

Fighting Blight with Libraries
Milwaukee's Midcentury Mayors and the Development of
Milwaukee Public Library's Neighborhood Libraries as a
Strategy for Urban Renewal

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By the end of the 1950s, Milwaukee's residents and leaders were living in a city that had grown rapidly and was increasingly faced with racial tension, hostile suburbs, blighted housing, and a limited tax base. In the midst of these changes, Milwaukee Public Library (MPL) had failed to expand and adapt its locations and services alongside the city's growth. While Central Library on Wisconsin Avenue downtown had been enlarged in 1957 to provide much-needed additional storage space for the city's book stock, MPL's scattered collection of neighborhood libraries had not been modernized for many years.¹ Neighborhood libraries were an innovation of the early 20th century intended to increase the accessibility of American libraries' collections and services.² They took the form of relatively small buildings with less book stock which operated in collaboration with larger library headquarters in cities' centers. Milwaukee's neighborhood libraries in the first half of the 20th century largely took the form of rented storefronts and repurposed government buildings such as firehouses and had popped up haphazardly across the city every few years. Over the course of the 1960s, however, these neighborhood libraries would be transformed into a strategic system of easily accessible, newly-constructed buildings designed to facilitate residents gathering, reading, and feeling at home in their community.

The catalyst for this update to neighborhood libraries was the change in leadership Milwaukee experienced in 1960 when Mayor Frank Zeidler left office and Mayor Henry Maier took his place. While Zeidler cared deeply about the city and saw libraries as a vital service,

¹ For a history of MPL's start and development in the 19th century, see Banda, Anne E. "A Tale of Two Cities: Public Library Development in Milwaukee and Montreal." PhD diss. University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2006. <https://ezproxy.lib.uwm.edu/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.uwm.edu/dissertations-theses/tale-two-cities-public-library-development/docview/304985233/se-2>.

² A note about terminology: what are referred to as "neighborhood libraries" in the mid-20th century are today more commonly referred to as "branch libraries," in Milwaukee and beyond. This change is partially due to the increased number of residents a library today serves, compared to in the early 20th century. For more, see Emil L. Brandt to R. Paul Bartolini, May 4, 1969, in a folder labelled "Neighborhood Libraries Development Program, (1955-1962)," unprocessed MPL collection, Milwaukee Public Library, Frank P. Zeidler Room.

efforts to coordinate and better fund MPL's libraries did not go far during his 12 years in office. Maier was far less personally invested in libraries, and yet he oversaw the library building boom of the 1960s, even co-opting the new neighborhood libraries as publicity opportunities. While this contrast between the two mayors' beliefs and their financial support for libraries is ironic, Maier's support can be explained by examining the ways MPL and its leaders re-positioned libraries to align with Maier's priorities for the city. By arguing that libraries helped fight blight and presenting a strategic plan to maximize neighborhood libraries' impact and longevity, MPL was able to earn Maier's support for a major library initiative unlike any other Milwaukee had seen in its history. The vehicle for this plan, *Milwaukee's Ten Year Library Report, 1962-1971*, built upon previous efforts to modernize Milwaukee's neighborhood libraries, but married previous ideas to the ideals of efficiency and urban renewal Maier prioritized.³ This essay discusses the most successful (if limited) initiative to expand neighborhood libraries under Zeidler, before exploring the Ten Year Library Report and how Maier became an unlikely library supporter in the 1960s.

Frank P. Zeidler was mayor of Milwaukee from 1948 to 1960 and was the last of Milwaukee's socialist mayors.⁴ During his tenure, Zeidler led a city grappling with the interconnected problems of insufficient housing, urban blight, a limited tax base, increasing white flight to the suburbs, and a rapidly increasing African American population: there were just 980 African Americans in Milwaukee in 1910, while by 1960 there were 62,458 living in the city, 8.4% of the population.⁵ Unlike many Milwaukeeans at the time, Zeidler refused to blame

³ Department of City Development and the Milwaukee Public Library, *Milwaukee's Ten Year Library Report, 1962-1971* (Milwaukee, WI: Department of City Development, 1962).

⁴ James J. Casey Jr., "Frank Zeidler," *The Encyclopedia of Milwaukee*, accessed 13 November 2023 <https://emke.uwm.edu/entry/frank-zeidler/>

⁵ John McCarthy, *Making Milwaukee Mightier: Planning and the Politics of Growth, 1910-1960* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2009), 196.

Milwaukee's growing Black population for these problems, instead attempting to annex land surrounding the city in order to decrease population density, increase Milwaukee's tax base, more equitably share the cost of city benefits which even suburbanites benefitted from.⁶ While the Zeidler years saw increasingly coordinated suburban resistance to annexation, Zeidler and the Common Council convinced various surrounding areas to be annexed by offering them city services such as Lake Michigan water, sewer connections, and—most significantly for this study— increased access to Milwaukee Public Library services.⁷

The fact that Zeidler would include libraries in his plan to entice suburbs to be annexed is no surprise when one considers his lifelong investment in the public library, both as mayor and as a library user.⁸ While in office, Zeidler worked regularly with MPL's stern, longtime City Librarian Richard Krug, who sincerely appreciated Zeidler's "deep interest in the work of the Public Library."⁹ Zeidler would even go so far as to write to Krug periodically with ideas of ways the library could better serve Milwaukee. In 1954, for example, Zeidler wrote to Krug suggesting that MPL partner with the University of Wisconsin to offer free reading courses for Milwaukeeans after learning that UW's correspondence courses tend to "amount pretty largely to reading and reflecting what one has read," actions which the library was well-equipped, he felt, to offer.¹⁰

⁶ Tula A. Connell, *Conservative Counterrevolution: Challenging Liberalism in 1950s Milwaukee*, (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2016), 111-112.

⁷ John Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee*, Third Edition (Milwaukee, WI: Milwaukee County Historical Society, 2006), 338.

⁸ For photo evidence of Zeidler's love of libraries, see the photograph of him modeling their records collection in Box 192, Folder 03, Frank P. Zeidler Papers, 1844-2017, Milwaukee Public Library, Frank P. Zeidler Room.

⁹ Richard Krug to Frank Zeidler, April 30, 1956, Box 64, Folder 6, Frank P. Zeidler Mayoral Records, 1944-1962, Milwaukee Public Library, Frank P. Zeidler Room.

¹⁰ Frank Zeidler to Richard E. Krug, August 23, 1954, Box 64, Folder 6, Frank P. Zeidler Mayoral Records, 1944-1962, Milwaukee Public Library, Frank P. Zeidler Room.

Zeidler was also a willing participant in library events. He was awarded membership in the Ancient Order of the Bookworm (MPL's Summer Reading initiative for children), and even made appearances on MPL's TV programming, demonstrating to the children of Milwaukee that "the Mayor of Milwaukee was a person who knew books and who was a bookworm like themselves," according to Norma Rathbun, MPL's Coordinator of Work with Youth.¹¹

Zeidler continued to be an active library user until the end of his life. He became a member of the Martin Luther King Branch's Advisory Committee in 1974 and was an ongoing correspondent with and willing interview subject of various MPL librarians into the 2000s.¹²

Zeidler's affinity for the library was permanently commemorated in 1996 when MPL's Board of Trustees voted unanimously to name the newly renovated humanities reading room in Central Library after him in honor of his life-long library patronage, service to the city, and dedication to housing his mayoral and personal papers at MPL.¹³ Even today, some of the librarians working in the Frank P. Zeidler room fondly remember chatting with Zeidler at the Martin Luther King branch during his regular visits.¹⁴

In short, Zeidler was a mayor who was personally invested in his city's libraries. As such, he was a natural ally for library leaders like Krug who had a vision for modernizing and expanding MPL's locations and services. While Krug was gruff interpersonally, he was incredibly dedicated to MPL, serving as City Librarian (equivalent to library director) from 1941 to 1974. Krug began to draft plans for how Milwaukee's libraries could become more accessible

¹¹ Norma Rathbun, Coordinator of Work with Youth at MPL, to Zeidler, July 24, 1959, Box 64, Folder 6, Frank P. Zeidler Mayoral Records, 1944-1962, Milwaukee Public Library, Frank P. Zeidler Room.

¹² Hazel B. Maxwell, President of Library Board of Trustees to Frank P. Zeidler, March 14, 1974, Box 34, Folder 1, Frank P. Zeidler Papers, 1844-2017, Milwaukee Public Library, Frank P. Zeidler Room.

¹³ Jocklyn N. Smith, President of MPL Board of Trustees and Kathleen M. Huston, Head Librarian, to Frank P. Zeidler, December 18, 1996, Box 34, Folder 2, Frank P. Zeidler Papers, 1844-2017, Milwaukee Public Library, Frank P. Zeidler Room.

