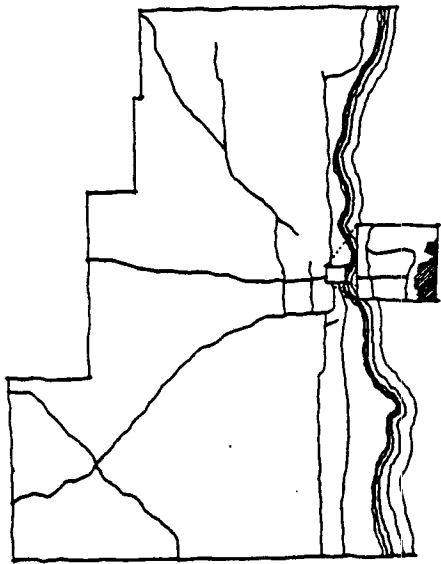


The 1950's were years of optimism and dramatic urban transformation. Young, post-War American families tended to reject city life for the less congested suburban alternative, consequently drawing critical dollars out of the downtown marketplace. Populations shifted from the center to the edge, widening an outer ring of low-density residential developments and the shopping centers built to supply it. Older city streets were slowly drained of diversity and economic life.

Policy-makers, meanwhile, began to popularize a new terminology to describe the worsening urban dilemma: "metropolitan area" grew to include the suburban populations; "inner city" generally defined dying downtown neighborhoods; "urban renewal" became the chief preoccupation of worried city governments; "ghettos"

The City's Freeway System



frightened businesses away from the risks of inner city crime; and the "commuter" ascended as the city primary daytime tenant, bringing at best lunch-hour life to the otherwise empty urban sidewalk.

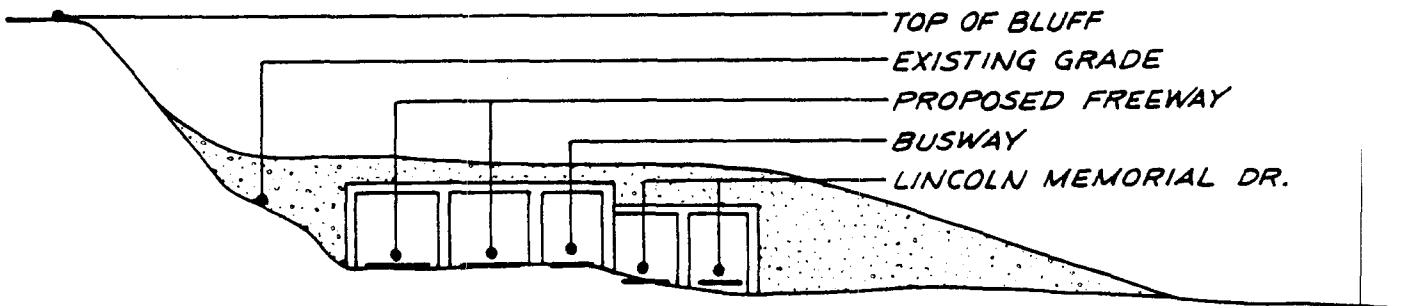
As these changes solidified, cities began to feel the pain of declining downtown retail activity. Transportation planners were called upon to help avert the collapse of the central business district. They cast new, high-speed expressways out into the sprawl with the hope of luring suburban consumers back downtown to help secure threatened city revenue. Needless to say, these new roads basically connected driveways with parking lots; entire city blocks were expediently flattened and covered with asphalt. Along with television, fast food, rock music, and the two-car family, the Fifties brought us the freeway.

