the Great Depression. Having dedicated itself solely to public improvement projects, the commission did not have much else to fall back on once the municipal bond market collapsed. Municipal appropriations often weren't paid on time, and they would ultimately decrease to just \$1,000 in 1934. Around this time, we saw a sudden and unexpected shift in the work of the Chicago Plan Commission when it took on a study of blighted housing conditions in 1933, a direct response to the federal government's intervention in housing and unemployment issues and the corresponding availability of financial resources for projects addressing them.

In 1934, the Metropolitan Housing Council (MHC) was created and undertook its mission to create a housing plan for the city of Chicago. MHC immediately recognized that the success of its efforts depended upon the success of the Chicago Plan Commission and the existence of a comprehensive city plan. Given the Chicago Plan Commission's diminishing role in city planning in the city, MHC set out to stimulate it as well as the

creation of a new general city plan, designing a Land Use Survey in 1934 and proposing that the Chicago Plan Commission take on the supervision of it.

Despite early interest in taking on the Land Use Survey in 1935 when it was first proposed, the Chicago Plan Commission would not follow through with that interest until 1938. In the late 1930s, MHC proposed a new ordinance that would effectively eliminate the original Chicago Plan Commission and replace it with a smaller commission and a large City Plan Advisory Board. This effort was successful and, in 1939, the old commission was eliminated and the new commission took its place. Furthermore, housing was officially written into the new Chicago Plan Commission's mandate, requiring that it work with the Chicago Housing Authority to identify locations for housing projects. The influence of the changing context and MHC's work was seen in the Chicago Plan Commission, which began to adopt a more comprehensive view of city planning that prioritized data collection and understanding the neighborhood unit. The financial circumstances and availability of federal resources generated the opportunity to transform the opportunity to reshape city planning into a reality.

In the following sections, we will look at the significant findings of this research and what they add to our understanding about how city planning changes or stays the same over time.

## **MAIN FINDINGS**

The main findings of this research provide us with additional insight regarding what shapes city planning. More specifically, the case presented in this dissertation details under what conditions change in city planning is more or less likely to occur: ultimately, we find



that the motivation for change alone is not sufficient. When the motivation is present – in this case from housing and other reform-minded groups – but the opportunity is absent due to a strongly reinforced adherence to a prescribed scope, we are more likely to see a continuation or reinforcement of the status quo. On the other hand, when the ability to maintain stasis has been depleted, the opportunity to influence or reshape city planning increases significantly.

### **What Shapes City Planning?**

In the case of the Chicago Plan Commission in its infancy and first decades, we see that, similar to historical accounts, the city's business interests – in the form of the Commercial Club of Chicago – had a significant influence over the shape and scope of city planning. This manifested during the City Beautiful movement, which energized a preoccupation with grand civic improvements at the expense of addressing other social issues in American cities, such as housing. While the influence of private business interests and City Beautiful are readily acknowledged in the literature, this dissertation has shown us how these initial views on what city planning were tightly controlled and reinforced, creating an established approach that was seemingly impossible to substantively change.

We will look more at the influence of the Commercial Club below, specifically in comparison to that of MHC. In what follows, we will consider the conditions under which change did and did not occur in city planning and its relationship with housing in Chicago in the early 1900s.

### ***Motivation Without Opportunity***

What we saw with the exclusion of housing from city planning from 1909 to the Great Depression was that there was motivation, particularly from outside groups, to incorporate housing into city planning, but no opportunity to do so given the resistance from the Chicago Plan Commission. Further, despite the initial opportunity to change that led to the commission's engagement with housing in the early 1930s, we saw that there continued to be some resistance to more committed engagement with housing.

First, we saw that almost immediately upon publication of the Plan of Chicago, there was criticism regarding its failure to acknowledge or address the growing housing issues in the city. This scrutiny was not merely empty criticism; it often came with suggestions of specific and manageable recommendations or from entities that were themselves modeling a different form of city planning that did not push the housing issue aside. An example of the first type can be found in the 1910 letter to the Chicago Plan Commission from the Board of the University of Chicago Settlement, wherein they argued the importance of housing in order for Chicago to become the city the Plan of Chicago envisioned. The Board recommended merely that the commission appoint a sub-committee to explore the housing issue, a request that was neither acted upon nor seemingly even considered.

An example of the second type can be found in the City Club which, like the Commercial Club, had taken an interest in city planning and formed a committee to explore what city planning would look like in Chicago. The City Club did not exclude housing from its repertoire of civic improvement ventures and was able to recognize and act upon the overlap between housing and city planning. The City Club maintained a committee for city planning and one for housing, and the two groups would hold joint meetings. In 1914, the

City Club reached out to the Chicago Plan Commission to address its concerns about the exclusion of housing from the Plan and the commission as well as the rigidity of the Plan of Chicago. As with the Board of the University of Chicago Settlement, these concerns did not result in a change in the shape or scope of city planning as the Chicago Plan Commission proceeded.

