

URBAN REDEVELOPMENT OF LAWRENCE, MA  
A RETROSPECTIVE CASE STUDY OF  
THE PLAINS NEIGHBORHOOD

BY

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B.S. UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL 2009  
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## **Abstract**

This is a retrospective case study of the urban redevelopment's impact in the Plains Neighborhood of Lawrence, MA. It investigates the Lawrence Redevelopment Authority and city officials' actions to use eminent domain for a perceived public benefit, via a top down approach, to revitalize the city throughout the 1960s. The research presented herein illustrates powerful institutions and local government's actions toward a vulnerable immigrant community, with an undercurrent of gentrification which lies beneath the goals to revitalize Lawrence, MA. It investigates the clash of differing ideals and perceptions of blight, growth, and what is a desirable community. Topics of why this area was chosen, what events lead up to urban redevelopment, as well as the motive, goals and ramifications of neighborhood clearance will be covered. Embracing a strong qualitative methodology, incorporated within are a variety of data collection techniques: seven oral histories, document analyses of administrative records, media investigation of pertinent newspaper articles, as well as quantitative analysis and archival research to uncover how the program impacted the city and its' residents.

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## **I: Methodology**

“Flowers often grow more beautifully on dung-hills than in gardens that look beautifully kept.” – Saint Francis de Sales

The Lawrence History Center maintains an extensive collection of urban renewal records from the 1950s to 1970s that were amassed by the Lawrence Redevelopment Authority, which was the agency created by the 1949 Housing Act, to oversee urban renewal. This collection includes, administration records, dwelling appraisals and photographs, relocation records, business replacement records, blue-print sized drawings and maps.<sup>1</sup> Many urban redevelopment projects took place in Lawrence, but the richest historical records exist documenting the Plains Project. These Lawrence Redevelopment Authority records were discovered in 2007, and since then, the Lawrence History Center has been in the process of cleaning, cataloguing, photography, and re-housing oversized charts, maps, and architectural plans from The LRA, which is believed to be the most comprehensive, such collection in the country.<sup>2</sup> I have worked extensively with these records, in addition to other pertinent documents, newspapers articles and oral histories that have been cataloged at the History Center. These records were useful in gathering data about the tax base, community sentiment, as well as detailed information about the makeup and character of the neighborhood, down to each individual dwelling unit. Along with researching the neighborhood sentiment toward urban renewal, I was able to piece together the perception held by LRA and city officials through internal LRA files and other supplemental documents. Oral histories were corroborated together with newspaper

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<sup>1</sup> Lawrence History Center

<sup>2</sup> Essex Heritage Grant Awards, 2008

articles and LRA documents, as well as census, and assessor figures. GIS was also used to visualize data such as community characteristics and the flood plain. This case study of the Plains is designed to provide context to the urban redevelopment projects in Lawrence, Massachusetts. It is designed to present a better understanding of how an urban redevelopment can go awry and its potential catastrophic implications.

A retrospective case study methodology was chosen to better understand a complex social issue that can be generalized to other communities (past and present). This microcosm study examines the use of the Federal Urban Redevelopment Program, which warrants a further all-inclusive and in-depth investigation of the ‘how’, ‘why’ and ‘for whom’ policies’ impact, as well as externalities not immediately apparent or documented. The perspectives of Redevelopment Authority personnel, community sentiment, residents, and business owners associated with the Plains Neighborhood assembled together provide the milieu to answer these questions. This study attempts to fill in, as well as complement, the existing urban renewal and redevelopment literature, and tells the story of the 742 families, 155 individuals and 126 businesses uprooted by the Lawrence Redevelopment Authority in the Plains Neighborhood. This research is dedicated to bring to light and give a voice to a community of the past. It is however, generalizable to any present day community that faces an imperial authority which does not reflect its community’s values or culture.