¹⁴ Dan Lee (local history librarian), in discussion with the author, October 28, 2023.

and useful for residents almost immediately after becoming City Librarian: as early as 1942, he published a report called the “Tentative Long-term Improvement Program for the Milwaukee Public Library” which called for additional branches and new standards for library spaces and staff.¹⁵ The US’s entry into WWII halted any immediate chance of implementing this plan, but Krug tried again to move the Common Council to support a “new deal” for updating MPL’s 17 small and ragged neighborhood libraries in 1951 when he contracted a Marquette professor to conduct an audit of MPL’s neighborhood libraries. This study confirmed that the space, collections, and staffing in these libraries had not adjusted to accommodate Milwaukee’s ongoing growth in area and population.¹⁶

Krug’s desire to update MPL’s neighborhood libraries was rooted in national trends. After the war, Americans’ expectations for and usage of libraries shifted in several important ways. First, Americans increasingly came to expect the convenience of the new shopping centers popping up around them. They were also not limited to their very immediate neighborhood thanks to the increasingly common automobile. As a result, library users no longer needed libraries to be within walking distance of where they lived, but they did expect their libraries to offer them a sizeable collection to browse and convenient parking.¹⁷ Another change at the time was that more and more Americans were attending and graduating high school. This meant both that adult populations were better educated and wanted diverse, stimulating reading materials and that high school students were placing a greater and greater demand on public libraries’ collections, as few public high schools had the resources to support research projects assigned.¹⁸

¹⁵ Daniel F. Ring, “Richard Krug: The Bookman as a Librarian,” in *Libraries & Culture* 29, no. 3 (1994), 260-261. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25542661>

¹⁶ “Neighborhood Libraries Survey, 1951,” Unprocessed MPL Collection, Box 58, Folder 3.

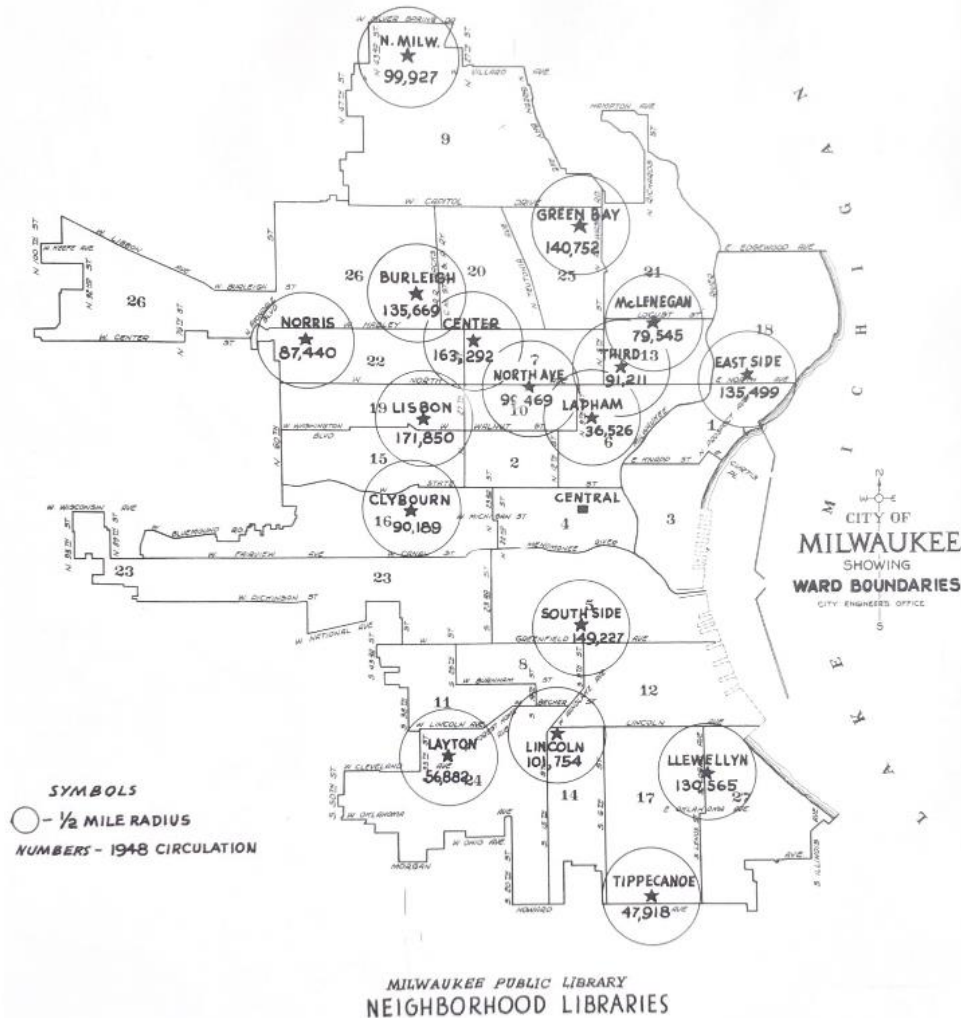
¹⁷ Ring, “Richard Krug,” 266.

¹⁸ Wayne A. Wiegand, *Part of Our Lives: A People’s History of the American Public Library* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 181.

Finally, American adults—including senior citizens—increasingly wanted spaces their social, business, and service groups could cheaply gather in. For example, the public library in Racine, Wisconsin hosted 2,000 meetings of local organizations between 1959 and 1967, with a total of 50,000 attendees.¹⁹

Milwaukee's neighborhood libraries were far from being able to meet these standards in the 1950s. Besides the newly enlarged Central Library, which served as an administrative center and storage space for the majority of MPL's collections, the majority of its neighborhood libraries were miniscule rented storefronts too cramped to hold browsing collections or meeting spaces. Library locations had been selected haphazardly as properties became available to lease, and were certainly not built to serve as libraries. Some neighborhood libraries were located within walking distance of each other, while other sections of the city were essentially library deserts which MPL's small fleet of bookmobiles could not completely satisfy. The neighborhood libraries had not kept pace with the massive increase in both population and area that Milwaukee experienced over the first half of the 20th century, leaving significant parts of the population without library access.

¹⁹ Wiegand, *Part of Our Lives*, 185.



A map of the 17 neighborhood libraries operating in 1948, with the population within a 1/2 mile radius (easy walking distance) of each marked. Note that this map was made prior to many of Milwaukee's largest annexations. Courtesy of Milwaukee Public Library Archives Collection.²⁰

After more than a decade of attempting to coordinate a plan for bringing Milwaukee's neighborhood libraries up to snuff, Krug managed to get the Library Board to draft an updated plan to be sent to the Common Council in 1957. The result was a compact document in three parts titled "Proposed Development of Neighborhood Libraries" (PDNL). PDNL laid out a numerical argument for why Milwaukee's libraries needed updating: in 1930, 18 neighborhood

²⁰ "Milwaukee Public Neighborhood Libraries," undated, in folder labeled "Surveys: neighborhood Libraries, 1951," unprocessed MPL collection about its history, Milwaukee Public Library, Frank P. Zeidler Room.

libraries (not counting Central library) served 578,249 people over 43,109 square miles. In 1957, just 17 neighborhood libraries were serving 714,000 Milwaukeean over 74,147 square miles. MPL was trying to serve a significantly larger number of residents spread over close to double the territory with one less library location than they had been 25 years before! What Milwaukee needed, then, was “an almost complete rebuilding of its neighborhood library system.”²¹

The plan proposed that MPL’s neighborhood libraries become a system of “at least” 10 locations distributed so that each would serve 100,000 residents. These buildings should be built to last for 50 years, requiring buildings that were “structurally sound with a distinctive exterior and a functional and flexible interior,” with windows that allowed library activities to be visible from the outside.²² Library sites should be in the “best commercial locations” so that it was convenient for citizens to stop by the library as they carried on their regular weekly activities like “work, shopping, church and school.”²³ In order to meet the various needs of post-war Americans, these libraries should offer room for reading and studying, meeting rooms for public use, staff offices, public restrooms (“a necessity”), and cloakrooms. The libraries should offer collections of 100,000 books designed to cater to the “forever widening” interests of Milwaukee’s adults and a “heavily duplicated, but well-selected” children’s collection.²⁴ Each location should have librarians on staff specializing in working with teenagers, children, and adults, respectively.²⁵

²¹ “Milwaukee Public Library System: Proposed Development of Neighborhood Libraries,” 1957, Box 64, Folder 4, Frank P. Zeidler Mayoral Records, 1944-1962, Milwaukee Public Library, Frank P. Zeidler Room, 2.

²² “Milwaukee Public Library System: Proposed Development of Neighborhood Libraries,” 1957, Box 64, Folder 4, Frank P. Zeidler Mayoral Records, 1944-1962, Milwaukee Public Library, Frank P. Zeidler Room, 2.

²³ Milwaukee Public Library System: Proposed Development of Neighborhood Libraries,” 1957, Box 64, Folder 4, Frank P. Zeidler Mayoral Records, 1944-1962, Milwaukee Public Library, Frank P. Zeidler Room, 4.

²⁴ “Milwaukee Public Library System: Proposed Development of Neighborhood Libraries,” 1957, Box 64, Folder 4, Frank P. Zeidler Mayoral Records, 1944-1962, Milwaukee Public Library, Frank P. Zeidler Room, 3.

²⁵ “Milwaukee Public Library System: Proposed Development of Neighborhood Libraries,” 1957, Box 64, Folder 4, Frank P. Zeidler Mayoral Records, 1944-1962, Milwaukee Public Library, Frank P. Zeidler Room, 4.

These were the traits that Krug and the Library Board of Trustees felt would give neighborhood libraries the capacity to become a cornerstone of Milwaukeeans' lives for the rest of the 20th Century. PDNL did not ignore the cost of building and maintaining libraries like the ones proposed, acknowledging that libraries aligned with this plan would require "more books..., longer hours, and more building." However, it argues that the cost of operating 10 larger, more strategic libraries would ultimately be more cost-effective than continuing to rent and operate small, scattered, inefficient storefront libraries.²⁶ PDNL notes that "our better educated citizenry of today and tomorrow is going to mean more use of strong neighborhood libraries."²⁷ In other words, implementing this plan for neighborhood libraries would be an investment in Milwaukee's citizens that would continue to pay dividends well into the future.