In these examples, we see that there was motivation for the Chicago Plan Commission to rethink how city planning was defined in Chicago. However, this motivation was not capitalized on, reflecting the lack of opportunity given the rigidity of the form of city planning that the Chicago Plan Commission operated within. This research would suggest that the opportunity to act on this motivation was absent due to the historical trajectory that preceded the rejection of that motivation: the impact of the World's Columbian Exposition galvanized the creation of the Plan of Chicago, which was based on City Beautiful, a particular belief about how cities should be developed. The sheer scale of both the Fair and the Plan generated a momentum that was unprecedented and, due to its role in leading both, the Commercial Club of Chicago was poised to set the direction city planning proceeded to take.

As we saw, the trajectory of city planning in Chicago exhibited self-reinforcing characteristics, particularly in the conditions under which the Chicago Plan Commission was created. The Fair – a grand manifestation of the City Beautiful philosophy – was the event that inspired the hiring of Daniel H. Burnham to create a plan for the city of Chicago. The City Beautiful approach – the belief that an aesthetically attractive city with grand boulevards and commanding civic spaces would inspire the success, happiness, and health of all the citizens – was carried forward from the Fair to the resulting Plan of Chicago that

Burnham created in collaboration with the Commercial Club of Chicago. The organizers and leaders of the Fair and the Plan were largely the same: wealthy businessmen that saw commercial and industrial success as the means to make Chicago the utopia with commercial supremacy that they dreamed of. The Plan of Chicago notoriously overlooked many serious challenges in Chicago – substandard housing and housing shortages in particular – and neglected to get to the root of many of those challenges: poverty, unemployment, and so forth.

When the Plan of Chicago was published, the Chicago Plan Commission was created with the mandate to study and implement the Plan of Chicago, not to study and implement city planning in general. As such, the scope of city planning was set, creating a rigidity that the Chicago Plan Commission was unable to break free from, no matter how many outside groups challenged its view of planning and exclusion of other social issues the city was facing.

The vision of City Beautiful was manifest in the Fair; when the men involved in the creation of the Fair were subsequently involved in the creation of the Plan of Chicago, the definition of city planning they held was reinforced. Furthermore, the same relationships and connections were further fortified, maintaining the same body of decision-makers from one stage in city planning's institutionalization to the next. This was again reinforced when those decision-makers transferred their view of what city planning entailed to the Chicago Plan Commission and were involved in the selection of the commission members. A number of the men involved in the writing of the Plan of Chicago became members of the commission themselves. As such, the predetermined vision of what city planning was and

how it would be implemented in Chicago was solidified, and shifting away from that trajectory was unlikely.

Once the Chicago Plan Commission got up and running, it was fully occupied with the details and legal processes of project implementation; there was no time left for considering other aspects of city planning as defined outside the framework of the Plan of Chicago. Furthermore, the men of the Chicago Plan Commission understood commerce and industry; they did not have comparable knowledge and familiarity with housing – a consequence that was deliberate or otherwise. As such, leadership claimed that they were unqualified to move far outside commerce- and transportation-focused projects.

The fortifying effects did not end there. When projects began getting funding from municipal bonds, this fueled the implementation of almost exclusively street and highway projects, which led to a reinforcement of the commission's view of their role in city development. Overall, the momentum that was generated was a luxury that moved city planning rapidly further, riding the wave of its successes while its shortcomings and flaws could be overlooked. All of these factors in combination afforded the Chicago Plan Commission the option of taking or leaving any proposed revisions to its course. In short, there was no impetus to change something that did not appear to the Commercial Club or the Chicago Plan Commission to be broken.

### ***Motivation With Opportunity***

As we saw in this research, it was only when both the motivation and the opportunity to expand city planning's scope to encompass housing were present that this actually occurred. First, there was motivation for city planning and housing to work more

closely coming from multiple sources. One was the sustained pressure from MHC, efforts that were multi-faceted and which MHC pursued on multiple levels simultaneously. This included designing the Land Use Survey and persisting until the commission took the lead on implementing it, working through various proposals to formally unite city planning and housing, and ultimately working to restructure the commission in 1939. However, as we also saw, the Chicago Plan Commission resisted the pressure from MHC for many years. This was even despite pressures and financial resources being made available via the federal government.