## Validity Threats

“People who look through keyholes are apt to get the idea that most things are keyhole shaped.” –Author Unknown

This being a retrospective case study occurring approximately forty to fifty years ago calls for some difficulty. Many of the persons involved in the project are unavailable, and old information, such as community statistics, are hard to locate and verify. However, I believe the time past since the project was officially completed, in 1971, is sufficient length of a time to look back at the urban renewal project and draw conclusions. Although, considerable time has passed, I believe an examination of the neighborhood too prematurely would not be sufficient enough to reach a verdict. The time issue is a validity threat that is unavoidable. A possible source of error to my research that I have accounted for is collecting data from only sources that were negatively affected by the project. I have gathered multiple view points, using a ‘triangulation’ method. A validity threat I have come across pertains to interviews, in regards to contradictions between administration records and residents’ claims. For example, residents assert a lack of information available to them, contrary to administrative record reports. Although there are some inconsistencies, I have to use triangulation to increase my validity. There are more corroborating agreements in the interviews, from uniquely different perspectives that I am able draw strong conclusions from. The different perspectives also create a full picture and represent all facets of those persons whose life was affected by the urban renewal program. The perspectives range from those instigating the project to those directly affected by it. An additional source of error is the lack of a comparison neighborhood to compare the Plains to. Similar neighborhoods where also cleared under the auspices of urban redevelopment and urban



renewal in Lawrence. However, with the lack of a comparison area, I do not have a baseline as to what might have happened to the Plains absence of a renewal program. Another potential misrepresentation would be the descriptions of the neighborhood and 'blight'. The perspective differs depending on where one stands. Although the records are quantitative in describing the number of deficiencies in the housing, the definition of 'blight' is very subjective. I have elaborated in great detail about this herein. I do not foresee a concrete conclusion as to the necessity of warranting neighborhood clearance based on just physical attributes. Instead, not focusing on physical attributes of housing, I believe what is important is the differing perspectives and disconnect from the residents and those instigating the redevelopment. To minimize threats to validity as much as possible, I have contributed much due diligence to my research. I believe the legitimacy within my thesis strong enough to be acceptable in the research community

## II: Introduction to Urban Redevelopment

“The trouble with land is that they’re not making it anymore” –Will Rogers

Although eminent domain may seem a modern response to reconfigure land in our heavily built up environment, it has perpetually existed under the auspices of different titles and intentions. In the United States, New England has been in the forefront of eminent domain as far back as colonial times. “The Massachusetts Statue of 1639 authorized destroying houses, gardens or orchards for highways.”<sup>3</sup> There were also many mill acts that permitted land and property to be flooded for water power. The 1667 Mill Dam Act originating from Virginia is the earliest example known in New England.<sup>4</sup> Throughout the industrialization of the United States, eminent domain was utilized in the New York City Tenement House Act of 1895; allowing the “Board of Health to condemn and demolish buildings declared unfit for human habitation.”<sup>5</sup> With the industrial revolution, came a demand for a labor pool within a close proximity to factories and mills. With the proletarianization of the workforce into dwellings near their jobs, the progression of eminent domain would inevitably be entangled in housing issues. In 1935, the New York Supreme Court gave the city’s housing authority power of eminent domain to condemn property. Soon, housing and economic development became a mutually dependent issue which demanded attention on the federal level. The Wagner Stegall Act of 1937 stated “It is hereby declared to be the policy of the United States to promote the general welfare of the nation by employing its funds and credit, as provided in this act, to

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<sup>3</sup> (Meidinger, 1980)

<sup>4</sup> (Meidinger, 1980)

<sup>5</sup> (Pritchett, 2003)

assist the several states and their political subdivisions to alleviate present and recurring unemployment and to remedy the unsafe and insanitary housing conditions and the acute shortage of decent, safe, and sanitary dwellings for families of low income, in urban and rural nonfarm areas, that are injurious to the health, safety and morale of the citizens of the nation.”<sup>6</sup>

