



TO: The Bismarck City
Planning Commission

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Introduction

The central business district of Bismarck is of vital concern for many reasons. It serves as the principal shopping center for the City; as the location of many private offices and places of entertainment; as a site for important public buildings; and as a center of tourist activities. Maintenance of property values within the central district is very significant in stabilizing the public tax base since much of the total City valuation is located downtown. With the trend toward decentralization in Bismarck, as well as in other American Cities, property owners in the central area and public officials must be very careful to preserve and improve the "business climate" in this area and not to permit a chain reaction of "scatterization".

The usual comprehensive study of a central business district would include the following topics:

- (1) Traffic circulation to and from the central district;
- (2) Appearance of store buildings and streets;
- (3) On-street and off-street parking areas;
- (4) Special methods for attracting customers into the area:
 - a. Provide a complete selection and variable price range of merchandise.
 - b. Attract people to the area by the location of public buildings, offices, clinics, etc., so that shopping trips may be combined with other trips.

In the past it appears that private and public interests in the City of Bismarck have taken actions which affected the entire central business district without always having their individual projects related to the overall needs of the area. Because one of the functions of the Planning Commission is to provide comprehensive plans and general information which will allow desirable coordination of separate actions by many diverse groups, this report is written to suggest the type of studies

and relationships which may be important in considering individual projects for the central business district. This report does not contain specific recommendations for public building programs, but rather should serve as a preliminary study of the overall problem. Later decisions concerning traffic flow, parking, pedestrian safety, and the location of public buildings may thus be oriented with the general objectives of the central area. This type of preliminary study seems especially important at this time due to the interest in relocating the public library, the possibilities of building a field house or arena type of structure, (which might be added to the existing Memorial Building), and the need for modernizing the Memorial Building to provide for increased recreational and convention uses. If these public structures could be located completely independent of other community interest, the selection of their sites could be based only on their particular needs. Public buildings, however, are of prime concern in the development of a central shopping district. On the one hand public buildings can help to draw customers into the area, while in reverse they may block logical expansion of downtown business buildings.

General Objectives

Although there may be certain exceptions, the following general objectives for central business district development seem to apply in Bismarck:

- (1) Improve traffic flow along the edges of the principal shopping district so that vehicles may easily reach the central area without actually impeding shopping traffic in the business core.
- (2) Develop off-street parking areas within the circumferential border of through streets.
- (3) Provide safe convenient access for pedestrians within the principal shopping district.
- (4) Locate public buildings on the fringe of the shopping district, where the traffic may reach them easily, without conflict with business oriented traffic flow.

(5) Group the public buildings as much as possible in order to enhance their individual appearances and as a means of convenience for serving the public.

(6) Encourage the principal merchandising units to locate as closely as possible within the central area, in order that shoppers may find a variety of merchandise without unnecessary travel between shopping units.

(7) Determine logical directions for central business district expansion, so that all the previously listed objectives will be related to future needs as well as to current problems.

Criteria for Locating Public Buildings

Naturally the most important factor in locating public buildings is to determine how much space will be needed for the specific uses which are contemplated and to estimate the number of persons who may visit such buildings. This study would ordinarily be undertaken by persons best acquainted with the particular public uses which are required. In other words, the library board has submitted figures to show that a library building is needed to house approximately three times the present book capacity of the existing library building. Ritterbush Brothers, Architects, have worked with recreational interests to determine the approximate amount of space needed for enlarging the Memorial Building or for locating a new type structure at a separate location. These estimates of space requirements, would be expected to remain relatively constant at any site.

Other questions of a somewhat more general nature which must be considered in choosing a public site are as follows:

(1) Trend of growth: public buildings should generally be located near the center of population to be served. This means that the trend of future growth should be analyzed, so that after a number of years have elapsed the public building will still be strategically located. Since business expansion will generally follow the direction of new residential growth, public buildings should not be located directly in the natural path of business expansion.

(2) Accessibility: present and future through streets must be studied. In this regard, a public building center at the fringe of the shopping district and at the junction of east-west and north-south arterial routes would be desirable.

(3) Adaptability: the amount of space and the topography of the proposed site should be appropriate to the required number of public buildings, their size, character and architectural style. If possible, new public buildings should be located at the edge of a business center where residential properties have depreciated in value and yet where business interests do not seem willing to expand.

(4) Cost: obviously the best theoretical site may not be feasible from a financial point of view. Total cost will include raw land value, the value of improvements on the land, cost of demolition and clearing, site preparation, annual tax loss by virtue of removing land from private ownership, special fees for relocating families, and legal expenses. Cost must also be estimated from a long range standpoint, since initial cost may not always be in relation to total future costs.

(5) Existing Public Buildings: the present condition and future plans for improving existing public buildings must be analyzed. Their location and future alterations may influence decisions concerning new public building locations.

Special Parking Studies

Studies for parking in the central business district should answer the following three questions: (1) What parking spaces are now available? (2) What is the demand for parking? (3) What can be done to improve parking? The first question involves an inventory of existing facilities for parking both on-street and off-street. This includes the total number of parking spaces, angle of parking, location of spaces, time limits, special zones, and the type of parking. The second question involves the usage and desires of the traveling public for parking. This can be analyzed by special

surveys of employees and customers. The third question concerns a selection of the most suitable land for off-street parking and methods for improving the on-street parking which includes engineering, financial, and legal steps for implementing the parking program.