As was noted above, the momentum that drove the Chicago Plan Commission was in part driven by the successful passing of a number of municipal bond issues, which funded the work the commission was doing. However, this focus of the Chicago Plan Commission on public improvement projects would eventually cause the municipality to develop the impression that the commission was all about public improvements; when the municipal bond market fell apart, the Chicago Plan Commission's role in the city was severely devalued. Not having other ventures to fall back on, the commission began to deteriorate.

Without financing for the projects they were accustomed to doing, the Chicago Plan Commission began meeting less and less. From 1909 to 1919, the full commission met eighteen times and the Executive Committee forty-three times. From 1920 to 1930, these numbers were thirteen and thirty-six, respectively. From 1930 to 1939, the full commission met three times and the Executive Committee, twenty. Appropriations also diminished, hitting an all-time low of \$1,000 in 1934. Ultimately, despite the successes of its initial decades and the positive reinforcement that was realized, a change in the local and national financial context created conditions that would finally open up the opportunity for change.

We saw this occur when the commission finally took on the Land Use Survey in 1938 and was reorganized in 1939, a reorganization that included housing in the new commission's formal mandate.<sup>362</sup>

### **The Impact and Potential Impact of Outside Groups**

As we saw from the preceding empirical chapters, independent entities could and did play an important and often overlooked role in the shape, scope, and evolution of city planning in Chicago. That said, whether and how such entities effectively influenced city planning was not consistent across different groups and issue areas. In comparing two such entities – the Commercial Club of Chicago and the Metropolitan Housing Council – we can begin to see 1) the degree to which such entities can shape and influence city planning and 2) the barriers that may exist to such agencies attempting to influence city planning.

As we will see from the more detailed summaries that follow, the Commercial Club was able to mold city planning to its liking in the early 1900s and maintain an influence on it via the Chicago Plan Commission for decades. In contrast, it was only when particular conditions existed that the Metropolitan Housing Council had the opportunity to do the same. Even when they were able to make what they saw as significant improvements to city planning by way of the Chicago Plan Commission, those changes would be subject to further alteration and ultimately prove unsustainable.

---

<sup>362</sup> Walker, *The Planning Function in Urban Government*, 244.

### ***The Commercial Club***

The empirical chapters of this dissertation as well as the city planning history literature tell us in no uncertain terms that the Commercial Club of Chicago had an unrivaled influence on city planning in Chicago. First and foremost, it was members of the Commercial Club that produced the idea of creating a comprehensive city plan for Chicago following the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition. It was the Commercial Club that bankrolled the hiring of Daniel H. Burnham to create the famed Plan of Chicago, and it was the Commercial Club that funded the Chicago Plan Commission for nearly its first decade.

Equally important however is the role that the Commercial Club played in the ultimate makeup of the Chicago Plan Commission's membership. The entire Executive Committee of the Chicago Plan Commission was a near complete replication of the Commercial Club's Plan Committee. Charles Wacker, the first and permanent chairman of the Chicago Plan Commission, who led the charge from 1909 to 1926, had also been a prominent member of the club. Mayor Fred Busse, when asked by the Commercial Club to create a commission to study the implementation of the Plan of Chicago, easily conceded. He went further, asking the club to recommend the men who would compose the commission, with the exception of his appointment of aldermanic representation. As such, the Commercial Club had near complete control over the perspectives and priorities that would be represented in city planning's first iteration. It is no surprise that this membership was made up almost exclusively of men of similar class, occupation, and business interests.

As a result, the Commercial Club had virtually exclusive authority in the shaping of city planning in Chicago. This significance of this was further intensified by the near-



impossibility of changing the scope and shape of city planning when its foundation was established in such a prescribed fashion. As such, we see that entities such as the Commercial Club were capable of substantially driving the shape of institutions such as city planning, though this was also due to its early engagement in the vacuum that existed due to the absence of municipal intervention in the growing urban challenges facing late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century cities.

### ***The Metropolitan Housing Council***

As we saw in the introductory chapter, the Metropolitan Housing Council (MHC) is absent in the literature in terms of references to both the Land Use Survey and the reshaping of the Chicago Plan Commission in the late 1930s. This omission is despite MHC's extensive involvement in these activities, which we observed in the empirical chapters of this dissertation.

What is important to note however is that there were certain conditions under which MHC was able to push its agenda for the Chicago Plan Commission forward and there were many years when it was not. From the year of its creation in 1934, almost immediately from its first day in existence, MHC set out advocating for the creation of a comprehensive housing plan for Chicago. In order to do that, MHC knew that it was dependent upon city planning and the Chicago Plan Commission's success.

