

Proposal for Downtown Area Shown

Envisions Shopping Plaza District Without Autos.

By HAYDEN BRADFORD, Gazette Staff Writer

Kalamazoo took a long look ahead today, to the period of 1980. It saw a striking and dynamic plan which its authors believe would assure the continued modernization, growth and prosperity of the city's central business district. The bold yet flexible program drawn up by one of the country's foremost planning consultant firms, was handed to the city as a gift Tuesday night by the Downtown Kalamazoo Planning Committee, Inc., at a meeting in City Hall.

The committee is an organization of forward-looking businessmen and property owners who

(How much would it cost? Who would pay for it? What steps would have to be taken to achieve it? What are the reactions of community leaders who have seen its presentation? For answers to these questions about the Gruen plan for downtown Kalamazoo, turn to page 1, section 2, for additional articles and illustrations.)

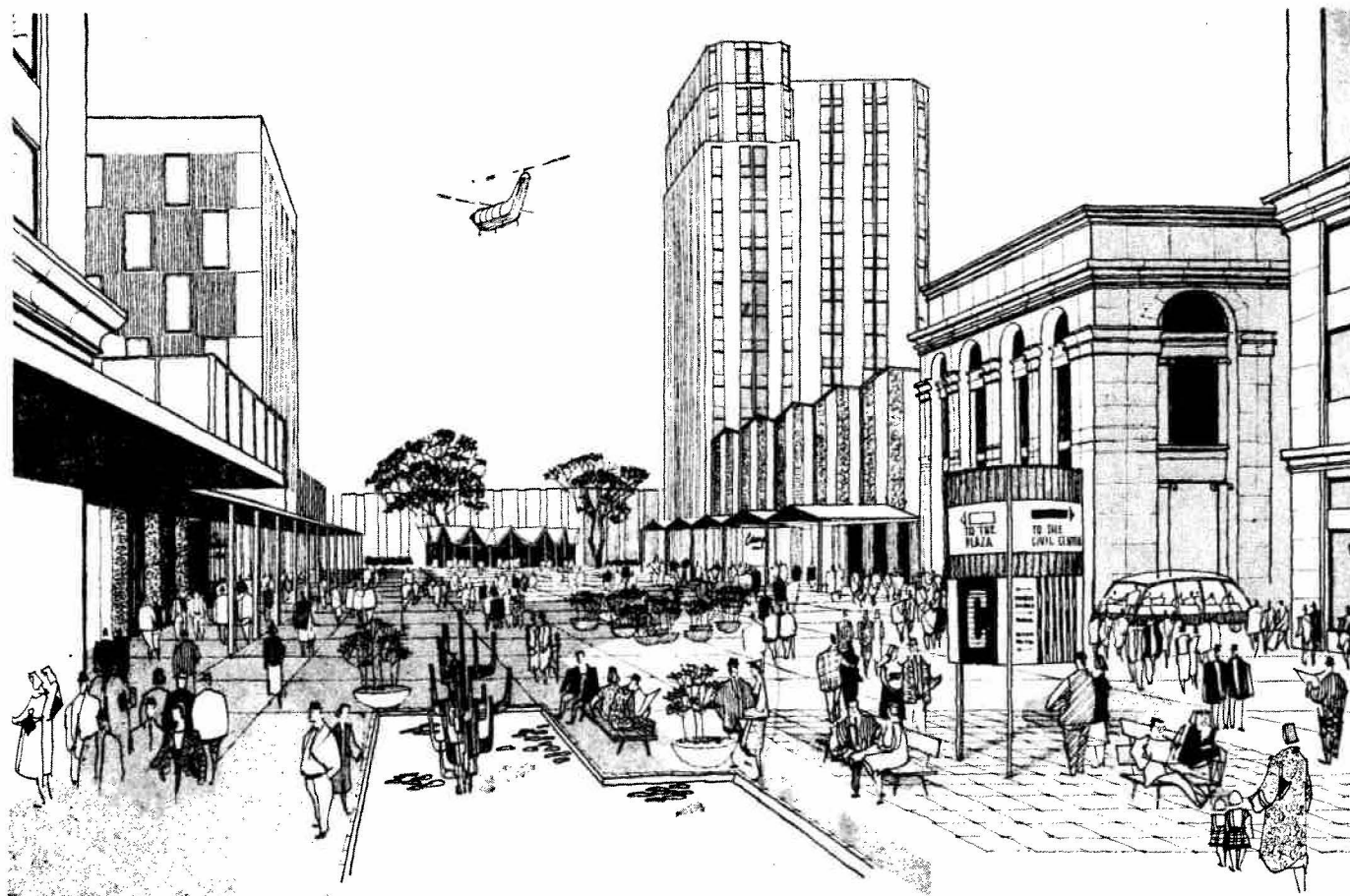
raised among themselves the \$50,000 needed to develop the revolutionary and imagination-stirring "blueprint for the future."