Like most other cities, Milwaukee responded to the suburban exodus with roads. Two years before the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission was instituted, Milwaukee County transportation experts had already articulated the need for a "belt" expressway to serve the downtown retail and business district. Years of accumulated plan analysis, statistical figuring, traffic studies, and highway mapping culminated in 1966 with Federal approval for a major freeway network. The high-speed, multiple lane transportation system was designed to connect a downtown freeway loop to various key interchanges. These included the harbor bridge and a new highway south to Chicago via Racine and Kenosha, the existing I-94 south (less than six miles from the proposed highway and parallel to it), I-94 west/northwest to Madison and Minneapolis, a combination of connections with Highways 41 and 43 north/northwest towards Green Bay and points inbetween, and southwest on Highway 15 to Janesville. The proposals of the County were later endorsed and augmented by SWRPC in its 1966 transportation plan, which recommended major highway improvements and freeway implementation to accommodate the expected growth of regional traffic volumes through the year 1990.

To shorten a complicated story, the County and City began systematic demolition in the late 1960's to prepare for the construction of the recommended freeway system. An upheaval of public debate ensued as community groups and citizen organizations opposed to the freeway proposals began to challenge the legality, purpose, and consequences of the new transportation network. The unanticipated energy crisis and fuel shortage of the early 1970's exacerbated the

widespread controversy. Other issues brought to light by the dispute included the displacement of housing units and businesses, the increased cost of highway construction (particularly in urban areas), the uncertainties of population change and fluctuating employment opportunities, and the fear that additional highway construction would further encourage the emigration of city residents. On the other hand, the city's business and labor communities argued that an integrated freeway system was necessary for the economic and social health of the region and the central city. The debate has not subsided.

With buildings already demolished, land cleared, and freeway segments partially constructed, SWRPC nonetheless revised its recommendations in 1978, eliminating portions of the system and freezing the implementation of the total plan. The shift in policy, which resulted in a moratorium on Park East and other freeway segments, was preceded by a number of significant political events. Among the most important were the Federal rejection of the County-prepared Environmental Impact Statement for the West Park freeway segment, the incorporation of a Park West Redevelopment Task Force, and the subsequent demapping of the Park West freeway by then acting-Governor Martin Schreiber. Although in growing numbers planners and politicians seem to agree that the future of the proposed transportation system is at best uncertain, almost all of the yet unconstructed segments remain legally mapped. As it stands today, the Park East corridor is reserved for a six-lane superhighway.