As such, from 1934 to 1939, MHC supported city planning as it was and as it needed it to be. They advocated by educating neighborhoods about the importance of city planning. MHC designed the Land Use Survey, which it saw as a vehicle for developing a basis for a comprehensive plan as well as institutionalizing the Chicago Plan Commission as a

repository for consistently updated data on the conditions of the city. Though MHC was likely capable of conducting the survey itself, it focused on the long-term benefits of the Chicago Plan Commission taking the lead. These benefits would include enhancing the commission's profile as the gatekeeper and coordinator for all city planning related activities in Chicago. Furthermore, the leadership of MHC – particularly Elizabeth Wood and Ferd Kramer – were influential Chicago citizens in their own right; this plus Kramer's strategic selection of politically powerful Board members likely contributed some clout to MHC's efforts.

Despite the efforts of MHC and despite the Chicago Plan Commission's welcoming of housing into its scope as a result of the opportunity presented via federal funding during the Great Depression, the commission maintained its resistance to MHC's prodding for another half a decade. In spite of MHC's support, the commission leadership did not have the confidence that it could successfully execute the Land Use Survey. Finally, as the 1930s were nearing their end, the Chicago Plan Commission, through additional pressure from the city, finally took up the Land Use Survey. This was followed shortly by the discontinuation of the commission as it was created in 1909 and its reinstatement as a smaller entity in 1939, an effort that was supported by both MHC and the Commercial Club.

Despite the resistance to its efforts to influence and reshape planning, we saw that, when the conditions were right – when there was both the motivation to change and the opportunity to do so – MHC was able to make inroads towards the city planning they envisioned, a profession and discipline that they hoped would enable them to deliver on their goal of realizing a comprehensive housing plan for the city.

## **The Role of the Plan Commission**

As was noted in the introductory chapter of this dissertation, the plan commission is an entity that is not closely studied, despite its omnipresence throughout the history of modern planning in the United States. In addition to their general neglect in the literature, plan commissions are often seen as synonymous with municipal planning departments, while the former is typically composed of volunteers and the latter is staffed with paid professionals.

This research reaffirms the need to more closely study and understand the role that plan commissions do and do not play in local city planning and development. As we saw in the empirical chapters of this dissertation, the plan commission – particularly its actions, funding or lack of funding, authority, and autonomy – can be indicative of the status and nature of city planning in a given city at a given time.

While contemporary plan commissions are most often strictly voluntary and do not maintain an operating budget, the original plan commissions that predated municipal planning departments would often have funds for public education campaigns, printing publications, and even hiring staff. During these times, the amount of funding allocated to any given plan commission and the source of those funds could provide a sense of the legitimacy of the commission and the degree to which the municipality endorsed city planning and saw it as a municipal function and responsibility. As we saw with the Chicago Plan Commission, municipal appropriations were initially delayed for several years, leaving the commission to rely upon funds from the Commercial Club. Further, when the city did fund the commission's operations, the amount of appropriations would fluctuate

significantly, with some aldermen often threatening to zero out its budget due to their perception that the commission lacked significance or priority.

Another interesting indicator to pay attention to in terms of plan commissions is the makeup of its membership and who is responsible for selecting commission members. As we saw with the Chicago Plan Commission, the Commercial Club had almost full discretion to fill the commission with whomever it chose. As such, we saw that the initial Chicago Plan Commission's membership looked very similar to that of the Commercial Club, with most of the Executive Committee of the latter having come directly from positions in the latter's Plan Committee. This is significant as it indicates the homogeneity of perspectives that went into city planning, the exclusion of representation from other non-business-centric perspectives, and the degree to which commercial interests were able to define the scope of city planning.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

In conclusion, we can see that who and what is involved in the initial development of city planning as an institution has long-term consequences. How the scope of city planning was initially defined was largely dependent upon those entities and agents and, as we saw, they were able to establish city planning along deliberate lines, limited to their understanding and perspective on what city planning could and should be, lines that were rigid and very difficult to shift. Those influences could ultimately control whether opportunities to change or alter city planning and its relationship with other entities were available. In addition, who is present and motivated to make demands on city planning in moments of opportunity for change is important, as they can ultimately influence the shape

and scope of the profession and discipline, as we saw with the Metropolitan Housing Council in the mid- to late 1930s.

Finally, we have learned that there is value in a closer, more examined look at the city plan commission and the degree to which it can serve as a gauge of the state of city planning overall. This entity has something to offer in terms of assessing the authority and legitimacy of city planning as well as indicating where the power to plan does and does not lie.