Calling for positive and coherent action instead of temporary stop-gap measures, the "master plan" foresees for the future an auto-less, pedestrian-only downtown "island" of beautiful shopping plazas surrounded by large, easily-accessible parking lots.

Behind the plan, the designers said, is the need for meeting

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Downtown Mall Depicted in Plan for Future



ARTIST'S CONCEPTION OF HOW MICHIGAN AVE. MALL WOULD LOOK IN FUTURE
Helicopter Hovers Overhead; Silent Electric Shuttle Bus Boards Passengers at Southeast Corner of
Burdick Intersection at Lower Right

Proposal for Downtown Area Shown

District of Shopping Plazas 'Blueprint.'

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such challenges of changing times as the threat of "traffic strangulation" now menacing downtown areas from coast to coast, and of central business area property deterioration.

THE PLAN, developed by Victor Gruen and Associates of Detroit, is the first of its kind to be drawn up for a Michigan city

Head Committee

Officers of the Downtown Kalamazoo Planning Committee, Inc., which received contributions from 80 downtown property owners and businesses to finance the drawing up of the central business district plan by the Gruen firm, are:

Chairman, Garrett Van Haften, American National Bank and Trust Co., president; vice chairman, Julius Isenberg, Bell Shoe Co., owner; and secretary-treasurer, A. Robert Corstange, First National Bank and Trust Co., vice president.

Members of the board of directors are Robert J. Brown, Chamber of Commerce secretary-manager; Birum G. Campbell, Consumers Power Co., vice president; Charles E. Finley, Industrial State Bank president; Irving Gilmore, Gilmore Brothers department store president; and Fred C. Reynolds, Kalamazoo Savings and Loan Association president.

and second in the nation only to the Gruen plan for the Fort Worth, Tex., downtown area.

The Fort Worth plan won much favorable publicity when it was unveiled last year, and experiments are just now being started leading toward its implementation.

Kalamazoo's plan still has no official sanction and neither local planning committee members nor city officials are yet obligated to carry out its ideas.

Its initial presentation stirred great interest, but brought a reminder by members of the designing firm of the long road that lies between vision and reality.

"THE NEW KALAMAZOO which we propose will not appear by magic overnight," Project Director Ralph J. Stephenson emphasized.

"It will take much detailed planning and careful attention to problems that undoubtedly will arise.