The plan assessed each of MPL's current library sites against the requirements listed above and found that just two library locations could be kept as-is and two could be "improved" in order to fit them. Ten new sites distributed around the city were recommended to purchase and build new libraries on, which should be "acquired as rapidly as the city's resources allow."²⁸ The final page of the report includes a proposed timeline and budget for library construction, renovations, land purchases, and equipment and furniture during the next six years, asking the council for a total of \$1,690,000 allocated to the cause through 1963.²⁹

²⁶ "Milwaukee Public Library System: Proposed Development of Neighborhood Libraries," 1957, Box 64, Folder 4, Frank P. Zeidler Mayoral Records, 1944-1962, Milwaukee Public Library, Frank P. Zeidler Room, 4.

To learn more about why they could be confident costs would be less, look into the history of Finney Library, the only neighborhood library constructed in the 1950s. Finney opened in 1953 at 4243 W. North Ave. See: Richard Krug to Clarence Beernink, September 11, 1959, in folder labeled "Building Site Acquisition," Atkinson Box 1, unprocessed MPL collection, Milwaukee Public Library, Frank P. Zeidler Room.

²⁷ "Milwaukee Public Library System: Proposed Development of Neighborhood Libraries," 1957, Box 64, Folder 4, Frank P. Zeidler Mayoral Records, 1944-1962, Milwaukee Public Library, Frank P. Zeidler Room, 3.

²⁸ "Milwaukee Public Library System: Proposed Development of Neighborhood Libraries," 1957, Box 64, Folder 4, Frank P. Zeidler Mayoral Records, 1944-1962, Milwaukee Public Library, Frank P. Zeidler Room, 5-6.

²⁹ "Milwaukee Public Library System: Proposed Development of Neighborhood Libraries," 1957, Box 64, Folder 4, Frank P. Zeidler Mayoral Records, 1944-1962, Milwaukee Public Library, Frank P. Zeidler Room, 7.

1958	Llewellyn	\$100,000
1959	Green Bay [new location]	500,000
1960	Land	60,000
1961	Tippecanoe	500,000
1962	Land	30,000
1963	Burleigh and Third	500,000
		\$1,690,000

The “1958-1963 Program”—PDNL’s list of sites to be prioritized and approximate purchasing/construction/furnishing budget for each location.³⁰

PDNL was received by the Common Council without any initial pushback, but was never formally approved, almost certainly because aldermen whose districts did not include one of the 10 proposed sites refused to approve a plan where their constituents would not receive a library.³¹ It did, however, inspire the Council to begin looking for a site to purchase in the area of W. Capitol Drive and N. Teutonia Avenue and to allot \$200,000 for the construction of the new building, which would eventually be christened Atkinson Neighborhood Library.³² This region was the first to receive a new library because the Green Bay Library which had served the area was slated to be razed. In 1958, MPL’s Green Bay Branch was shuttered (along with the rest of its community) in order to make way for Interstate 43, ending its 30 years of service at the intersection of the Garden Homes, Rufus King, Arlington Heights, and Franklin Heights

³⁰ “Milwaukee Public Library System: Proposed Development of Neighborhood Libraries,” 1957, Box 64, Folder 4, Frank P. Zeidler Mayoral Records, 1944-1962, Milwaukee Public Library, Frank P. Zeidler Room, 7.

³¹ Ring, “Richard Krug,” 266.

³² “Atkinson—1st New Library in 8 Years,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, January 31, 1961, in folder labeled “Clippings,” Atkinson Box 1, unprocessed MPL collection, Milwaukee Public Library, Frank P. Zeidler Room.

neighborhoods.³³ This left the area without a library, and Krug and local aldermen were determined to restore library service.

This was no easy process, however. A collection of lots on the North East side of Atkinson Avenue where it forms a triangle with Capital Drive and N. 20th Street were identified as a promising site. Krug described the location as one of a very few locations which fit into the PDNL's guidelines, insisting that this was the best spot in the area to build a new library that matched the plan's specifications and would conveniently serve Green Bay library's former patrons.³⁴ However, one of the lots had previously been eyed by a Dr. Verdone as a site for a medical clinic, and his refusal to give up his right to the site led to a drawn-out legal battle that extended into 1959.

Even once construction began, it appeared that the Common Council might not allot enough funds to satisfactorily complete the bright, modern library envisioned. In September of 1959, Krug wrote to beg for more money, explaining that the budget had originally been \$400,000 (\$100,000 less than asked for in PDNL), but then was cut twice to a mere \$200,000. Moreover, that estimate did not account for the important finishing touches of purchasing furniture, paving the parking lot, or buying additional book stock to fill the new shelves.³⁵ Even

³³ "Annual Report of the Green Bay Avenue Neighborhood Library for the Year 1958," 1959, in folder labeled "Green Bay, Annual Reports, 1947-1958," Atkinson Box 3, unprocessed MPL collection, Milwaukee Public Library, Frank P. Zeidler Room.

For a map of Milwaukee's neighborhoods, see: Department of City Development, "City of Milwaukee Neighborhoods," 12 June 2013.

<https://city.milwaukee.gov/ImageLibrary/Groups/dnsAuthors/Maps/MilwaukeeNeighborhoodsMap.pdf>

³⁴ "N. 19th Pl. and Atkinson Dr. Proposed Neighborhood Library Site Hearing," January 14, 1959, in folder labeled "Building Construction, Correspondence," in Atkinson Box 3, unprocessed MPL collection, Milwaukee Public Library, Frank P. Zeidler Room.

³⁵ Richard Krug to Clarence Beernink, September 11, 1959, in folder labeled "Building Site Acquisition," Atkinson Box 1, unprocessed MPL collection, Milwaukee Public Library, Frank P. Zeidler Room, 2-3.

taking cost-effective measures like constructing with cement blocks could not stretch \$200,000 enough to properly establish the new library.³⁶

In the end, purchasing land, constructing the building, and getting Atkinson Library ready for patrons cost a total of \$245,000.³⁷ The library unofficially opened to the public in January of 1961 and had a formal open house to welcome residents on April 23. Initially, Atkinson was a busy place. Its 1961 annual report shares that 1,383 items circulated on its first day open, and 1,200 people attended the dedication ceremony in April.³⁸ One regular patron even went so far as to declare that “the building represented one of the few times the city has received a bargain for its money.”³⁹ However, the library struggled to offer its patrons enough books to browse. At the end of the year, they had just 40,000 books, a far cry from the 100,000 suggested in PDNL.⁴⁰ The library was also open for just 43 hours a week, limiting patrons’ ability to visit. These problems of under-funding were in conflict with the “new idea in library service” Atkinson was intended to exemplify: that “the collection should serve its public in greater depth and breadth than has previously been possible in other neighborhood libraries.”⁴¹

After Atkinson’s dedication ceremony, the *Sunday Picture Journal* ran a photo-heavy feature about the library, describing it as “ideal” and highlighting the large windows facing the

³⁶ “Okay Plans for Branch: Library Trustees Act,” clipping from unknown paper, July 24, 1959, “Atkinson [originals], 1958-1989,” Atkinson 4, unprocessed MPL collection, Milwaukee Public Library, Frank P. Zeidler Room.

³⁷ “Library All Booked Up, Welcomed by Neighbors,” clipping from unknown newspaper, January 31, 1961, in folder labelled “Atkinson [originals], 1958-1989,” Atkinson 4, unprocessed MPL collection, Milwaukee Public Library, Frank P. Zeidler Room, 2-3.

³⁸ “Annual Report of the Atkinson Neighborhood Library for the Year 1961,” Undated, in folder labelled “General Correspondence”, Atkinson Box 1, unprocessed MPL collection, Milwaukee Public Library, Frank P. Zeidler Room, 1, 2.

³⁹ “Annual Report of the Atkinson Neighborhood Library for the Year 1961,” Undated, in folder labelled “General Correspondence”, Atkinson Box 1, unprocessed MPL collection, Milwaukee Public Library, Frank P. Zeidler Room, 3.

⁴⁰ “Annual Report of the Atkinson Neighborhood Library for the Year 1961,” Undated, in folder labelled “General Correspondence”, Atkinson Box 1, unprocessed MPL collection, Milwaukee Public Library, Frank P. Zeidler Room, 1, 6.

⁴¹ “Annual Report of the Atkinson Neighborhood Library for the Year 1961,” Undated, in folder labelled “General Correspondence”, Atkinson Box 1, unprocessed MPL collection, Milwaukee Public Library, Frank P. Zeidler Room, 6.

three busy streets outside.⁴² The article notes one other way Atkinson fell short of PDNL's guidelines: the location is conveniently accessible for a population of 60,000, rather than 100,000. Overall, however, the feature is a glowing review, highlighting that residents were largely impressed with the building. The paper suggests that Atkinson could be a beacon for continuing renovation of Milwaukee's neighborhood libraries, concluding by stating that "the acceptance of this library will go a long way toward determining the number and types of other branch libraries to be provided."⁴³

While the neighborhood did generally accept Atkinson, the years of delay and lack of funds to stock and staff it no doubt made it seem dubious that more libraries really would be built, or that they would be funded well enough to actually meet the information needs of Milwaukeeans. This doubt and disappointment were ongoing for Krug and Zeidler. In March 1959, Richard Krug shared MPL's annual review for 1958 with Zeidler. In his letter accompanying the report, Krug made his frustration with the lack of funding for library expansion clear, writing that "one of the most disturbing features of 1958 was the continued failure on the part of the city to acquire the kind of library sites needed for more effective community service," with land prices only rising as the city hemmed and hawed.⁴⁴ In his response, Zeidler was sympathetic with Krug's complaints but seemingly had his hands tied. He bemoaned the lack of funding to better serve the library, echoing complaints he would often make about how the city was strapped for cash due to its limited tax base and hostile suburbs.