This research has made a contribution to the understanding of how, why, and when institutions change or stay the same, particularly that of city planning. Modern city planning, since its birth in the early 1900s, has consistently failed to establish a clear and consistent identity. Efforts to rethink and recalibrate what city planning is to better fit and meet the needs of American cities have been part and parcel of the profession and discipline throughout its life. Also present has been a general disappointment with the field's ultimate inability to deliver on its goals to solve and prevent the challenges faced in the urban environment.

While the struggle to clearly articulate the role of city planning in the development and conditions of our cities is ongoing, this research adds to the evolving understanding of whether and how city planning can be redirected and improved.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### ARCHIVAL COLLECTIONS

Archival Image & Media Collection. The Art Institute of Chicago, Ryerson & Burnham Archives.

Municipal Reference Collection. Chicago Public Library, Harold Washington Library Center.

City Club of Chicago records. Chicago History Museum, Research Center.

Commercial Club of Chicago records. Chicago History Museum, Research Center.

Metropolitan Planning Council records. University of Illinois at Chicago, Special Collections.

### SECONDARY SOURCES

*Abendpost*, "Charles H. Wacker Dies at Lake Geneva," November 1, 1929. Accessed at: [http://flps.newberry.org/article/5418474\\_6\\_1092/](http://flps.newberry.org/article/5418474_6_1092/)

"About." City Club of Chicago: Illinois' premier public affairs forum since 1903. <https://www.cityclub-chicago.org/about>

Addams, Jane. *Twenty Years at Hull-House, with Autobiographical Notes*. New York: Penguin, 1981.

Andrachek, Steven E. "Housing in the United States: 1890-1929." In *The Story of Housing*, edited by Gertrude Sipperly Fish. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1979.

Bachin, Robin. *Building the South Side: Urban Space and Civic Culture in Chicago, 1890-1919*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004.

Badger, Reid. *The Great American Fair: The World's Columbian Exposition & American Culture*. Chicago: Nelson Hall, 1979.

Bauman, John F. "Community Building versus Housing Reform: Roy Lubove and the History of Housing Reform in the United States." *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 68, no. 3 (Summer 2001): 293-313.

Brown, Parke. "Zimmer to Quit Post as County Hospital Head," *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, IL), Nov. 29, 1937.

Burnham, Daniel H. and Edward H. Bennett. *Plan of Chicago*. New York: De Capo Press, 1970.

Cherry, Gordon E. (Ed.). *Shaping an Urban World*. London: Mansell, 1980.

Chicago Board of Local Improvements, *A Sixteen-Year Record of Achievement, 1915-1931*. Chicago: A.E. Burnett, 1931.

Chicago Plan Commission, *Chicago's Greatest Issue: An Official Plan*. Chicago: Chicago Plan Commission, 1911.

Chicago Plan Commission, *Rebuilding Old Chicago—City Planning Aspects of the Neighborhood Redevelopment Corporation Law*. Chicago: Chicago Plan Commission, 1941.

*Chicago Tribune*, "180 Appointed as New Chicago Plan Advisors," November 5, 1939.

*Chicago Tribune*, "All to Know Chicago Plans," April 23, 1910.

*Chicago Tribune*, "Bonding Bills Raise Tax Only 33c Upon \$100: Wacker Explains Status of Measure Aiding Improvements," May 19, 1919.

*Chicago Tribune*, "City Planning Personnel to be Unchanged," December 15, 1949.

*Chicago Tribune*, "Club to Teach City Beauty," April 10, 1910.

*Chicago Tribune*, "Col. Sprague, 69, Politician and Grocer, Is Dead," April 8, 1946.

*Chicago Tribune*, "Congestion of Street Traffic," October 30, 1905.

*Chicago Tribune*, "False Economy," June 28, 1918.

*Chicago Tribune*, "James Simpson, Utilities Chief, Dies," November 26, 1939.

*Chicago Tribune*, "Mayor Tries to Make Wacker Expert 'Goat,'" June 11, 1921.

*Chicago Tribune*, "Moody 'Chicago Plan' Head," January 15, 1911.

*Chicago Tribune*, "Offers Bill in House to Create Illinois Housing Commission." November 16, 1932.

*Chicago Tribune*, "Pike in Budget Cuts Out Plan and Rail Boards," December 4, 1916.

*Chicago Tribune*, "Planning Chief Supports Bill to Clear Slums," December 20, 1940.

*Chicago Tribune*, "Reconstruction Platform of Chicago Plan Commission," December 14, 1918.