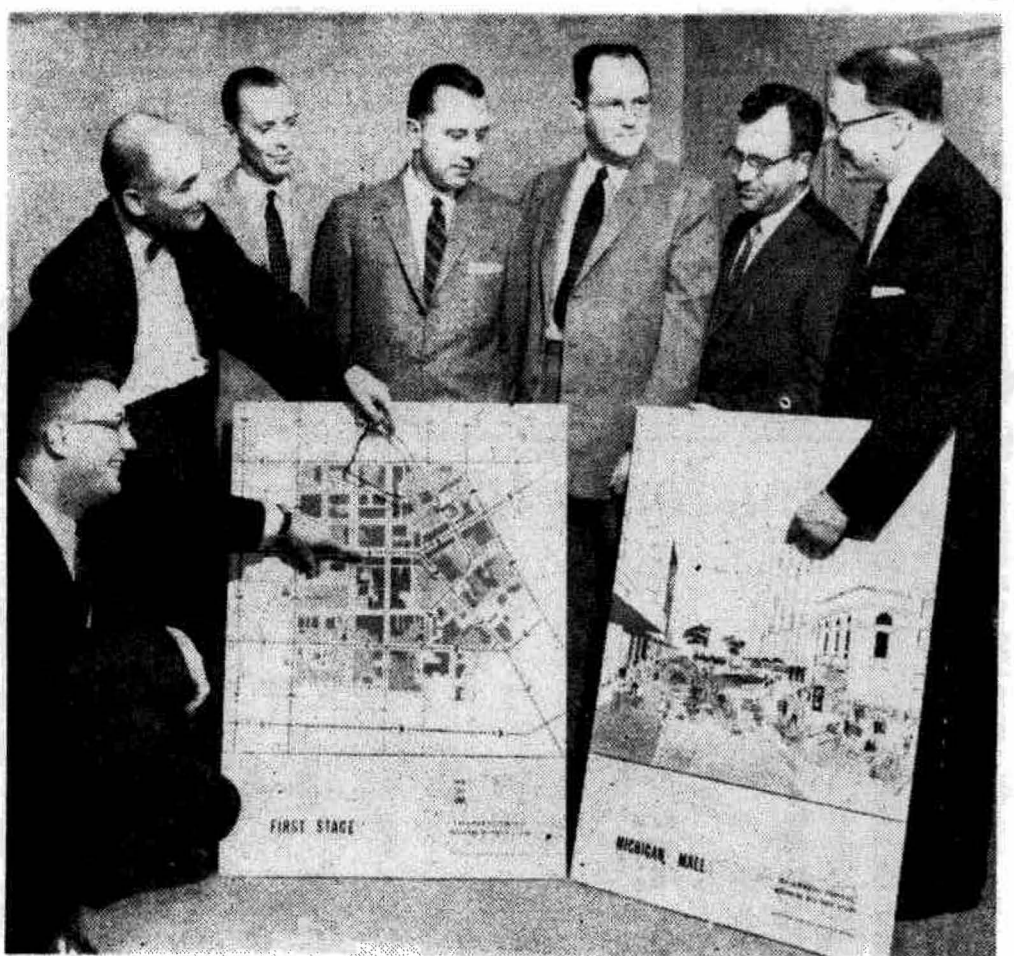
"A concerted effort will be necessary on the part of many to adjust themselves to this proposed new environment, aligning individual desires with the community effort.

"Willingness and enthusiasm on the part of governmental agencies and private enterprise will be necessary to realize a truly modern downtown district such as this master plan envisions.

"This study by itself is not an end, but merely a beginning."

THE GRUEN PLAN calls for developing the downtown area into a vital entity serving all of this community's elements. It is based upon the theory that suburbs and residential areas depend upon a prosperous downtown core for continued healthy growth.

It envisions a peripheral



'NOT CLOSED, BUT OPENED' — Two staff members of Victor Gruen and Associates of Detroit explain the basic concept of their \$50,000 master plan for "Downtown Kalamazoo—1980" to a group of local business leaders. Project Director Ralph J. Stephenson (left) stresses that "these streets won't be closed, but rather will be

opened to full pedestrian use for the first time in modern Kalamazoo history." Looking on are Ulrich Weil, planning director, Donald T. Probasco, A. Robert Corstange, R. Donald Maxwell, Fred C. Reynolds, and Robert G. Brown, the last four all being board member of the Downtown Kalamazoo Planning Committee. —Gazette photo

road ringing the entire central business district, running approximately along Kalamazoo avenue on the north, Pitcher street on the east, Walnut street on the south, and Cooley-Potter streets on the west.

(This entire 180-acre area, Gruen staffers emphasize, is only slightly larger than the 164-acre Northland shopping center in Detroit, which was designed by this same firm and has been an outstanding commercial success.)

Gathering traffic from tributary thoroughfares, this external boundary route would funnel downtown-bound traffic into vast parking areas surrounding the shopping, office, governmental, entertainment, cultural and research areas at the center.

THOUSANDS of auto spaces would be immediately adjacent to downtown and within a few minutes' stroll of the motorists' destinations.

Once inside the main downtown district no pedestrian would have to watch overhead signals, dodge autos, or listen to policemen's shrill whistles directing traffic. Stores would no longer be separated by streams of onrushing auto traffic.

Trees, shrubs and flowers along the airy, spacious malls would create a leisurely atmosphere conducive to pleasant shopping in the stores along the shaded plazas. Children could play here in safety, easily watched by one parent while the other shopped.

Artistic canopies would protect shoppers from rain, snow and hot sun rays. For those desiring such service, there would be silent electric shuttle buses to take them anyplace within the central business district.