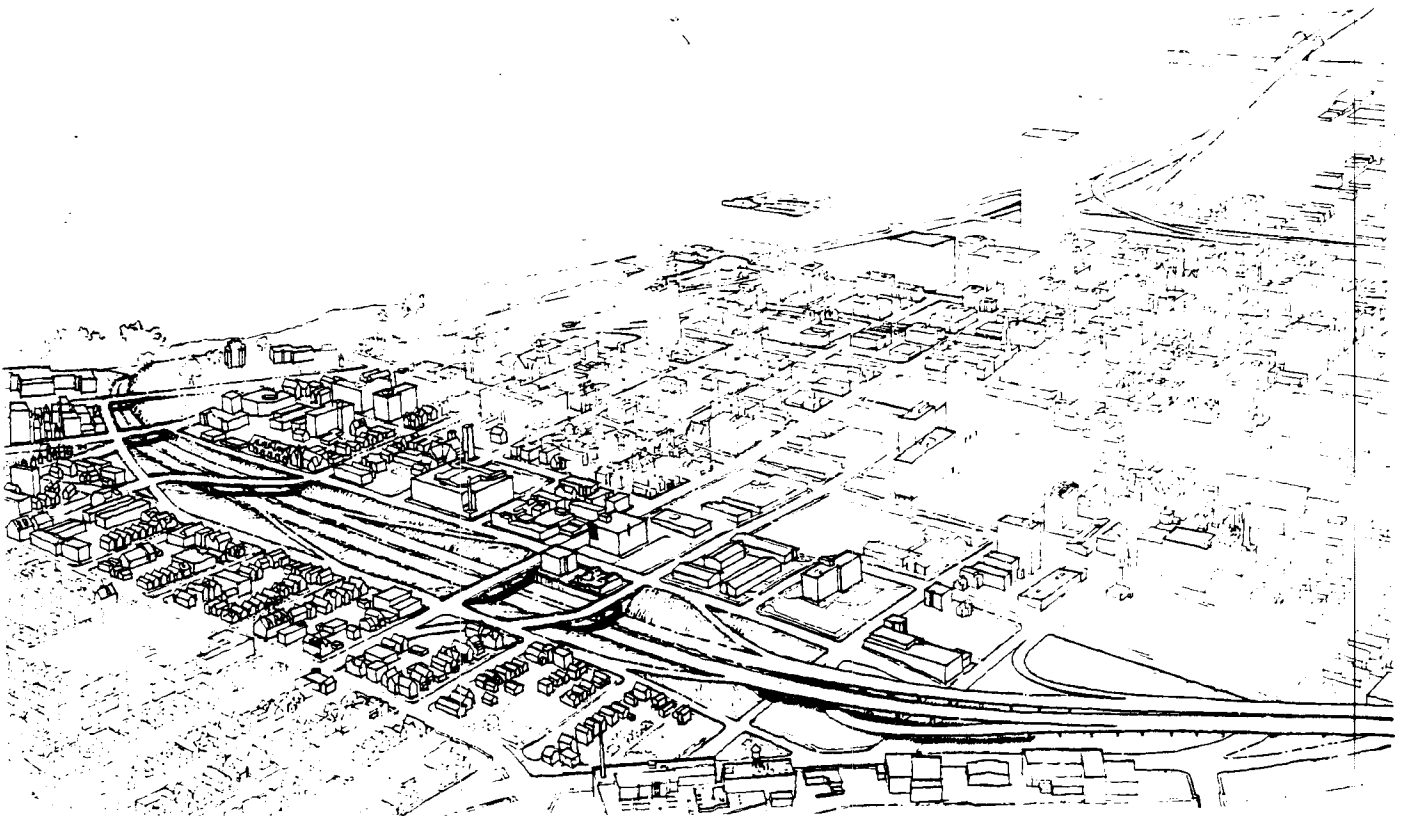


When it appeared that the Environmental Impact Statement for the Lake segment of the downtown loop was unsatisfactory, the County issued a supplement which modified the first version of the 1976 proposal with a new design. The unbuilt segment in question would extend the existing stub-end at N. Milwaukee Street

due east to the lake bluff and, swinging sharply to the south, connect it with the Hoan Bridge and related south- and west-bound interchanges. An enumeration of the consequences of this proposal may help to illuminate its impact on life in the Lower East Side and along Milwaukee's lakefront:

1. The four-lane freeway segment running parallel to the shore of Lake Michigan below N. Prospect Avenue's lake bluff would be partially hidden in a cut-and-cover tunnel approximately 2,200 feet long.
2. Construction would require the relocation of a major portion of Lincoln Memorial Drive.
3. The freeway might intensify rather than relieve traffic on Downer, N. Prospect, N. Farwell, N. Oakland, and N. Humboldt Avenue, as well as other north-south arteries, including Maryland, Holton, and N. 3rd Street.
4. The new freeway would increase adverse traffic noise up to 15 decibels over the 1974 level, particularly near the lake bluff's southward turn, and require the construction of a 5 ft. high concrete attenuating (noise-reducing) wall along its edges.

If the Freeway Gets Built . . .



5. A 10 ft. high barrier from N. Humboldt to the southbound lane of the Lake freeway would be required to satisfy Federal highway standards.

6. The County's proposal states that "despite the use of attenuating techniques, some areas would probably still experience moderate sound level impacts," particularly the Lower East Side neighborhoods adjacent to the corridor.

7. Construction would require the disturbance of at least one-quarter of an acre of Juneau Park (as well as an undetermined amount of surrounding park land) to accommodate a large ventilating plant needed to remove toxic fumes from the cut-and-cover tunnel, which would include a 40 ft. high exhaust tower.

8. What is now the Park East corridor would be transformed into a 200 ft. wide valley of traffic.

9. The north side of the Lower East Side would be connected to its south side by five freeway viaducts--one at N. Prospect, one at N. Farwell, one connecting N. Humboldt to N. Astor, one at N. Van Buren, and the last connecting N. Van Buren to N. Jackson Street.