- Chicago Tribune*, "Street Car Accidents," August 16, 1908.
- Chicago Tribune*, "Two Chicagoans Are Placed on Housing Bodies," February 13, 1938.
- Condit, Carl W. *Chicago 1930-70: Building, Planning, and Urban Technology*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1974.
- Condit, Carl W. *Chicago 1910-29: Building, Planning, and Urban Technology*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1973.
- Cooke, Jason. "Compensated Taking: Zoning and the Politics of Building Height Regulation in Chicago, 1871-1923," *Journal of Planning History* 12, no. 3 (2013): 209.
- Corbin Sies, Mary and Christopher Silver. "Introduction: The History of Planning History." In *Planning the Twentieth-Century American City*, edited by Mary Corbin Sies and Christopher Silver. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.
- Draper, Joan E. "The Art and Science of Park Planning in the United States: Chicago's Small Parks, 1902 to 1905." In *Planning the Twentieth-Century American City*, edited by Mary Corbin Sies and Christopher Silver. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.
- Dretske, Diana. "Joseph T. Bowen Country Club, Waukegan." *Lake County, Illinois History* (blog). April 19, 2013 (10:09 a.m.). Accessed at: <http://lakecountyhistory.blogspot.com/2013/04/joseph-t-bowen-country-club-waukegan.html>.
- Dyja, Thomas. *The Third Coast: When Chicago Built the American Dream*. New York: Penguin Books, 2013.
- Fairfield, John D. *The Mysteries of the Great City: The Politics of Urban Design, 1877-1937*. Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1993.
- Finstein, Amy D. "From "Cesspool" to "The Greatest Improvement of Its Kind": Wacker Drive and the Recasting of the Chicago Riverfront, 1909-1926." *Journal of Planning History* 14, no. 4 (2015): 288.
- Friedman, Lawrence M. *Government and Slum Housing*. New York: Arno Press, 1978.
- Garb, Margaret. "Race, Housing, and Burnham's Plan: Why Is There No Housing in the 1909 Plan of Chicago?" *Journal of Planning History* 10, no. 2 (2011).
- Garb, Margaret. *City of American Dreams: A History of Home Ownership and Housing Reform in Chicago, 1871-1919*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005.



- Gosnell, Harold F. *Machine Politics: Chicago Model*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970.
- “Guide to the Julius Rosenwald Papers 1905-1963.” The University of Chicago Special Collections Research Center Finding Aids.  
[https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/e/scrc/findingaids/view.php?eadid=ICU.SPCL.ROSE\\_NWALDI](https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/e/scrc/findingaids/view.php?eadid=ICU.SPCL.ROSE_NWALDI)
- Harris, Neil, Wim de Wit, James Gilbert, and Robert W. Rydell. *Grand Illusions: Chicago's World's Fair of 1893*. Skokie, Illinois: Chicago Historical Society, 1994.
- “Herbert Hoover: Statement Announcing the White House Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership.” The American Presidency Project.  
<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=22804>
- Hewett, Oscar E. “City Slights ‘Plan’ Praised All Over The World.” *Chicago Tribune*, March 6, 1919.
- Hirsch, Arnold R. *Making the Second Ghetto: Race & Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1983.
- “History.” Metropolitan Planning Council.  
<https://www.metroplanning.org/about/History.html>
- “HOUSING: (310 ILCS 5/) State Housing Act.,” Illinois General Assembly. Accessed July 14, 2017: <http://www.ilga.gov/legislation/ilcs/ilcs3.asp?ActID=1423&ChapterID=29>
- Holleran, Michael. *Boston's "Changeful Times": Origins of Preservation and Planning in America*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998.
- Hunt, D. Bradford and Jon B. DeVries. *Planning Chicago*. Chicago: The American Planning Association, 2013.
- Kelley, Nicholas. “Early Days at Hull House.” *Social Service Review* 28, no. 4 (Dec. 1954).
- Kling, Samuel. “Wide Boulevards, Narrow Visions: Burnham’s Street System and the Chicago Plan Commission, 1909-1930.” *Journal of Planning History* 12, no. 3 (2013).
- Klove, Robert C. “City Planning in Chicago: A Review.” *Geographical Review* 38, no. 1 (Jan. 1948).
- LeGates, Richard and Frederic Stout. “Editor’s Introduction.” In *Early Urban Planning Volume I: Selected Essays*, edited by Richard LeGates and Frederic Stout. London and New York: Routledge/Thoemmes Press, 1998.