⁴² "A New Library for All," *Sunday Picture Journal*, April 30, 1961, in a folder labelled "Dedication, 1959-1961," Atkinson Box 1, unprocessed MPL collection, Milwaukee Public Library, Frank P. Zeidler Room, 12.

⁴³ "A New Library for All," *Sunday Picture Journal*, April 30, 1961, in a folder labelled "Dedication, 1959-1961," Atkinson Box 1, unprocessed MPL collection, Milwaukee Public Library, Frank P. Zeidler Room, 13.

⁴⁴ Richard Krug to Frank Zeidler, March 4, 1959, Box 64, Folder 6, Frank P. Zeidler Mayoral Records, 1944-1962, Milwaukee Public Library, Frank P. Zeidler Room.

Zeidler sadly concludes that he does “not see the finds in sight for an expanding program of this type.”⁴⁵

Zeidler’s love for MPL and dedication to its cause cannot be doubted, but his fondness for libraries was not enough to bring the Common Council to prioritize the suggestions of the PDNL. In spite of attempts made to strategize MPL’s locations and growth during his tenure, Milwaukee’s libraries remained scattered, understaffed, and insufficient at the end of Zeidler’s mayoralty. Zeidler, who so often felt trapped and cheated of tax revenue by the suburbs surrounding Milwaukee, had many pressing issues to address during his time as mayor, including major housing shortages and deepening racial inequity and tension. While he certainly valued libraries’ ability to educate, entertain, and even democratize Milwaukee’s society, Zeidler did not present libraries as a part of the solution to Milwaukee’s midcentury woes to the Common Council and other decisionmakers. As a result, MPL’s neighborhood libraries failed to be pulled into a unified, strategic plan that the city could prioritize during his tenure. However, Zeidler’s successor would bring new strategies for solving urban problems to the mayor’s office, and libraries would almost coincidentally play a role in those plans.

Henry W. Maier was Milwaukee’s longest-serving mayor, holding office from 1960 to 1988. His legacy, however, is a complicated one. He did oversee what John Gurda calls a “civic renaissance” in Milwaukee, with the opening of city treasures like the Domes, the Public Museum’s downtown building, new skyscrapers on the city skyline, the Summerfest grounds on the lakefront, and more.⁴⁶ On the other hand, his attempts to achieve the twin goals of urban renewal and fighting blight led to clearance of overcrowded housing in the city’s ‘inner core’—

⁴⁵ Frank Zeidler to Richard Krug, March 10, 1959, Box 64, Folder 6, Frank P. Zeidler Mayoral Records, 1944-1962, Milwaukee Public Library, Frank P. Zeidler Room.

⁴⁶ Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee*, 354.

the region bounded by 3rd and 12th streets, Juneau and North Avenues— amounted to destroying many of Milwaukee’s African American communities.⁴⁷ Because Maier simultaneously paused the city’s construction of public housing, his urban renewal policies meant that the residents of the 14,219 inner core housing units destroyed during his tenure had nowhere to go, ultimately creating even greater housing inequity.⁴⁸ This displacement would only exacerbate the racial tensions between Milwaukee’s white ethnics and its steadily growing African American population, and Maier’s dismissive handling of Civil Rights in Milwaukee is the greatest blot on his legacy as mayor.⁴⁹

Clearly, Maier had very different goals and strategies than Zeidler had. One other difference between the two was that Maier was far less personally invested in Milwaukee’s libraries. Maier’s papers include significantly less materials about MPL than Zeidler’s do.⁵⁰ The materials included are mostly correspondence about appointments to the Library Board and general news coverage about MPL. It seems that Maier did not work nearly as closely with Krug and the Board of Trustees as Zeidler did, and certainly did not write to librarians with ideas for services like Zeidler did throughout his life.

Maier’s ideas about library service in Milwaukee largely revolved around how to more efficiently fund them. For example, Maier advocated for library services to become the purview of Milwaukee County. In position papers about a referendum to be held in November 1966,

⁴⁷ Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee*, 366-367.

⁴⁸ Connell, *Conservative Counter Revolution*, 124.

⁴⁹ McCarthy, *Making Milwaukee Mightier*, 218.

⁵⁰ Another clue to Maier’s more distant relationship with MPL is the location of his papers: Maier controversially insisted that his Mayoral papers be housed at the UWM Archives rather than MPL, the official repository of city records. This unprecedented choice was initially strongly opposed by Wisconsin Archivist Society and others, including Zeidler himself, who advocated for Maier’s papers to be housed—like his own—at MPL. See: Zeidler to Mark G. Theil, Assistant Archivist at Marquette University, Dec. 1. 1987, Box 34, Folder 1, Frank P. Zeidler Papers, 1844-2017, Milwaukee Public Library, Frank P. Zeidler Room.

Maier argued that “financial and representational consolidation with sufficient representation of suburbs on the controlling boards” would be a fair way to providing high quality library service to all of Milwaukee County.⁵¹ After all, he argued, the suburbs got more state tax funding than the City of Milwaukee, and MPL’s library services benefited members of the entire county, not just the city residents whose high taxes funded the library at present!⁵² As this scheme to help get the suburbs to pay for city services—like many others proposed by both Maier and Zeidler—never came to fruition, Maier sought to keep Milwaukee’s libraries running and efficient with the resources that *were* available to him, including federal and state dollars which were increasingly available to fund services like public libraries. In 1965, Maier wrote to Krug about the possibility of getting \$62,000 in federal funds for the Forest Home library then being constructed, since the “new Housing Act” meant areas predominated by low to moderate income citizens could secure “up to a 50% contribution from the federal government” on projects serving those citizens.⁵³

Maier’s desire for greater efficiency and to shared costs were consistent themes of his mayoralty, including his approach to blight and renewal. One of Maier’s priorities was reorganizing and combining city government’s departments for greater efficiency. Most influentially, he combined the previously separate offices of planning, housing and redevelopment into the unified Department of City Development. This department was intimately involved with Maier’s plans to tackle the pressing issues of urban renewal and blight.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Henry W. Maier, Position Paper No. 1, City Referenda, Nov. 8, 1966, Box 114, Folder 20, Records of Mayor Henry W. Maier Administration, Milwaukee, Wisconsin 1957-1989, UW-Milwaukee Archives, 4.

⁵² Henry W. Maier, Position Paper No. 4, City Referenda, Nov. 8, 1966, Records of Mayor Henry W. Maier Administration, Milwaukee, Wisconsin 1957-1989, UW-Milwaukee Archives, 4.

⁵³ Henry W. Meir to Richard Krug, October 4, 1965, Records of Mayor Henry W. Maier Administration, Milwaukee, Wisconsin 1957-1989, UW-Milwaukee Archives.

⁵⁴ Bethany Harding, “Henry W. Maier,” *The Encyclopedia of Milwaukee*, accessed 28 November 2023, <https://emke.uwm.edu/entry/henry-w-maier/>

In 1964, the still-new Department of City Development published *Milwaukee's Community Renewal Program Projects and Objectives*. This 40+ page report submitted to the Common Council lays out a two-pronged plan for addressing blight in Milwaukee: stopping the spread of blight *and* revitalizing already blighted blocks, with an emphasis on “clearance and redevelopment” of blighted structures.⁵⁵ The report covers residential, commercial, and industrial parts of the city, dividing a map of the city into four “classes” of treatment area: class I regions were “stable and sound”; class II areas were sound, but needed additional building codes to quell the “signs of obsolescence and decline” beginning to show; class III areas had some dilapidated buildings, but were overall stable could be revitalized primarily with rehabilitation and minimal clearance; and class IV areas needed “substantial clearance and redevelopment,” as soon as was possible.⁵⁶ The map illustrating this part of the plan (a confusingly clean map for a report that purported to examine every single structure in the city) presents the city’s core as consistently blighted, with the outer reaches of the city and suburbs seemingly free from all blight.⁵⁷ The plan laid out an intense urban renewal schedule to take place from 1962-1969 to be funded with a \$220,000 federal grant and \$110,000 from the city.⁵⁸ This expense was justifiable because blight places a high taxation rate on “sound areas,” and so a coordinated, strategic attack on blight was needed to save the city and its residents money.⁵⁹

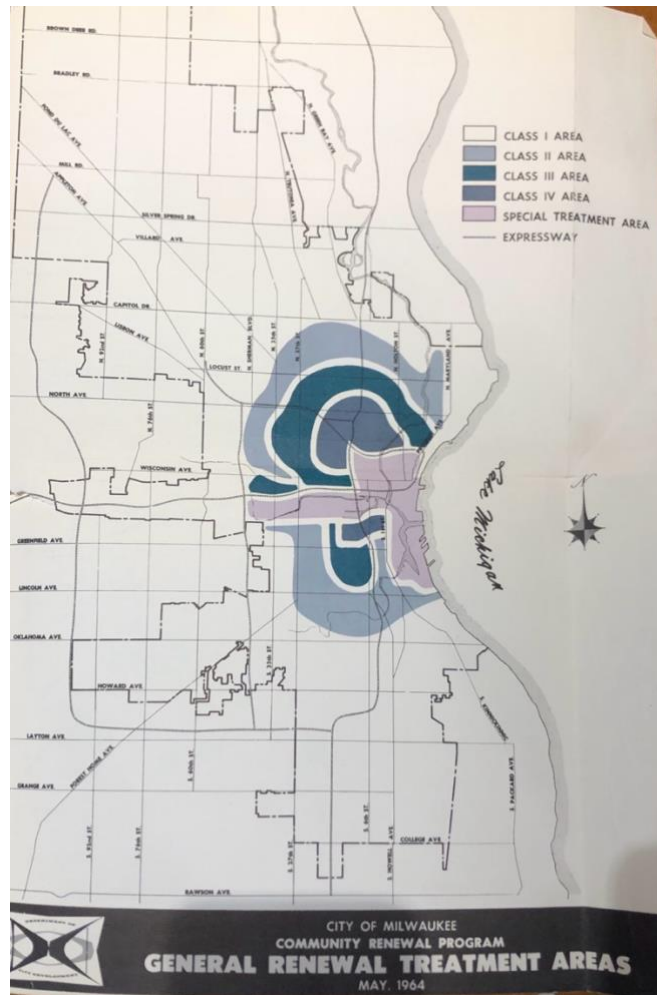
⁵⁵ Department of City Development, *Milwaukee's Community Renewal Program Projects and Objectives* (Milwaukee, WI: Department of City Development, 1964), 9.