In a word, the construction of the freeway would do little to enhance the Lower East Side neighborhoods as they are known today. Without question, the quality of life on all blocks adjacent to the freeway's traffic would be irreversibly altered.

In response to the controversy and clearly divided public opinion, SWRPC's 1978 Annual Report described a major revision of its original transportation plan, substituting its former recommendation with a "two-tier" proposal. The Commission removed some parts of the earlier recommendation altogether. In Milwaukee County, the Commission imposed a ten year moratorium on the completion of the Stadium Freeway-South from the East West Freeway to the Airport Freeway, on the Lake Freeway from the south end of the Hoan Memorial Bridge to the Racine County line, and on the Park Freeway-East from the stub-end at N. Milwaukee Street to the East-West Freeway (the so-called "loop closure"). Additionally, SWRPC recommended that all involved implementing agencies (the City and the County) thoroughly explore low-capital investment (i.e. no build) improvements to the existing transportation network. Further, the Commission directed each agency to explore alternative plans that would terminate the existing freeway stub-ends and integrate existing freeway segments into normal arterial traffic.

In its revised "two-tier" transportation plan, SWRPC recommended that City and County highway agencies explore alternative solutions for the accommodation of anticipated traffic volume in lieu of the proposed freeway system. The Commission emphasized the importance of developing satisfactory resolutions to the existing freeway stub-ends temporarily orphaned by the 1978 moratorium. Only when it can be demonstrated that these alternatives effectively meet forecasted traffic demand will SWRPC undertake the necessary steps to remove it from the regional transportation plan for the year 2000.



The fate of the Park East freeway stub-end and the future redevelopment of the eight-block corridor are part of the same problem. Perched at the corridor's westernmost edge, the giant concrete ribbon will remain a formidable obstacle to supportive redevelopment even after the freeway is demapped.

The path of traffic through the Lower East Side area significantly influences pedestrian safety, the division of smaller adjacent neighborhoods, perceived stability, property value, crime, and residential integrity, among other factors. It has already been intimated that many highway officials regard the eastward extension of stub-end lanes into existing neighborhood streets as a favorable alternative. Should such a plan ever be implemented, it would damage the surrounding neighborhoods nearly as much as the freeway, albeit far less dramatically.

In its 1978 Annual Planning Report (Vol. 25, No. 2), SWRPC explored three alternatives to the stub-end on N. Milwaukee Street. The following excerpt describes their recommendations:

"In the Park Freeway-East corridor at least three alternatives have been proposed (see diagrams). In the first alternative, the Park Freeway-East would be extended on the cleared right-of-way a distance of about 1,200 feet. At that point an off-ramp would be constructed to E. Ogden Avenue and an on-ramp would be constructed from N. Farwell Avenue. A new surface street connection would be made between N. Astor Street and N. Humboldt Avenue. In addition, ramps would be constructed from the current terminus of the freeway to E. Ogden Avenue and E. Lyon Street, and the connections of N. Jackson and N. Van Buren Streets would be constructed between E. Lyon Street and E. Ogden Avenue.

"Under the second alternative, no extension of the freeway is envisioned. Ramps would be constructed from the existing "stub end" to E. Ogden Avenue and E. Lyon Street and the previously noted connection between N. Astor and N. Humboldt Avenue would be constructed. Under both the first and second alternatives, E. Lyon Street and E. Ogden Avenue and N. Jackson Street and N. Van Buren Street would be operated as one-way pairs.

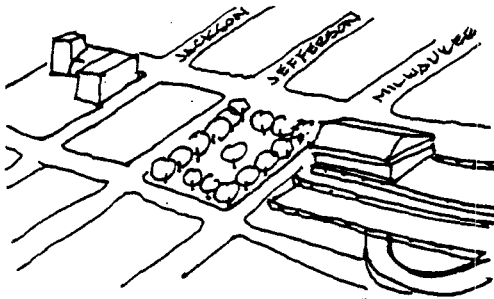
"The third alternative would involve a minimum of new construction, proposing merely the construction of freeway on- and off-ramps from the present terminus of the freeway to N. Jackson Street. Under this alternative, both E. Ogden Avenue and E. Lyon Street and N. Jackson and N. Van Buren Street would operate as two-way facilities. Similarly, the local street pattern in the vicinity of N. Humboldt and E. Ogden Avenues would not be changed."