- Lepawsky, Albert. "The New Chicago Plan Commission." *The Journal of Land & Public Utility Economics* 16, no. 1 (Feb. 1940).
- Lubove, Roy. *The Urban Community: Housing and Planning in the Progressive Era*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1967.
- Marcuse, Peter. "Housing in Early City Planning." *Journal of Urban History* 6, no. 3 (Feb. 1980).
- Mayer, Harold M. "Applications of Residential Data from the Chicago Land Use Survey." *Journal of Land & Public Utility Economics* 19, no. 1 (Feb. 1943).
- Meyerson, Martin and Edward C. Banfield. *Politics, Planning and the Public Interest: The Case of Public Housing in Chicago*. Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1955.
- Moody, Walter. *Wacker's Manual of the Plan of Chicago: Municipal Economy*. Chicago: Henneberry Co., 1912.
- Moskowitz, Marina. "Zoning the industrial city: Planners, commissioners, and boosters in the 1920s." *Business and Economic History*, Vol 27, Issue 2 (Winter 1998).
- Municipal\_Reference\_Guy. "Welcome to the Municipal Reference Collection" last modified September 7, 2013. <https://www.chipublib.org/blogs/post/welcome-to-the-municipal-reference-collection/>
- Oxley, Michael. *Economics, Planning and Housing*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.
- Peterson, Jon. "Frederick Law Olmsted Sr. and Frederick Law Olmsted Jr.: The Visionary and the Professional." In *Planning the Twentieth-Century American City*, edited by Mary Corbin Sies and Christopher Silver. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.
- Peterson, Jon. "The City Beautiful Movement: Forgotten Origins and Lost Meanings." In *Introduction to Planning History in the United States*, edited by Donald A. Krueckeberg. New Brunswick, New Jersey: The Center for Urban Policy Research at Rutgers University, 1983.
- Peterson, Jon. *The Birth of City Planning in the United States, 1840-1917*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003.
- Philpott, Thomas Lee. *The Slum and the Ghetto: Immigrants, Blacks, and Reformers in Chicago, 1880-1930*. Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1991.
- Radford, Gail. *Modern Housing in America: Policy Struggles in the New Deal Era*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996.

- Reps, John W. *The Making of Urban America: A History of City Planning in the United States*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Roddewig, Richard J. "Law as Hidden Architecture: Law, Politics, and Implementation of the Burnham Plan of Chicago Since 1909." *The John Marshall Law Review* 43, no. 2 (2010).
- Rydell, Robert W. *All the World's a Fair*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.
- Schultz, Stanley K. *Constructing Urban Culture: American Cities and City Planning, 1800-1920*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989.
- Schwieterman, Joseph P. and Dana M. Caspall. *The Politics of Place: A History of Zoning in Chicago*. Chicago: Lake Claremont Press, 2006.
- Scott, Mel. *American City Planning Since 1890: A History Commemorating the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the American Institute of Planners*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969.
- Simpson, Dick. *Rogues, Rebels, and Rubber Stamps: The Politics of the Chicago City Council from 1863 to the Present*. Boulder, Colorado and Oxford: Westview Press, 2001.
- Smith, Blaine S. "Figures Traffic Jams Costing Ten Millions A Day." *Chicago Tribune*, January 30, 1927.
- Smith, Carl *The Plan of Chicago: Daniel Burnham and the Remaking of the American City*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2006.
- Stewart, K. Kay. "Twentieth Century Housing Design from an Ecological Perspective." In *The Story of Housing*, edited by Gertrude Sipperly Fish. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1979.
- "Taylor, Graham." Virginia Commonwealth University Libraries Social Welfare History Project. <http://socialwelfare.library.vcu.edu/people/taylor-graham/>
- "The Men of Hull-House: An Overlooked Aspect of Settlement Life." Urban Experience in Chicago: Hull-House and Its Neighborhoods, 1889-1963, University of Illinois at Chicago. [http://hullhouse.uic.edu/hull/urbanexp/main.cgi?file=new/show\\_doc.ptt&doc=1033&chap=48](http://hullhouse.uic.edu/hull/urbanexp/main.cgi?file=new/show_doc.ptt&doc=1033&chap=48)
- Taylor, W. Russell. "A Summary Analysis of Two Outstanding Studies by the Chicago Plan Commission." *Social Forces* 24, no. 2 (Dec. 1945).

“University of Chicago Settlement.” Virginia Commonwealth University Libraries Social Welfare History Project. <http://socialwelfare.library.vcu.edu/settlement-houses/university-chicago-settlement/>

Walker, Robert Averill. *The Planning Function in Urban Government*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1941.

Weiss, Marc A. and John T. Metzger. “Planning for Chicago: The Changing Politics for Metropolitan Growth and Neighborhood Development.” In *Atop the Urban Hierarchy*, edited by Robert A. Beauregard. Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1989.

Wilson, William H. *The City Beautiful Movement*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989.