The Gruen plan, its creators claim, would head off the dilemma anticipated by traffic experts, of downtown streets becoming so jammed within a few years that they will be virtually useless for either parking or moving vehicles.

AN INTEGRAL part of the

plan would be the construction of a major elevated east-west thoroughfare along Kalamazoo avenue and one at ground level along Pitcher street's present route.

These would be designed to carry around downtown the nearly 60 per cent of traffic bound past it for other destinations. Both routes, incidentally, were proposed in the City Planning Commission's 1950 street thoroughfare plan.

Deceleration lanes would lead off these expressways into the central business district parking area. Other major streets, such as Lovell and Rose, would funnel downtown traffic directly to and from its destination.

WITHIN THE central core, where once coveted locations now remain vacant, no unproductive land would remain. The new downtown would "abound with healthy economic and physical improvements," the planners predict.

"New and old activities would employ more people and attract more shoppers both from within the city as well as from more distant areas than ever before.

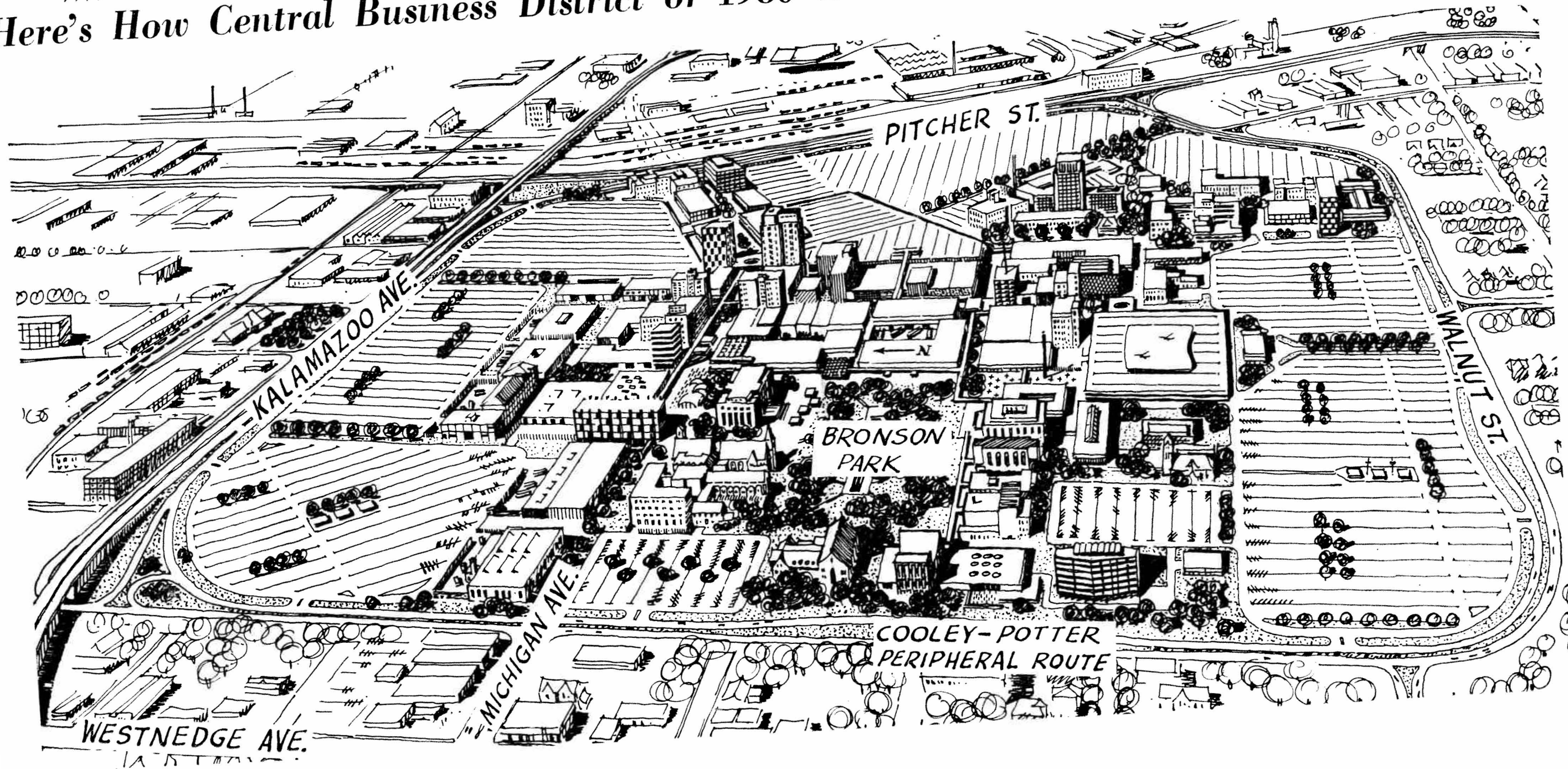
"Buildings would be compactly grouped, but never oppressively close. Many former streets once occupied by noisy, smelly cars and trucks would accommodate hosts of attractive and striking shops.