The first alternative would have essentially the same impact on neighborhood life as the freeway itself. The second and third alternatives, while they utilize less land on the freeway corridor, would seriously jeopardize the quality of the neighborhoods located in the vicinity of the stub-end. Although the Catalogue has not examined traffic figures to support its conclusions, the proposals offered here seem to add unnecessary traffic to N. Jackson, which is only three blocks north of the existing freeway off-ramp. By observation, it would appear that the existing on- and off-ramps serving freeway traffic are satisfactory. Any additional road construction in the corridor area therefore seems redundant.

Three No-Build Alternatives

In an effort to contribute a new dimension to the study of stub-end alternatives, the Catalogue offers the following no-build proposals. Each attempts to creatively explore the adaptive potential of the existing structure, save the last, which would cut the freeway back west of N. Milwaukee Street.

No. 1: Adaptive Use of the Freeway Surface

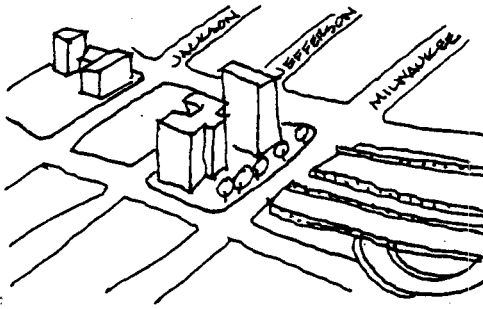


With a little creativity, it is possible to imagine the large, unused stretch of six-lane highway as the perfect surface for special pedestrian events and activities. Although the stub-end is not quite close enough to the downtown shopping district to be integrated into its new commercial program, the elevated deck could be adapted for use as a seasonal farmer's or flea market, arts and crafts fair, and other related festivities. Ample surface area located underneath the freeway could accommodate incoming and outgoing traffic routed to parking via N. Water Street; the same area could provide space for storage facilities, public lavatories, vertical circulation to and from the activity, and related services.

The stub-end rests on an otherwise vacant lot that would support the development of temporary or permanent park and passive recreational areas. Minimal landscaping, park furniture, shade trees, and other improvements would result in an amenity independent from the adaptive use of the freeway surface, but nonetheless capable of augmenting any special event. Although a permanent, sheltering facility similar to the Green Market developed on Fond du Lac in conjunction with the Park West redevelopment effort is feasible, no permanent construction would be necessary to support temporary special events. Lightweight structures, such as those used at Summerfest and the PAC, would adequately serve seasonal festivities.

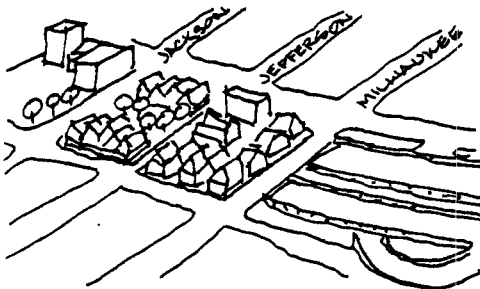
No. 2: Integration into New Development

The freeway road surface could be easily redesigned to integrate parking space into a new high rise and midrise development constructed around the existing stub end. With ground level access from Jefferson Street, new buildings serving the residential and commercial demand might link the Lower East Side with



the new development projects planned between N. Water and N. Jefferson Streets, including the MGIC towers, MSOE, which helps to generate a greater student population in the area, could develop the site as housing located less than three blocks from its campus buildings. The school already utilized the area underneath the freeway for parking. This solution, if carefully synthesized with a variety of new development concepts, would increase the city's tax base without inviting any additional freeway-related expenditures.