## CURRICULUM VITAE

Kari Smith

### Dissertation Title

Sheltering Opportunity: City Planning and Housing in Chicago, 1909-1941

### Education

MSc, 2011

Technische Universität Darmstadt, Darmstadt, Germany and Université Pierre-Mendès-France, Grenoble, France

Major: International Cooperation and Urban Development

Thesis Title: "The wall, the door and the key: resilience, education, and planning in segregated urban communities"

BSBA, 2002

Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff, AZ

Major: Business Administration

### Teaching Experience

Independently taught a 200-level general studies course titled "Exploring the Urban Environment" for six semesters

### Awards

Teaching Assistantship (PhD)

Chancellor's Award (PhD)

Graduate School travel support (PhD)

Awarded Outstanding Conference Paper by the AESOP Young Academics Network (2013)

Graduated cum laude and with honors (BSBA)

Two-thirds tuition waiver based on academic merit (BSBA)

### Leadership and Service

Editorial Committee Member and Book Review Editor for ePolis, the UWM Urban Studies electronic journal

Founder/coordinator of the Urban Studies Dissertation/Thesis Writing Group

Erasmus Mundus scholarship (MSc)

Coordinated an internal, student-funded scholarship pool for a study trip to Cairo, Alexandria, and Siwa, Egypt (MSc)

## Presentations

Understanding the institutionalization of urban planning in Chicago via its changing relationship with housing, 1909-1941

48<sup>th</sup> Urban Affairs Association Conference  
- Toronto, Ontario, Canada (April 2018)

Ideas, discourse, and the institutionalization of urban planning in Chicago

47<sup>th</sup> Urban Affairs Association Conference  
- Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA (April 2017)

Between a rock and a hard place: Citizen plan commissions in local development

45<sup>th</sup> Urban Affairs Association Conference  
- Miami, Florida, USA (April 2015)

The operationalization of resilience in urban planning as a vehicle for government/non-profit collaboration

43<sup>rd</sup> Annual Conference of the Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action (ARNOVA)  
- Denver, Colorado, USA (November 2014)

Urban planning commissions: A nested history

2014 International Planning History Society Conference  
- St. Augustine, Florida, USA (July 2014)

Measuring and understanding perceptions of intra-governmental cooperation in local governments (presented twice)

UWM Helen Bader Institute of Nonprofit Management Spring Colloquium Series  
- Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA (April 2014)

44<sup>th</sup> Urban Affairs Association Conference

- San Antonio, Texas, USA (March 2014)

The information imperative: exploring information's role in urban and community resilience

Association of European Schools of Planning (AESOP) – Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning (ACSP) Joint Congress  
- Dublin, Ireland (July 2013)

Urban planning and zoning commission governance

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Urban Studies Program Student Forum  
- Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA (April 2013)

The wall, the door, and the key? Exploring resilience as a theoretical and practical concept in understanding and managing urban social problems

43<sup>rd</sup> Urban Affairs Association Conference  
- San Francisco, California, USA (April 2013)

The wall, the door, and the key? Exploring the meaning of resilience in urban planning practice  
Association of European Schools of Planning (AESOP) Young Academics Annual Meeting  
- Vienna, Austria (February/March 2013)

The wall, the door and the key? Exploring resilience in problem and solution identification in segregated Roma communities  
Association of European Schools of Planning (AESOP) 2012 Conference  
- Ankara, Turkey (July 2012)

The role of education in the development of community resilience in urban segregated minorities  
UK/Ireland Planning Research Conference  
- Birmingham, England, UK (September 2011)

## Publications

Smith, Kari. "The Who, What, and How of Plan Commissions in Southeast Wisconsin." Milwaukee: Public Policy Forum. 2015. Web. Available at <http://publicpolicyforum.org/research/who-what-and-how-plan-commissions-southeast-wisconsin>

Smith, Kari. "A Closer Look at Local Government: The Who, What, and How of Local Plan Commissions." *Land Use Tracker* Vol. 15, No. 4(Summer 2015): pg. 1-4. Available at <http://www.uwsp.edu/cnr-ap/clue/Pages/publications-resources/LandUseTracker.aspx>

Smith, Kari. "Urban Planning Commissions: A Nested History." Flagler College. 2014 International Planning History Society Conference. St. Augustine, FL. 23 July 2014. Conference presentation (peer reviewed)

Smith, Kari. "The wall, the door, and the key: resilience, education, and planning in segregated urban communities." In Coehlo, Luana Xavier Pinto, et al. (eds.). *Mundus Urbano: (re)thinking urban development*. Berlin: Franke & Timme GmbH. 2013: pg. 95-103

## Research Skills and Training

Historical/archival  
Qualitative interviewing, including transcription and analysis  
Participant observation  
Coding, content analysis, and process tracing

Unobtrusive/desk research, including researching city codes and charters