Economic decline, housing issues, and especially the notion of ‘blight,’ secured an interest at the federal level. What is identified as urban redevelopment, later classified as urban renewal, was a federal program that originated in the 1949 American Housing Act. It was Title 1 in the Act which provided federal funds for ‘slum clearance.’ The Housing Act also subsidized public housing units and authorized the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) mortgage insurance. The 1949 Housing Act was a response to the post-Great Depression and WW II atmosphere of housing shortages and affordability issues. It was not until 1954, that the term ‘urban renewal’ was officially coined during the 1949 Housing Act amendment.<sup>7</sup> 1954 was also the year the Supreme Court ruled in *Berman v. Parker*; a case in which an ‘unblighted’ department store in a ‘blighted’ area was taken by eminent domain. This case also left no doubt that a redevelopment authority could, with public monies, subsidize private redevelopment if there is a perceived public *benefit*; not public *use*, which historically has been the case. Some of the main points of that case are outlined below:

Section (h) It is not beyond the power of Congress or its authorized agencies to attack the problem of the blighted parts of the community on an area, rather than on a structure-by-structure basis. Redevelopment

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<sup>6</sup> (United States Housing Act, 1937)

<sup>7</sup> (Lietz, 2010)

of an entire area under a balanced integrated plan so as to include not only new homes, but also schools, churches, parks, streets, and shopping centers is plainly relevant to the maintenance of the desired housing standards, and therefore within congressional power.

(i) The standards contained in the Act are sufficiently definite to sustain the delegation of authority to administrative agencies to execute the plan to eliminate not only slums, but also the blighted areas that tend to produce slums.

(j) Once the public purpose is established, the amount and character of the land to be taken for the project and the need for a particular tract to complete the integrated plan rests in the discretion of the legislature.

(k) If the Redevelopment Agency considers it necessary in carrying out a redevelopment project to take full title to the land, as distinguished from the objectionable buildings located thereon, it may do so.<sup>8</sup>

‘Blight’ and ‘slum’ were mentioned profusely throughout the case as a rationale for the use of eminent domain; however, those terms were never concisely defined in that case, or the 1954 Housing Act. However, Section 3(r) of the Housing Act states:

‘Substandard housing conditions’ means the conditions obtaining in connection with the existence of any dwelling, or dwellings, or housing accommodations for human beings, which because of lack of sanitary facilities, ventilation, or light, or because of dilapidation, overcrowding, faulty interior arrangement, or any combination of these factors, is in the opinion of the commissioners, detrimental to the safety, health, morals,

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<sup>8</sup> (Berman v. Parker, 1954)

or welfare of the inhabitants.”<sup>9</sup> The Housing Act of 1954 also was the introduction of the phrase urban *renewal*. The rhetoric use of urban *redevelopment* began shifting to urban *renewal*, as a ‘let’s not demolish everything’ approach was beginning to gain more clout. Meanwhile, theories of the perceived success of recent and ongoing redevelopment projects became rampant, and a move from small projects toward more ‘efficient’ larger projects escalated. *Berman v. Parker* also set precedent for the taking of dwellings that are not deficient in ‘blighted’ areas, asserting it falls under a public benefit. The most extreme use of eminent domain for a perceived public benefit is considered the razed neighborhood of Poletown, MI; in which an ‘unblighted’ community was demolished for the construction of a General Motors plant.

The intended goal for urban redevelopment was to revitalize neighborhoods; mostly inner cities and urban areas, which were considered a ‘slum’ or ‘blighted.’ Most of the urban redevelopment projects took place from the late 1940s to the early 1970s. “The federal urban renewal program attempts to rebuild rundown areas of cities by feeding large subsidies of public money and government power into the normal operations of the private market. After the urban renewal area is selected, plans are drawn up and approved by the local renewal agency, the local governing body, and the federal authorities, HUD, in Washington. Once the project has been officially approved, the authorities either persuade the owners of real estate in the area to sell willingly or force them to sell by invoking the power of eminent domain.”<sup>10</sup> In the case of Lawrence, MA, the Lawrence Redevelopment Authority (LRA) was created as a renewal agency. Federal funds were funneled through the LRA and used to acquire ‘blighted’ areas. Title I of the

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<sup>9</sup> (*Berman v. Parker*, 1954)

<sup>10</sup> (Anderson, 1964) p<sup>2</sup>

Housing Act of 1949 paid two-thirds the cost of acquiring a site, leaving the remaining one-third to the city. In the case of Lawrence, MA the remaining third was also heavily subsidized by the state.