No. 3: Cutting the Freeway Back



The potential for development of the block currently occupied by the stub end introduces two alternatives that attempt to integrate the existing freeway structure into a variety of housing scenarios. The first of these would require that the unused section of the freeway be demolished and moved west beyond Milwaukee Street. This resection would free the entire westernmost block of the corridor for development of residential or even commercial high rise buildings. Mid and low rise clusters could surround higher buildings at the base and take advantage of the existing western slope of the site. The need for a strong, delineating elements at the western edge of the neighborhood is great, and the removal of the stub end might increase the development potential of in-town residences located less than four blocks from City Hall, MGIC, the Pabst Theater, and the Performing Arts Center. At any rate, the cost of dismantling this portion of the freeway would be significantly less burdensome than the cost of completing it.

Outside Influences

Like many other American cities, land use in Milwaukee was affected by decisions made by and in the interest of persons and groups operating outside of the immediate community. Its design and layout were largely determined by speculators, developers, and industrialists who based their decisions on private profit, not on a concern for the community or environment. The city grid was simple to survey, because it provided a large number of uniform lots that were easily recorded in legal documents. Industrialists located plants and factories where they could maximize profit. Workers were usually left to secure whatever housing they could, wherever they could find it. This pattern has characterized zoning policy in the City of Milwaukee and its surrounding neighborhoods since its beginning.

In recent years, City policies and private interests have demolished whole blocks for new construction and have cleared large tracts of land to accommodate the construction of a comprehensive freeway system. Lower East Side residents have enjoyed little or no control over the City's annexation of neighborhood land. Needless to say, the power of eminent domain has profoundly affected its present day character.

Downtown Redevelopment

Development and growth in and around the expanding central business district will play a significant role in the future of the Lower East Side. The Rouse Company, a Baltimore based redevelopment organization, is working in conjunction with the City and the Milwaukee Redevelopment Corporation to construct and manage a new downtown mall, "The Grand Avenue". It is hoped that the Mall, coupled with a number of new office projects (MGIC Plaza East, the 110 Building, the new Federal Building), will attract a greater residential interest in the downtown area.

The increasing costs of energy and automobile ownership have caused large segments of the nation's population to reside closer to their places of employment. The population that is returning to most central cities nationwide tends to represent middle and upper class younger couples and single and two person households. Milwaukee seems to be going against the national trend. Even though rents and house values are lower on the Lower East Side than the majority of the Metropolitan area, people are still leaving the central city in



favor of outlying areas. This trend has less to do with the desirability of the Lower East Side than a general preference for suburban living. To add to the decline, Wisconsin on the whole has been losing significant amounts of its population to the Sunbelt States.

Potential Housing Demand

Trends do, however, change over time. There is a good chance that housing near the downtown area may become attractive to a large segment of the population. If a greater number of households begin to seek residences closer to the central business district, the Lower East Side will invariably serve as the major housing center for the downtown area. The new housing demand could be met with new construction and through the renovation of the existing housing stock.

New housing starts in the city and the nation have been well below normal for 1980-81. This can be attributed not only to the increases in the cost of construction, but also to increases in the cost of money, and a general scarcity of home loans and alternative financing sources. Milwaukee has recently witnessed the demise of a number of proposed condominium projects, among them the Atrium, which was to have been constructed south of the Juneau Village shopping center. The L'Hermitage condominium on the northwest corner of Jackson and Van Buren began as a developer's dream when construction started. Although every unit had been sold early in the project, when units were ready for occupancy, many buyers withdrew. Suburban projects have fared somewhat better, primarily because of lower purchase prices.