"Cleverly located structures with open sides would further help to reduce any disturbance created by service vehicles which would find it essential to enter downtown during the day."

These planners anticipate that by 1980, in fact, downtown Kalamazoo leaders could be expected to be considering a proposal to make the then-already beautiful Burdick and Michigan malls into year-round roofed and air-conditioned shopping centers.

Imaginative Plan Drawn for City of Future

Here's How Central Business District of 1980 is Envisioned in Revolutionary Proposal



Questions and Answers on Costs and Other Factors

Tuesday night's presentation of the imaginative plan to revitalize downtown Kalamazoo prompted a host of questions by viewers.

The Gazette put some of the questions to Ralph J. Stephenson, Kalamazoo project director for Victor Gruen and Associates of Detroit. Here are his answers:

Q—How much would it cost to implement this plan?

A—The total cannot be even approximately estimated, but its cost should not place an undue burden upon anyone. Public funds spent should be little, if any, more than would be necessary without such an integrated plan as ours. And every dollar of private capital invested should bring a fair profit in return.

Q—How do you figure that?

A—During the next 20 years private capital is going to spend millions for new construction anyway, and governmental agencies will have to do the same to improve and widen existing streets to cope with the traffic increases anticipated. We simply propose that this money be spent realistically with a desirable goal in mind rather than haphazardly.

Q—You mean the city taxpayer will not pay the bill?

A—That's right. His share would probably be no greater than he would pay anyway for stop-gap measures which would never achieve a lasting solution to the downtown traffic problem.

* * *

Q—What about the north-south and east-west thoroughfares along Kalamazoo avenue and Pitcher street to carry traffic around downtown? Won't they be expensive?

A—Possibly. But we have merely incorporated into our master plan the thoroughfare plan recommended by your City Planning Commission in 1950. As that body concluded, such routes as these will soon become essential since already

nearly 60 per cent of the total traffic entering the central business district has no destination there.

Q—You say other governmental agencies may contribute?

A—True. It is probable that both federal and state agencies can be convinced to share in the cost of these thoroughfares, and possibly in certain other phases of the program.

Q—How will private capital help?

A—Downtown property owners and businessmen paid our fee for drawing up this plan, and can be expected to organize permanently to further its implementation. In addition, many are preparing expansion projects and new projects downtown at their own risk, and may simply correlate these anticipated expenditures into this plan.

Q—What about downtown taxes?

A—Downtown property will probably eventually pay more taxes, but it should be well worth it to the owners. The core of the city, with less than one per cent of the city's land area, already pays seven per cent of the city's total real estate tax even though many downtown blocks are by no means fully developed. As the modernization of the central business district progresses, making the land more valuable, this percentage can be expected to increase.

Q—Does the plan take into account changes needed elsewhere in the city?

A—Not directly. It establishes a design at the nucleus which would simplify and clarify the redesign needed outside the core.

Q—Would this plan halt the building of shopping centers in the suburbs?

A—No. We anticipate the continued migration to the suburbs of certain convenience-oriented retail outlets such as food, drug and hardware stores to serve residential areas. But we expect this to be more than offset by the growth downtown of more specialized outlets, particularly comparison

shopping facilities, designed to service the needs of the entire trade area rather than isolated sections.

Q—Won't outlying city taxpayers help pay the city share of the cost of carrying out this plan?

A—Yes, but only to the extent that property taxes are used, and downtown already pays the largest single share of these and this percentage would be expected to grow even larger with the development of the plan.