⁵⁶ Department of City Development, *Milwaukee's Community Renewal Program Projects and Objectives*, 14-15.

⁵⁷ Department of City Development, *Milwaukee's Community Renewal Program Projects and Objectives*, fold-out map between pages 16 and 17.

⁵⁸ Department of City Development, *Milwaukee's Community Renewal Program Projects and Objectives*, 1.

⁵⁹ Department of City Development, *Milwaukee's Community Renewal Program Projects and Objectives*, 7.



“General Renewal Treatment Areas” map from Milwaukee’s Community Renewal Program Projects and Objectives. Courtesy of the Department of City Development.⁶⁰

While libraries are not mentioned in the plan’s community renewal strategies, the language and priorities of the plan align with another major document placed before the Common Council in the early 1960s: *Milwaukee’s Ten Year Library Report, 1962-1971*. This document was a joint effort between MPL’s Board of Trustees and the Department of City Development and was officially adopted by the Common Council in 1962. The very first page of the Ten Year Library Report (TYLR) describes its initiative to systematize Milwaukee’s

⁶⁰ Department of City Development, *Milwaukee’s Community Renewal Program Projects and Objectives*, fold-out map between pages 16 and 17.

neighborhood libraires as part of a “the establishment of a Community Renewal Program.”⁶¹ The document argued that Milwaukee has “a vital need” for a “rational approach” to maintaining and adding libraries in order to make sure the still-growing city could offer sufficient library service to its residents in the present and into the future.⁶² To help justify the “substantial capital expenditures” called for in the plan, it argues that libraries have a “beneficial impact” on the neighborhoods they are located in, enhancing property values and “assisting in halting further decline in blighted areas.”⁶³ A reader aware of Maier’s priorities as mayor (efficiency, renewal, strategic spending) might notice that the framing of TYLR aligns remarkably well with these goals, and that alignment is no coincidence. While Maier himself may not have been a passionate library-lover, his actions as mayor directly spurred the creation of this document.

In January 1961, the Common Council had attempted to approve the purchase of a plot of land on 72nd St. and Oklahoma Ave. to offer better library service to the steadily growing population of southwest Milwaukee. The purchase seemed to be moving forward, until Maier vetoed the initiative on January 24. While aldermen and residents in the region had been clamoring for a library for some time and furiously opposed Maier’s choice, the mayor stood firm. In a letter explaining his veto to the Common Council, Maier explained the site did not meet the specifications called for in PDNL. If this still-not-formally-adopted plan was to be the blueprint for library expansion, the site was an unsuitable investment. If, on the other hand, the Common Council did not want to follow PDNL’s guidelines, then Maier insisted that they needed to establish a new set of standards and priorities before the city invested in any more

⁶¹ Department of City Development and the Milwaukee Public Library, *Milwaukee’s Ten Year Library Report, 1962-1971*, 1.

⁶² Department of City Development and the Milwaukee Public Library, *Milwaukee’s Ten Year Library Report, 1962-1971*, 2.

⁶³ Department of City Development and the Milwaukee Public Library, *Milwaukee’s Ten Year Library Report, 1962-1971*, 2.

library sites. Maier understood he was disappointing many Milwaukeeans, but remained firm, insisting that “the city cannot afford to complete both a program of large, superbly equipped branch libraries and another program of smaller, less-adequate but more numerous facilities whose primary benefit is to localized groups.”⁶⁴ Strategy and consistency was needed, and no amount of uproar from Milwaukeeans who wanted a library in their neighborhood would move him.⁶⁵

TYLR reiterates many of the same changes in Milwaukee’s population as PDNL had. The 1962 plan, however, not only mentions Milwaukee’s significant population growth, increasing levels of education, and the square miles added to the city, but also MPL’s relationship with the suburbs, noting that 18% of registered borrowers (80,604 out of a total of 439,738) were not residents of the city of Milwaukee.⁶⁶ While many suburban municipalities had established contracts with MPL by 1965 which essentially allowed them to rent MPL’s books to stock their libraries’ shelves by paying a complicated fee based on population and circulations, a significant number of suburban residents still chose to drive into Milwaukee to browse MPL neighborhood library collections or use the services at Central.⁶⁷ As such, MPL users were even higher than the PDNL had indicated, and it can be presumed that offering better library service to suburbanites might eventually lay the ground work for a cost-sharing plan with the County like the one Maier would propose in 1966.

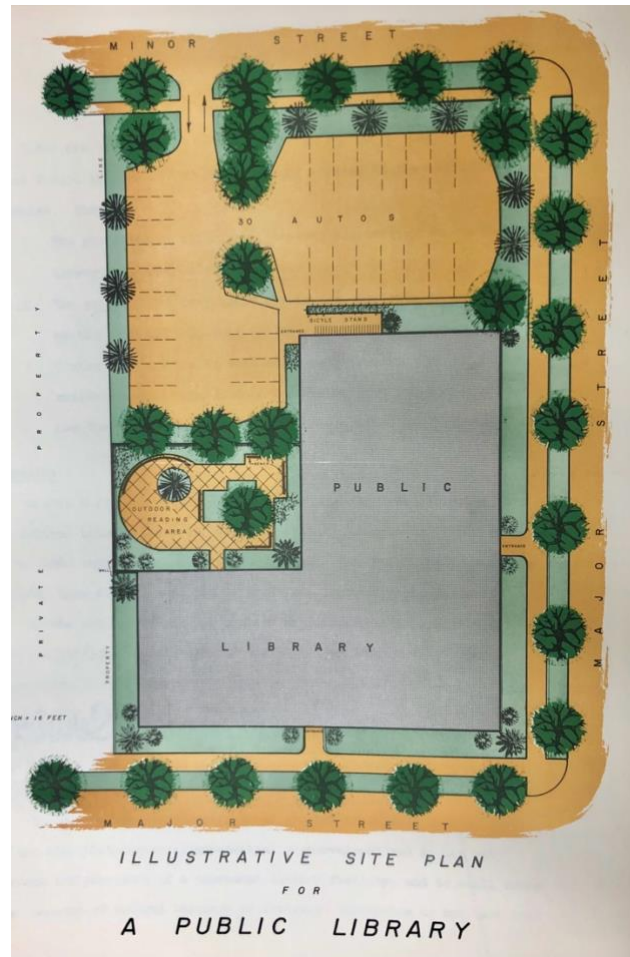
⁶⁴ Henry W. Maier to Common Council, January 24, 1961, 3.

⁶⁵ To see newspaper coverage of the veto controversy, see the folder called “Oklahoma [Clippings] (originals),” in “Zablocki Sort” box, unprocessed MPL collection, Milwaukee Public Library, Frank P. Zeidler Room.

⁶⁶ Department of City Development and the Milwaukee Public Library, *Milwaukee’s Ten Year Library Report, 1962-1971*, 5-6.

⁶⁷ Barbara Landram Wilson, “Metropolitan Library Service: The Milwaukee System,” MA thesis (University of Chicago, 1965), 27, 32, 69.

TYLR also differs from the PDNL in its depth. While PDNL was a mere 7 pages, TYLR is 42 pages long with a 23-page appendix and includes maps, photos, and even a full-page “Illustrative Site Plan” of what a library built according to its specifications would look like.⁶⁸ This site plan makes clear that TYLR includes both more specifications for what makes a sustainable Neighborhood Library but also shrunk some of the specifications listed in the PDNL.



*“Illustrative Site Plan for a Public Library,” from Milwaukee’s Ten Year Library Report, 1962-1971. Courtesy of the Department of City Development.*⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Department of City Development and the Milwaukee Public Library, *Milwaukee’s Ten Year Library Report, 1962-1971*, 17.

⁶⁹ Department of City Development and the Milwaukee Public Library, *Milwaukee’s Ten Year Library Report, 1962-1971*, 17.

As opposed to proposing the construction of 10 libraries serving 100,000 residents each, TYLR calls for building 11 libraries to serve 60,000 residents each. More specifically, those 60,000 people should be within a 5-minute drive of the location, and the libraries should maximize their accessibility for drivers by being located on “two main arteries” in a location with “pull”—that is, one shoppers already visit often to accomplish other errands.⁷⁰ As almost an afterthought, the plan notes that the sites should also be close to a bus transfer point, since after all, “some library patrons use mass transit.”⁷¹ Other notable features of a modern library according to TYLR but not discussed in the PDNL are an outdoor reading area and a parking lot with at least 30 parking spots.