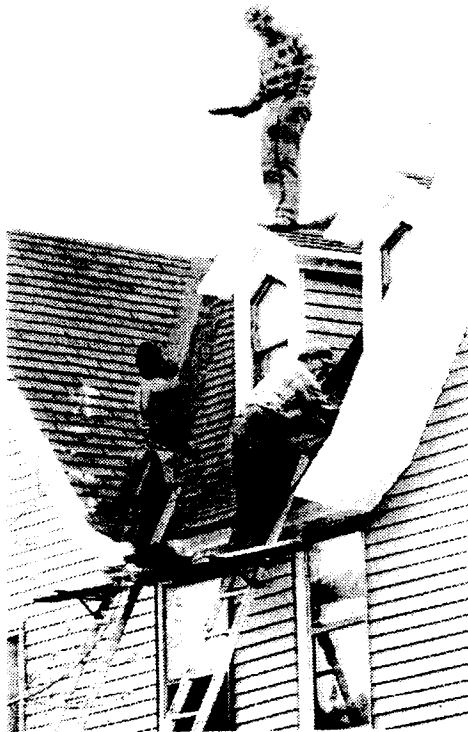
In the past few years, new apartment construction has come to a virtual standstill. Current construction policies and rents have made apartment development a very unattractive investment in today's construction market. Ironically, with the increase in condominium conversions, and the increase in the costs of homes, there will be an even greater demand for rental units. Meanwhile, the baby boom population is reaching its thirties and flooding the market with a demand for homes for their newly-formed families. Consequently, recent studies by both the city and private market consultants predict a critical housing shortage in the 1980's. Vacancy rates throughout the city and the Lower East Side verify the need for rental units: generally, projects are holding at about a 3% vacancy rate, and



a well run project may have a rate of better than 2%. Particularly in newer units, the Lower East Side has shown the highest rate of rent increase in the City (12-15%). This can be traced to the area's proximity to downtown and foreshadows the potential of a local population shift.

Future Trends

Milwaukee is currently exhibiting trends that are somewhat unusual. The City has been losing a significant portion of its population, yet a housing shortage is predicted. The older age of Milwaukee's housing stock, and the lack of new construction, coupled with the decrease in the size of households may well lead to a shortage. What types of housing could meet this predicted demand? The Lower East Side has a large amount of older housing stock and smaller units. These older buildings could be renovated at, or below the cost of new construction. Existing smaller units could be renovated and up-dated to meet the future demand for more affordable smaller accommodations as rents increase. New condominium construction could be designed to contain smaller units. Construction costs have averaged \$62.50 per square foot for new condominiums. Smaller units would, therefore, fall within the reach of a greater number of homebuyers and would make downtown projects more competitive with suburban projects. The lower cost condominiums could serve as the starter homes of the future, as well as the last home purchased by many older people. In Milwaukee the trend has been to construct condominiums in the upper income range. Recent analysis has suggested that the more expensive units (\$80,000) will have a limited market in the future.



New apartment construction might also feature smaller units. New apartments are costly to build, maintain and finance. In order to attract the higher rents necessary to cover their costs, developers will be required to decrease the size of units, but increase their quality. They will also have to seek new and innovative ways to finance, including joint ventures, cooperative investments, and partnerships. Rents will probably be higher with any new construction, but studies have shown that long time renters will commit 25% of their gross incomes to rent for housing that satisfies their needs. Recent studies have shown that the number one concern of the tenant is location. Second and third in importance are exterior appearance and convenience to shops and schools. Apartment size was ranked sixteenth, al-

though apartment layout was ranked sixth. This stresses the significance of good location, sound construction, and well thoughtout layouts.

The Effects of Redevelopment

The Lower East Side provides a prime location for new development and renovation/conversion. Its proximity to downtown offices, the retail district, the PAC, Summerfest, and many other cultural amenities, will make it an attractive location for housing expansion in the future. If redevelopment of the Lower East Side occurs, one must consider its effect on existing neighborhoods and their residents. If Milwaukee follows national patterns, there will be an increase in property values, speculation, housing prices, rents, and taxes. A certain amount of reinvestment is good for neighborhood growth and stability, but one must remember that a neighborhood is not only its buildings, but also its people. What makes the Lower East Side such an unusual community is its diversity, both in building types and, more importantly, people. Any redevelopment benefits should be weighed against the consequences to the community.