Q—But is it fair that an outlying taxpayer should pay at all?

A—To the small extent he may be participating, he will be favoring himself. Unlike most shopping centers, downtown is not merely retailing with a few services added. This plan would locate there major hotels, transportation terminals, public governmental and organizational buildings, cultural activities, hospitals, and similar uses which serve a wide area with essential functions.

Q—Can't a retired home owner find most of these services elsewhere?

A—Possibly. But there is still need for super centers where his checks can be cleared, and where all his satellite services and functions have headquarters, even if he does not visit them. Without them, all his sub-center contacts would be less efficient and useful.

* * *

Q—Who would reimburse downtown property owners whose improvements are destroyed?

The plan retains every well-built structure more than two stories high in the downtown area and stresses a minimum of demolition.

Q—What status does the plan have now?

A—None officially.

Q—What is needed to go ahead?

A—The first step would be to align the full support of the community behind the plan's basic goals and objectives.

This task would most naturally fall to the Downtown Kalamazoo Planning Committee. Then it must be presented formally to the city government for official adoption.

Q—Who would carry out the long-range execution?

A—Once its elements have been adopted as official planning goals, the accomplishments of its objectives would proceed most effectively through existing agencies of government. Private enterprise participation, in the form of renovating existing commercial structures and building new ones, however, would provide the major key to its success.

* * *

Q—Why has 1980 been chosen as the target date for the plan's achievement?

A—That year was selected as being not too far distant as to make the plan totally visionary nor as too short a time so that it would lose its long-range validity.

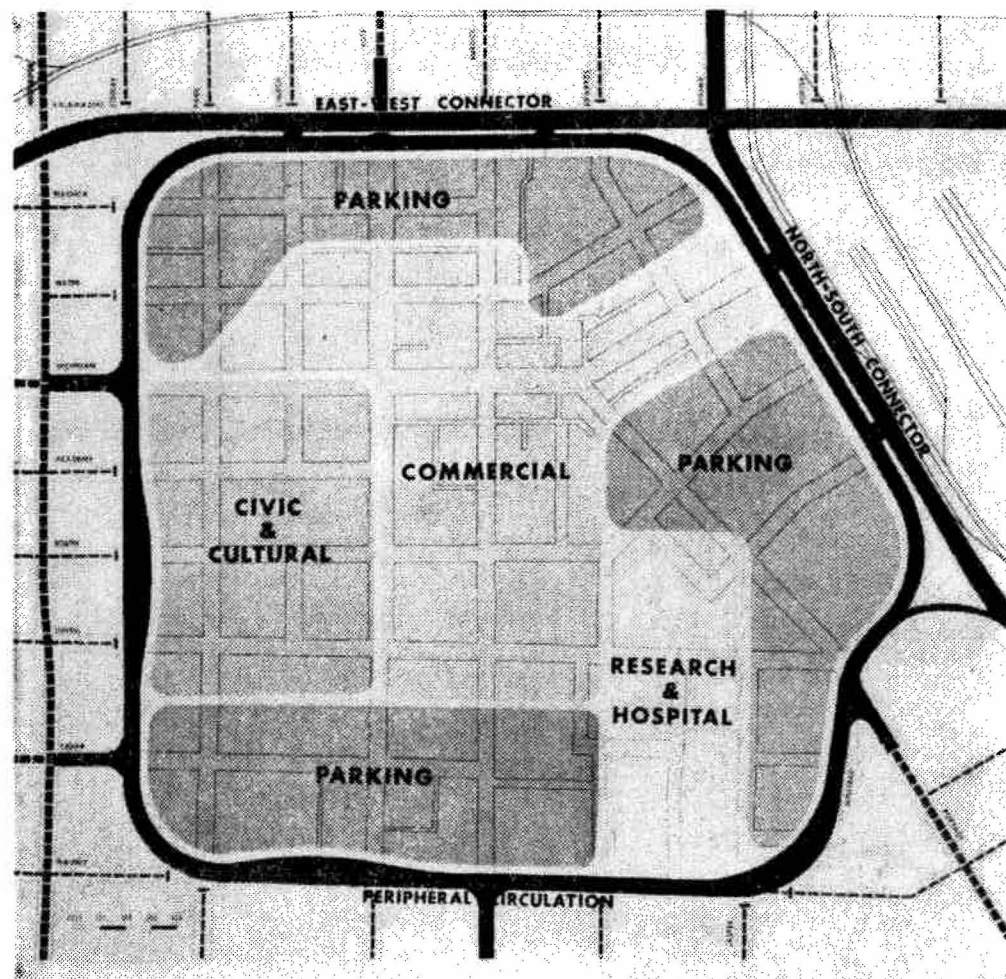
Q—Is this visionary and sweeping plan practical?