PDNL had not outlined what the square footage of new libraries should be, but TYLR suggests a minimum of 10,000 square feet and an optimum size of 15,000, with specifications for how this space should be used. Like the PDNL, this plan argues for structures which are “aesthetically pleasing and functional,” with a “flexible” interior and large windows which “enable the activities of the library to be visible from the street,” presumably to invite passersby in to use the library themselves.⁷² The plan argues that spacious libraries will attract more patrons as they will not be overcrowded and can house a more robust collection for browsing and checking out.⁷³ The suggested book stock is nevertheless much smaller than PDNL’s (though significantly larger than Atkinson’s) at 40,000 minimum and 60,000 books optimum.⁷⁴ TYLR

⁷⁰ Department of City Development and the Milwaukee Public Library, *Milwaukee’s Ten Year Library Report, 1962-1971*, 8, 10.

⁷¹ Department of City Development and the Milwaukee Public Library, *Milwaukee’s Ten Year Library Report, 1962-1971*, 10.

⁷² Department of City Development and the Milwaukee Public Library, *Milwaukee’s Ten Year Library Report, 1962-1971*, 13.

⁷³ Department of City Development and the Milwaukee Public Library, *Milwaukee’s Ten Year Library Report, 1962-1971*, 11.

⁷⁴ Department of City Development and the Milwaukee Public Library, *Milwaukee’s Ten Year Library Report, 1962-1971*, 16.

also specifies that libraries need sufficient staffing and hours of operations to meet patrons' needs, asking that each location have 11-15 employees and be open 56-63 hours a week.⁷⁵

Perhaps this was a lesson that Atkinson's early struggles inspired the Library Board to codify!

Space Requirements	Minimum Building (in sq. ft.)	Optimum Building (in sq. ft.)
Public and Book Area	5,950	10,500
Restrooms, housekeeping, & halls	1,150	1,400
Circulating and work area	800	1,000
Meeting room & storage	1,100	1,100
Mechanical equipment room	1,000	1,000
Total Floor Area of Building	10,000	15,000

*Suggested usage of the square footage recommended for Minimum and Maximum sized library buildings in TYLR.*⁷⁶

Of the 12 neighborhood libraries functioning in 1962, just 3 met these requirements: Atkinson, Finney, and Llewellyn. Atkinson proved to be a good investment that would live up to these new standards, and while Finney (located at 4243 W. North Ave.) and Llewellyn (at 907 E. Russel St.) were unsatisfactory in many regards, they were so much nearer to the plan's specifications than the rest of the neighborhood libraries that they would be allowed to continue operating.⁷⁷ TYLR proposed building 7 new libraries in the next

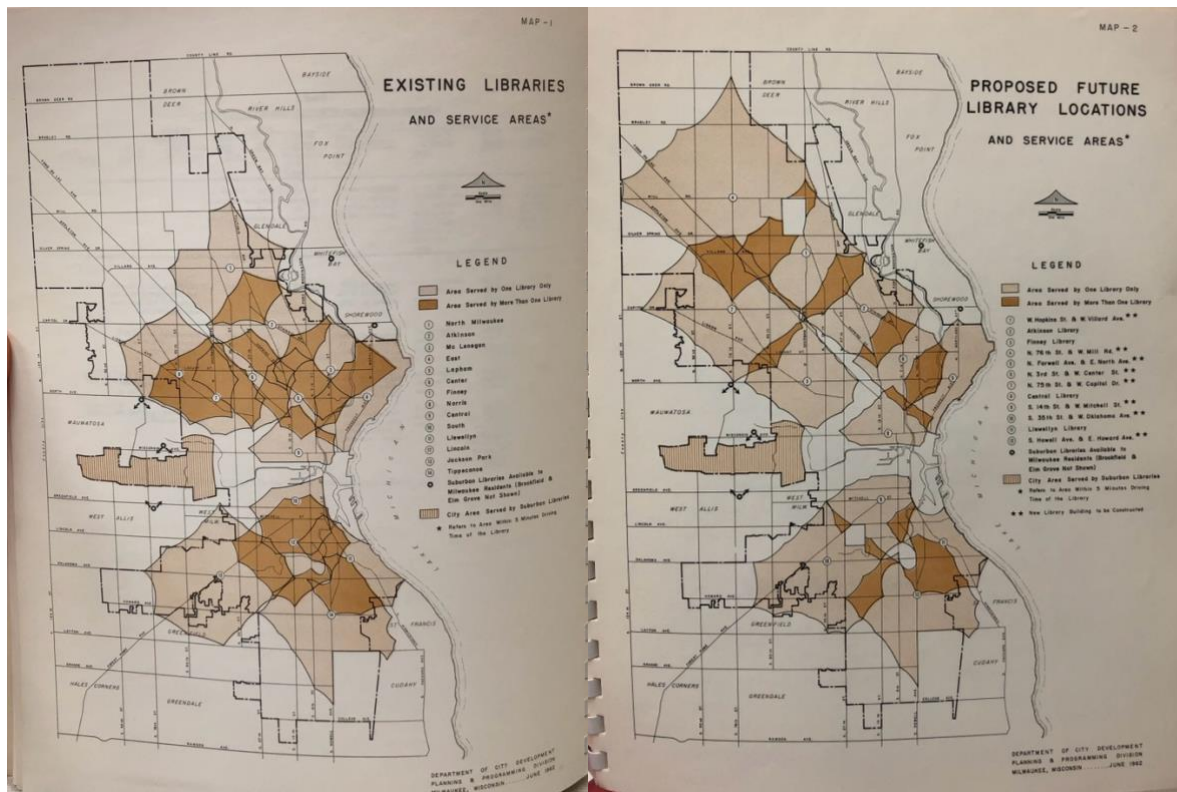
⁷⁵ Department of City Development and the Milwaukee Public Library, *Milwaukee's Ten Year Library Report, 1962-1971*, 16.

⁷⁶ Department of City Development and the Milwaukee Public Library, *Milwaukee's Ten Year Library Report, 1962-1971*, 14.

⁷⁷ Department of City Development and the Milwaukee Public Library, *Milwaukee's Ten Year Library Report, 1962-1971*, 23. See also chart on 28-31.

Richard Krug to Frank Zeidler, March 4, 1959, Box 64, Folder 6, Frank P. Zeidler Mayoral Records, 1944-1962, Milwaukee Public Library, Frank P. Zeidler Room.

decade, suggesting locations which would distribute libraries across the city and place them at strategic intersections, including a few sites already owned by the city.



Service areas of existing libraries as of 1962 and the proposed library locations to be established by 1972, as seen in Milwaukee's Ten Year Library Report, 1962-1971. Courtesy of the Department of City Development.⁷⁸

Nevertheless, this plan would be an expensive one. The total proposed cost for purchasing lots, constructing and furnishing new buildings, and enlarging and improving some existing locations was \$3,520,000.⁷⁹ However, TYLR argues eloquently for the importance of bringing Milwaukee's libraries up to date. Libraries were presented as a key city service which Milwaukee's government would be remiss on its duties if it fails to maintain and invest in, stating that:

⁷⁸ Department of City Development and the Milwaukee Public Library, *Milwaukee's Ten Year Library Report, 1962-1971*, 32, 37.

⁷⁹ Department of City Development and the Milwaukee Public Library, *Milwaukee's Ten Year Library Report, 1962-1971*, 42.

Proper design and construction of building and site pay enumerable [sic] dividends in operating efficiency, lower maintenance costs and esthetic appreciation. A library is more than just a place to pick up books; it is a place for study and research, a place for leisurely reading and listening, and a focal point for community activities. The location, site, building, and services of the library must satisfy these various needs if Milwaukee's system is to adequately perform its designated role in municipal services.⁸⁰

This argument for libraries as a municipal service Milwaukeeans were entitled (and which could help fight blight, to boot) to must have been convincing, because the Common Council and Maier accepted and officially adopted the plan, beginning a decade long library-building boom in Milwaukee.