Good reference material is available from several sources to show how a complete parking analysis and action program can be undertaken. The main purpose of outlining the content of these parking studies at this time is to show that many of the facts required for parking are of importance in studying related central business district problems. For example, the location of existing on-street and off-street parking spaces may influence decisions as to where new business buildings or new public buildings will locate. For example, if the parking spaces east of the Memorial Building are removed by the extension of this building, will other supplemental off-street parking be required for both business and public uses? If the demand for parking indicates a sharp deficit in a certain section of the business area at this time, should a public building locate in such an area at the expense of future actions to acquire such lands for necessary off-street parking?

Cost

Ordinarily public building sites can be purchased at the fringe of the business district in areas of blight for a relatively low cost. This does not appear to be true in the City of Bismarck. Very substantial residential properties are located immediately adjoining the business area. Where the individual houses are not too expensive, they are located in most cases, on small lots which have a relatively high total cost for a combination of properties. Although exact determinations of property value can only be obtained by personal contact with the owners of such properties, the following general estimates indicate the cost problem along the fringe area of the central business district:

<u>Location</u>	<u>Estimated Cost</u>
(1) East side of Third Street between Avenue A and Rosser Avenue (across the street from the site of the proposed new post office)	\$215,000.00
(2) East side of Third Street between Avenue A and Avenue B (ommitting lot 12)	\$110,000.00
(3) West side of Sixth Street between Avenue A and Avenue B	\$120,000.00
(4) West side of Seventh Street between Avenue B and Avenue C	\$ 90,000.00
(5) East side of Seventh Street between Thayer Avenue and Rosser Avenue	\$190,000.00
(6) West side of Eighth Street between Thayer Avenue and Rosser Avenue	\$110,000.00
(7) East side of Eighth Street between Rosser Avenue and Thayer Avenue	\$130,000.00
(8) West side of Ninth Street between Rosser Avenue and Thayer Avenue	\$140,000.00

Thus in summary it would appear that purchasing as much as one-half block of property along the north border of the central business district would range from approximately \$100,000 to \$200,000.

Existing Public Buildings

Because of its one block of well landscaped property, the most impressive public structure in the central business area is the County Court House. The City Police and Fire Building and the other city offices are not attractive due to their crowded location. The present public library building, the Memorial Building, and the city auditorium are well located but are on restricted sites. Even though these City and County buildings are relatively close together in location, they do not have desirable civic center unity.

The two large hospitals and the medical centers in the central area of Bismarck are not typical "civic center" uses but they are very important in drawing many people into the central section of the City. Persons visiting these hospital and medical centers may come from long distances from the city, but once within the central area they may be prospective customers for various retail outlets. On the other hand, the hospital sites each occupy a total of one block at the present time and future expansion plans, especially for off-street parking, may require additional hospital owned land. This means that these uses, much like the County Court House, attract people toward the central shopping area but actually serve as a barrier toward the expansion of business buildings.

The proposed new post office building will be located away from other public buildings so that it cannot be considered a part of a typical civic center layout.

General Conclusions

Adapting the general needs of a civic center and central area plan to the present conditions of Bismarck does not lead to positive answers. Several thoughts, however, do appear of particular importance. These suggestions are included in this report for future study purposes. As a supplement to the more specific studies for each of the various public building programs, these general conclusions may be useful in coordinating specialized interests with generally accepted planning principles.

(1) Expansion of the central business district will definitely be to the north, because of the highway and railroad barriers to the south and the principal residential expansion northward. Because of the Court House and hospital locations, the principal central business growth may be expected west of 5th Street.

(2) Rosser Avenue should be widened as soon as possible to allow four lanes of moving traffic (no parking to be permitted on pavements from 40 feet to 48 feet in width) for its entire length, in order to open a circumferential route along the north edge of the central area.

(3) Ninth Street should be widened, where it is now less than 44 feet in width, and no parking permitted so as to allow four lanes for traffic on the eastern edge of the central business district.

(4) Broadway, between 3rd Street and 6th Street, should be considered the main shopping area with pedestrian travel emphasized in this three block area. New merchandising units should be encouraged in locations as close as possible to this shopping focus.

(5) More off-street parking areas will definitely be needed as the City expands but such public lots or buildings should be within two blocks of the Broadway (3rd Street to 6th Street) shopping center.

(6) New public buildings should be located as close as possible to the Thayer Avenue and 6th Street intersection, which now joins principal City and County units. The area east of this intersection seems most feasible.

(7) The public parking area east of the Memorial Building should not be used for building purposes unless a compensating parking area is developed nearby.

(8) The Memorial Building and Auditorium remodeling for convention and meeting room purposes seems imperative. With changing social interests (more TV and fewer public entertainment functions) these two buildings are strategically located for supplemental convention and other meeting purposes.

(9) Specialized recreational functions, requiring an arena type structure and extensive off-street parking, seem to necessitate a site in an outlying area. At a later date when Junior College plans are more definite, such a building or "sports center" could be studied in relation to possible joint use with the College.

(10) Top priority should be given to a combined bond issue for building a new library within two blocks of its present location, remodeling the

present library for certain City offices, and renovating and altering the Memorial Building and City Auditorium. Possibly County "post war" building revenue could also be used in this undertaking, since both City and unincorporated areas could use the library and convention and meeting room facilities.