A—Much more so than going ahead haphazardly. Its goal of separating vehicular and pedestrian traffic in the downtown area is certainly more practical than to ignore all the data which makes it logical to forecast an unmanageable traffic jam there unless drastic steps are taken.

These statistics indicate that by 1980 there will be almost four times as many automobiles seeking to use downtown streets as their present areas can accommodate. We simply propose as a realistic alternative to such an impossible situation the creation of a pedestrian central business district in which a leisurely atmosphere induces higher spending by shoppers and every foot of land is put to its most productive use.

KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

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SCHEMATIC MAP SHOWS FUTURE LAND USE ALLOCATIONS
Parking Area Would Accommodate 11,500 Automobiles

Plan Stirs Curiosity, Wins Praise

General reaction of the nearly 200 downtown property owners, businessmen and city officials who viewed Tuesday's presentation of the Gruen plan might be summed up as: "Wonderful! But how do we do it?"

Questions directed at the Gruen staff members indicated considerable curiosity about the details of acquiring the vast areas of parking space and of bringing about the changes in land uses called for by the plan.

Yet a host of downtown and city leaders questioned by the Gazette expressed unanimous approval of the plan's overall

concept and basic goals. Comments included "excellent," "realistic," "reasonable," "most flexible," "within reach," "the only answer," and "most commendable."

Fred C. Reynolds, a director of the Downtown Planning Committee, termed it "fine," noting that "I've been looking at it for a year, and it takes that long to realize it is really possible."

Alfred Southon, Chamber of Commerce president, praised the plan's concept, and expressed confidence that the many problems of bringing it to reality can be solved with perseverance.

R. Donald Maxwell, City Planning Commission chairman, was impressed by questions asked after the presentation which indicated to him that some viewers believed "this is going to happen faster than it will." "We must all realize," he stressed, "that this will be a gradual development."

Among the most enthusiastic was Irving Gilmore, another Downtown Planning Committee member.

"Wouldn't it be wonderful," he said, "if we could be the first city to do it!"

PLANNERS URGE EARLY START ON PROGRAM

One-Way Traffic Loop Around Car-Less Central Business District Recommended as First Step

Creators of the Gruen plan to make downtown Kalamazoo the most modern central business district in the nation urged the Downtown Kalamazoo Planning Committee and city officials Tuesday to begin implementing it as soon as possible.

Among steps which they propose might be taken almost immediately is the inauguration of a one-way traffic loop around an autoless downtown nucleus.

This would utilize Michigan avenue, Portage, South Henrietta, Lovell and Park streets.

"MOST OF THE area inside this loop could then be devoted to pedestrian use for the first time in Kalamazoo's modern history," the Gruen plan suggests.

The planners contend that such a pattern would not interfere or disrupt any present activities and would require only minor adjustments.

They point out that "there are already many existing parking facilities on the inside edge of this loop," and suggest that these could be easily supplemented by closing portions of present streets to moving vehicle traffic.

Service vehicles would be allowed to penetrate this center core only along carefully predetermined routes.

IN THE SECOND stage, the plan calls for moving the perimeter road outward, the beginning of replacements of low activity uses with more productive ones, and the acquisition of rights of way for the final peripheral route and the north-south and east-west thoroughfares by-passing the downtown area.

The third stage would see

the peripheral route and the thoroughfares in use, large portions of new parking areas in use, long-delayed construction projects being completed, much planning accomplished, and total realization of the plan's final concept within view.

This path, however, would include numerous hurdles requiring very real effort to be cleared, the planners admit.