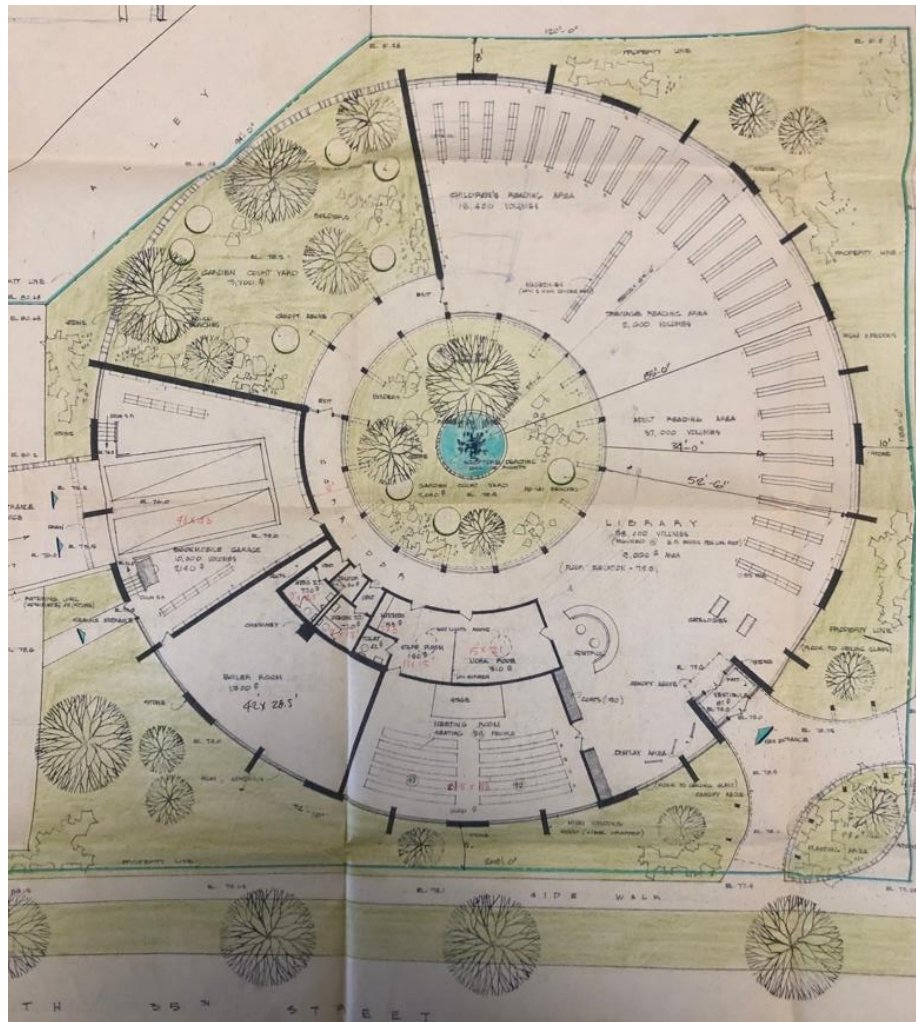
The first library created as part of TYLR was Oklahoma Library (renamed the Zablocki Library in 1984), located in southwest Milwaukee as a more-strategic structure and location than the one Maier had so controversially vetoed in 1961.⁸¹ In meetings between the architects (the same firm who designed and constructed Atkinson) and Krug, it was established that the building should be 14,000 square feet and include sufficient space and shelving for 60,000 books, just as TYLR called for.⁸² The design established, however, was very different from Atkinson and from the model illustration included in TYLR: Oklahoma would be a round building with a circular reading garden in the center and book stacks radiating like spokes from the center. This unique design was something MPL staff and customers proudly discussed for years, with a librarian explaining in 1967 that "the very uniqueness of a circular building is an advantage in attracting

⁸⁰ Department of City Development and the Milwaukee Public Library, *Milwaukee's Ten Year Library Report, 1962-1971*, 40.

⁸¹ This name change occurred the year after Zablocki's death. However, there were some efforts to name this library after popular representative of Milwaukee's South Side, Clement Zablocki, in 1963. However, when asked to comment on the idea, Zablocki declared "I'm still alive!..I thought it was customary to name libraries after people who are deceased." See "Congressman Zablocki can take the Library Board of Trustees 'off the hook,'" Channel 6 editorial, February 25, 1963, in unnamed folder, Zablocki box 1, unprocessed MPL collection, Milwaukee Public Library, Frank P. Zeidler Room.

⁸² "Conference Memorandum: Neighborhood Library South 35th Street and Oklahoma Avenue," August 18, 1961, in folder labelled "Building Construction," Zablocki Box 1, unprocessed MPL collection, Milwaukee Public Library, Frank P. Zeidler Room, 1.

users just because it is unusual and interesting.” Other benefits of the design were letting in lots of natural light and that it made it easy for librarians to “supervise” the whole library.⁸³



*Photograph of architect's plan of Oklahoma Library, undated. Courtesy of Milwaukee Public Library Archives Collection.*⁸⁴

However, Oklahoma, like Atkinson, was a more costly affair than city leaders had hoped or planned for. While \$250,000 was initially budgeted for the construction and furnishing of the building, Krug had to ask the Common Council for more funding multiple times. In 1962, he

⁸³ J. Jerome Sorensen, librarian at Oklahoma, to Kenneth L. Wood, Librarian in Denver Colorado, October 9, 1967, in folder labelled "General Correspondence," Zablocki Box 1, unprocessed MPL collection, Milwaukee Public Library, Frank P. Zeidler Room, 1.

⁸⁴ From folder labelled "Oklahoma Branch Library, 1958-1965," "Zablocki Sort" box, unprocessed MPL Collection, Milwaukee Public Library, Frank P. Zeidler Room.

asked for \$44,000 to cover costs like landscaping, wallcoverings, and shelving.⁸⁵ As the library's opening approached, Krug had to petition again for funding to sufficiently staff and stock the library. The additional shelving purchased with the previous infusion of cash was only filled with the 26,000 books that had been housed in the small Jackson Park Library which Oklahoma was replacing—a far cry from the 40-60,000 TYLR called for.⁸⁶ The alderman of Oklahoma Library's ward called the lack of books "ridiculous."⁸⁷ The Council had also failed to budget for sufficient staffing for the new library, and Krug begged them for the funds to hire 2 additional librarians, 2 student aides, and 1 custodian to be approved as soon as possible.⁸⁸ Even with a state-of-the-art building constructed according to TYLR's specifications, Krug and other librarians had to fight for city leaders' support for the ongoing and arguably less-immediate costs of books and staffing.

In spite of these struggles, Oklahoma did indeed open in 1963, opening its doors in August for minimal service and hosting a formal dedication and open house on December 1. Oklahoma Library was a smash hit from the day it opened its doors, and Krug's petitions to get the shelves stocked and the building staffed paid off. Oklahoma's 1963 annual report stated that "hardly a day passes when someone, regular patron or first-time visitor, does not express appreciation of the beauty of the building, or the expanded book collection and, sometimes, gratitude for services rendered."⁸⁹ At the end of the year, the *Milwaukee Sentinel* reported that

⁸⁵ Richard Krug to Common Council, May 18, 1962, in folder labelled "Building Construction," in Zablocki Box 1, unprocessed MPL collection, Milwaukee Public Library, Frank P. Zeidler Room.

⁸⁶ Richard Krug to Common Council, June 20, 1963, in folder labelled "Building Construction," in Zablocki Box 1, unprocessed MPL collection, Milwaukee Public Library, Frank P. Zeidler Room, 2.

⁸⁷ "Aldermen Fear New Pleas May Drain Contingent Funds," *Milwaukee Sentinel* clipping, July 17, 1963, in folder labelled "Building Construction," in Zablocki Box 1, unprocessed MPL collection, Milwaukee Public Library, Frank P. Zeidler Room.

⁸⁸ Richard Krug to Common Council, June 20, 1963, in folder labelled "Building Construction," in Zablocki Box 1, unprocessed MPL collection, Milwaukee Public Library, Frank P. Zeidler Room, 1.

⁸⁹ "Oklahoma Neighborhood Library Annual Report 1963," Undated, in folder labelled "Annual Reports, 1963-1974," in "Zablocki Sort" box, unprocessed MPL collection, Milwaukee Public Library, Frank P. Zeidler Room, 7.

this new library alone accounted for 20% of MPL's circulation in 1963, increasing checkouts in Milwaukee by 44,000!⁹⁰

This success only increased in 1964, with the library seeing an adult circulation increase of 13.6%, steady juvenile circulation, and a total circulation increase of 8% over their already significant 1963 circulation statistics. These numbers would set a "a new high for Milwaukee Neighborhood Libraries," with 141,191 total circulations in 1964.⁹¹ These records did come with some downsides: a significant portion of Oklahoma's library users were students using the library and its materials to study, causing what the 1964 annual report called "attendant disciplinary problems." As a result, "constant vigilance and patrolling by the entire staff" was required to keep Oklahoma's "atmosphere reasonably conducive to study and reading" for the rest of its users.⁹² The high numbers of users and checkouts also created a greater need for staffing. Oklahoma's 1964 report lists increasing the library's staff and book stock as pressing goals for 1965, noting that "meeting our present standards of service will present quite a challenge for staff" if additional employees were not hired.⁹³

This innovative, popular new library was of particular interest to Maier, not as a library patron, but as proof of the success of the urban renewal efforts he was spearheading in Milwaukee. Perhaps inspired by the backlash to his veto of the library at 72nd and Oklahoma in 1961, Maier made a point to appear at this new library. His first public appearance at Oklahoma

⁹⁰ "City's Busiest Branch Library is Dedicated," *Milwaukee Sentinel* clipping, December 2, 1963, in folder labelled "Building Construction," in Zablocki Box 1, unprocessed MPL collection, Milwaukee Public Library, Frank P. Zeidler Room.

⁹¹ "Oklahoma Library Annual Report 1964," undated, in folder labelled "Annual Reports, 1963-1974," in "Zablocki Sort" box, unprocessed MPL collection, Milwaukee Public Library, Frank P. Zeidler Room, 1.

⁹² "Oklahoma Library Annual Report 1964," undated, in folder labelled "Annual Reports, 1963-1974," in "Zablocki Sort" box, unprocessed MPL collection, Milwaukee Public Library, Frank P. Zeidler Room, 10.