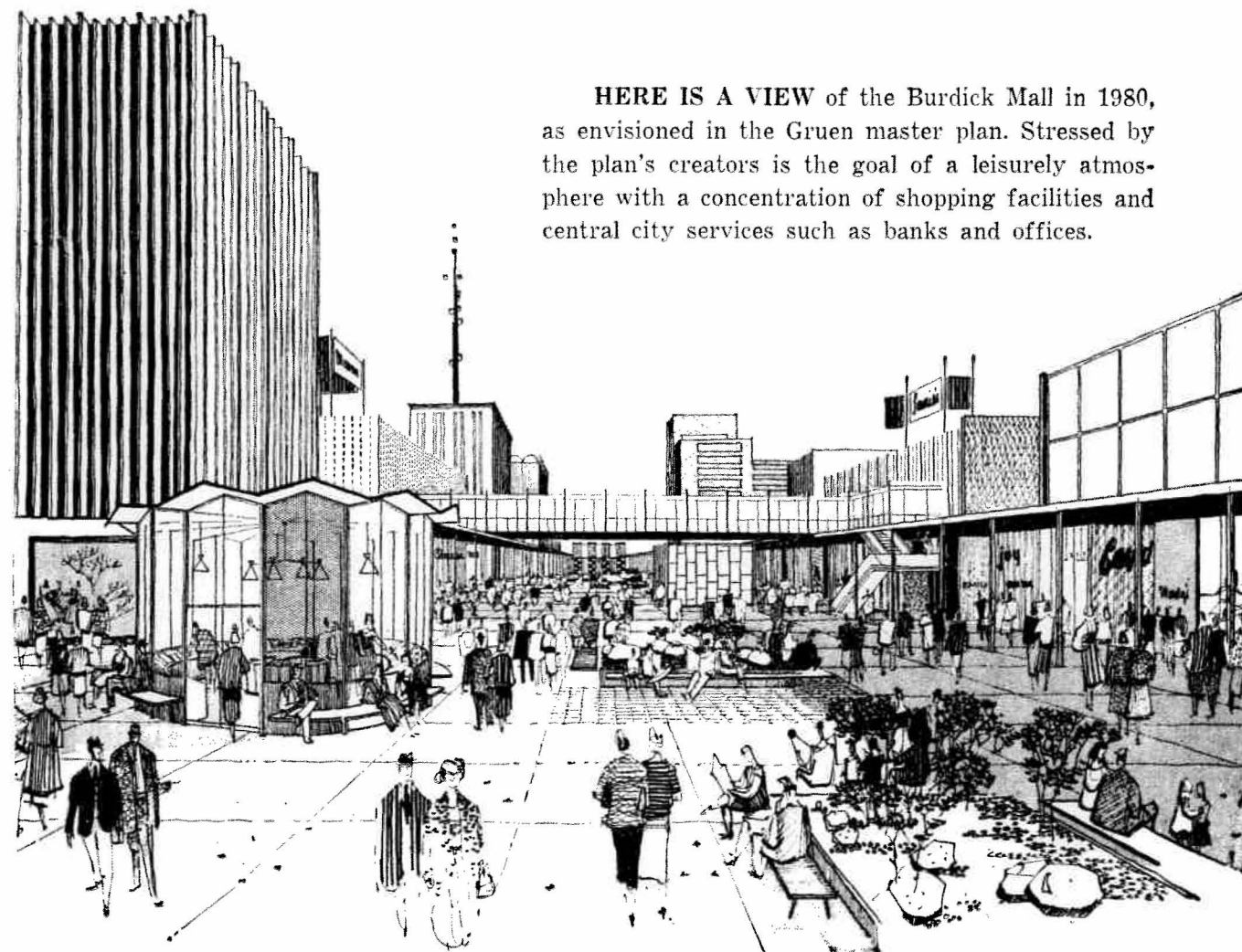
Among the first major problems to be solved, they stress, would be the one regarding the closing of streets without leaving any doubts as to the city's right to continue

them in public use, or to sell them for private use, as conditions may require.

Other details which would have to be taken care of would be arrangements for the proposed plantings on the malls and their perpetual care; acquisition and administration of the huge parking areas;

zoning, architectural and engineering problems.

The planners express confidence, however, that none of these should be insurmountable if the enthusiastic support of the entire community can be marshaled behind this long-range downtown master plan for 1980.



HERE IS A VIEW of the Burdick Mall in 1980, as envisioned in the Gruen master plan. Stressed by the plan's creators is the goal of a leisurely atmosphere with a concentration of shopping facilities and central city services such as banks and offices.