⁹³ "Oklahoma Library Annual Report 1964," undated, in folder labelled "Annual Reports, 1963-1974," in "Zablocki Sort" box, unprocessed MPL collection, Milwaukee Public Library, Frank P. Zeidler Room, 11.

was at the groundbreaking ceremony on June 27th, 1962.⁹⁴ In the speech he delivered upon the occasion, Maier did not shy away from mentioning the conflict over site selection, giving a nod to the disappointment and anger expressed by residents the year before at his veto. But Maier assured his audience that “there was never any question about the urgency for a library in this section of the city,” and that this new library, aligned with modern library standards established at long-last in TYLR, would become a “dynamic cultural facility” for Southwest Milwaukee.⁹⁵ The “kind of neighborhood cultural supermarket” being built at 35th St. and Oklahoma Ave. was more than just an offering to the “growing reading public of Milwaukee”—for Maier, the establishment of a library that would live up to the thoughtful guidelines and geographic distribution laid out in TYLR “represented an important victory for better planning of the distribution of our city resources.”⁹⁶ In this speech, Maier presented the library not just as a place for community members to gather, for students to do their school work, or for citizens to find reading materials. Rather, it was a victory in his battle to establish Milwaukee as an efficient, modern metropolis free from blight.

These themes were present once again in Maier’s speech at Oklahoma’s formal dedication and open house a year and a half later, in December 1963. His speech on this day, presented near the center of the C-shaped building, was filled with pride in the library. In spite of his fairly minimal involvement in the design, funding, and daily operations of the building,

⁹⁴ For a photograph of Maier breaking ground at this event, see *Through These Doors: Milwaukee’s Wonderful New Public Museum: 1963 Directory and Report of City Progress in 1962* (Milwaukee, WI: City of Milwaukee, 1963), Milwaukee Public Library Archives, Common Council Records, Series 6, Box 278, 17.

⁹⁵ Henry Meier, “Remarks by Mayor Henry W. Maier prepared for Delivery at groundbreaking ceremonies for new branch library at S. 35th and W. Oklahoma Ave.,” June 27, 1962, Box 169, Folder 6, Records of Mayor Henry W. Maier Administration, Milwaukee, Wisconsin 1957-1989, UW-Milwaukee Archives, 2.

⁹⁶ Henry Meier, “Remarks by Mayor Henry W. Maier prepared for Delivery at groundbreaking ceremonies for new branch library at S. 35th and W. Oklahoma Ave.,” June 27, 1962, Box 169, Folder 6, Records of Mayor Henry W. Maier Administration, Milwaukee, Wisconsin 1957-1989, UW-Milwaukee Archives, 1.

Maier declared: “I can say without exaggeration that I feel that I’m a part of this library.”⁹⁷ He also explicitly mentions TYLR in his speech. While the “storm of controversy that surrounded [Oklahoma’s] birth” had been difficult, Maier argued that out of that struggle came a major bright side: the city now had a roadmap that would enable them to “build libraries where they will be needed most over the years.”⁹⁸ Maier reiterated the same points he had made to the Common Council when vetoing the previous library site, insisting that libraries should be strategically constructed with balanced budgets in order to facilitate Milwaukee’s development as a whole. TYLR was the plan which would enable city leadership to make these investments with confidence in their maximum positive, lasting impact. He stated:

Our city could no longer afford haphazard library projects—any more than it can afford haphazard development in any other areas. There has to be a planned, programmed approach relating projects in one area to the total development of the city, and related also to the amount of money available. We have that in our ten year library program.⁹⁹

For Maier, the fact that Oklahoma was already “the busiest branch library in the city” indicated that the plan would be a continuing success.¹⁰⁰

And indeed, the plan largely was successful, and Maier continued to stress his role in its creation and implementation.¹⁰¹ Maier made speeches at the groundbreakings and/or openings of

⁹⁷ Henry Meier, “Dedication—Oklahoma Library, 3505 W. Oklahoma Avenue,” December 1, 1963, in folder labelled “Building Construction” in Zablocki Box 1, unprocessed MPL collection, Milwaukee Public Library, Frank P. Zeidler Room.

⁹⁸ Henry Meier, “Dedication—Oklahoma Library, 3505 W. Oklahoma Avenue,” December 1, 1963, in folder labelled “Building Construction” in Zablocki Box 1, unprocessed MPL collection, Milwaukee Public Library, Frank P. Zeidler Room.

⁹⁹ Henry Meier, “Dedication—Oklahoma Library, 3505 W. Oklahoma Avenue,” December 1, 1963, in folder labelled “Building Construction” in Zablocki Box 1, unprocessed MPL collection, Milwaukee Public Library, Frank P. Zeidler Room.

¹⁰⁰ Henry Meier, “Dedication—Oklahoma Library, 3505 W. Oklahoma Avenue,” December 1, 1963, in folder labelled “Building Construction” in Zablocki Box 1, unprocessed MPL collection, Milwaukee Public Library, Frank P. Zeidler Room.

¹⁰¹ One indicator of the plan’s success and longevity is that several of the libraries built—including the Oklahoma branch—are either still in use, while the sites others were built on continue to be strategic locations for MPL today, even if new library buildings have been constructed on them.

the libraries constructed under the plan consistently throughout the 1960s: Capitol (which opened in 1964), Forest Home (1966), Villard (1968), and Tippecanoe (1969), though he did not prioritize making appearances at the relocation and remodeling of some other library locations which occurred over the course of the decade.¹⁰² These library openings (and Maier's presence at them) were prominently featured in the Common Council's *Directory & Report of City Progress* each year in the early 1960s. The 1965 edition of this annual report even used the library as its theme, titling the report "Milwaukee Public Library: Your Community Information Center" and featuring illustrations of Central Library on the cover and photographs of new library locations like Oklahoma on the inside cover flap. The report lauds TYLR, reporting "dramatic public acceptance of this concept of libraries" that served as proof that the plan was a good idea for the city.¹⁰³

In the speeches he presented at the opening of these new libraries, Maier also frequently praised TYLR. He extolled libraries as a cost-saving measure for Milwaukee in the long run, since "we've reached a point in urban life where the only thing more expensive than education is ignorance."¹⁰⁴ He stressed how libraries offer proof that the city is alive and well, and that its residents care about their home.¹⁰⁵ And consistently, he emphasized how TYLR allowed Milwaukee to build libraries with confidence that they can answer "tomorrow's needs as well as

¹⁰² A rare piece of scholarship on TYLR as a whole and particularly of the plan's attention to (or lack thereof) African American neighborhoods and patrons can be found in Madeline Brenner's 2022 thesis. See: Madeline Brenner, "'Neighborhood Library Modernization': Public Library Expansion in Milwaukee During the 1960s and 1970s" (2022). *Theses and Dissertations*. 2873. <https://dc.uwm.edu/etd/2873>

¹⁰³ Milwaukee Common Council, *Focus on the Milwaukee Public Library: Your Community Information Center: 1965 Directory and Report of City Progress in 1964* (Milwaukee, WI: City of Milwaukee, 1965), Box 278, Common Council Records, Series 6, Milwaukee Public Library, Frank P. Zeidler Room.

¹⁰⁴ Henry Maier, "Groundbreaking Ceremonies for New Forest home Library—15th St. and West Forest Home," November 10, 1965, Box 170, Folder 2, Records of Mayor Henry W. Maier Administration, Milwaukee, Wisconsin 1957-1989, UW-Milwaukee Archives.

¹⁰⁵ Henry Maier, "Mayor Maier's Remarks at the Dedication Ceremony of the New Forest Home Library—15th and Forest Home," December 11, 1966, Box 170, Folder 15, Records of Mayor Henry W. Maier Administration, Milwaukee, Wisconsin 1957-1989, UW-Milwaukee Archives.

the needs of today” by being strategically located and built to serve 60-70,000 residents.¹⁰⁶ At the Capitol library groundbreaking, Maier stated that it was his veto of the proposed library in Southwest Milwaukee which had spurred the Library Board of Trustees and the Common Council to create the plan which led to the creation of this steady stream of new, state-of-the-art libraries.¹⁰⁷ Libraries may not have been a personal passion of Maier’s, but he was more than willing to invest in them as long as they furthered his goals of renewal and could, in turn, be used as proof of his successful urban leadership.

If TYLR and the sudden influx of investment it brought to MPL’s libraries have a lesson to offer us in the present, it is perhaps that libraries and similar municipal services can find more allies in local government by positioning themselves as an irreplicable part of greater goals those leaders are pursuing. Zeidler and Krug were passionate library advocates for decades, eagerly hoping to establish MPL’s neighborhood libraries throughout the city and to make their resources available to all city residents. However, amidst the sea of concerns Krug, Zeidler, and the Common Council were faced with in the 1950s, remodeling or building libraries largely fell by the wayside. It was only when the Library Board presented neighborhood libraries as not only a nice service to offer residents, but as a key tool for fighting blight and strategically renewing Milwaukee’s urban spaces that Maier and the Common Council took up the cause with consistency. As a result of TYLR, millions of dollars were invested in neighborhood libraries across the city, several of which are still in use 60 years later. TYLR’s strategic planning and positioning of libraries made it possible for Maier to adopt them as a tool for demonstrating his

¹⁰⁶ Henry Maier, “Capital Library Groundbreaking Ceremonies – West Capital Drive and North 75th Street,” May 14, 1963, Box 169, Folder 9, Records of Mayor Henry W. Maier Administration, Milwaukee, Wisconsin 1957-1989, UW-Milwaukee Archives.

¹⁰⁷ Henry Maier, “Capital Library Groundbreaking Ceremonies – West Capital Drive and North 75th Street,” May 14, 1963, Box 169, Folder 9, Records of Mayor Henry W. Maier Administration, Milwaukee, Wisconsin 1957-1989, UW-Milwaukee Archives.

passion for efficiency and development, in spite of his lack of personal affection for libraries. At a time when budget cuts loom over MPL, affecting staffing, services, and the hours today's branches are open, TYLR could be a guide for imagining how to advocate for the importance of library services today.