There were many possible explanations for the cause of ‘blight’ or disinvestment in urban cities. One possible explanation was ‘suburban flight,’ fueled by the 1944 GI Bill and the Federal Housing Administration. “The GI Bill (officially the Serviceman's Readjustment Act), guaranteed Veterans Administration (VA) mortgages to veterans under favorable terms, which fueled suburbanization after the end of World War II.”<sup>5</sup> Decades later, while the federal government was still trying to renew the inner cities, the Federal Housing Administration and the Veterans Administration encouraged the migration out of urban areas by financing almost one-half of the suburban housing built in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>11</sup> Another explanation for inner cities deterioration was the exodus of ‘economic engines,’ creating high levels of unemployment, as is the case with Lawrence, MA. Regardless of the causes of disinvestment in the inner cities, the federal government was committed to eradicating the ‘blight’ in these areas.

Urban renewal created much controversy. The means to wipe out ‘blight’, as well as other counterproductive policies, were called into question by skeptics. For example, there was considerable disagreement over the justification of redevelopment and if indeed it was in the public's best interest. “Should government officials use taxpayers’ money and the power of eminent domain to scatter residents of rundown areas of the cities, demolish the buildings they once lived in, and then guide the reconstruction according to

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<sup>11</sup> (Gross, 2010) p35

aesthetic, social, and economic standards which they feel to be more suitable?”<sup>12</sup> During the period of urban renewal in the United States, the Federal Government also passed Acts that bordered on contradicting the goals of reducing blight in urban areas. The Highway Act of 1956 subsidized 90% of highway construction in the United States by the Federal Government. The result was a quicker commute time between suburbs and inner cities at the expense of cutting through, destroying, or isolating some neighborhoods. Many businesses relocated because of the interstates. “People have too; besides linking distant places to each other, the system has encircled many urban areas with ‘beltways’, which let motorists move between surrounding suburbs without having to bother with the cities. Once commuters began whizzing around those beltways, centrifugal force did the rest, propelling office space, staff and tax revenues away from the centre.”<sup>13</sup> The creation of the interstate system may have contributed to disinvestment in urban areas that were in much need of investment. Lawrence for example, was losing much needed tax revenue in the downtown shopping area to suburban malls with ample parking. The Federal Aid Highway Act was also considered responsible for subsidizing the exodus of affluent residents from the inner city, demarcating communities along socio-economic lines and transporting employment out of urban areas.

Many of the urban renewal projects were associated with unforeseen negative externalities, and many resulted in failure. In some cases, programs actually destroyed more housing units than they built, such as the Lincoln Center development in New York where 7,000 apartments were replaced with 4,400 apartments.<sup>14</sup> Projects also took

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<sup>12</sup> (Anderson, 1964) p<sup>5</sup>

<sup>13</sup> (The Economist, 2006)

<sup>14</sup> (Caro, 1925)

considerable time to complete; the typical project takes on average, twelve years to complete.<sup>15</sup> Many of the projects also took place in areas of large minority concentration. “The executors were criticized for ignoring the heavy psychological cost of enforced relocation and the social cost of the destruction of healthy communities. In the past, the appearance of poor immigrants in a neighborhood was considered to be a major cause of deterioration.”<sup>16</sup> The use of eminent domain also forced families to move against their will. “It is generally regarded as a failure—it did not achieve its intended objectives and resulted in the destruction of many poor but otherwise vibrant neighborhoods and historic buildings.”<sup>17</sup> Urban redevelopment has been drastic in changing land use patterns in the United States, but there are still questions of whether it was a palliative strategy that ignored underlying problems, or was too harsh a remedy to reduce ‘blight.’ Those critical of the federal program inquire who urban renewal was really created for and who was to benefit. “Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody. Even a ghetto, after it has remained a ghetto for a period of time builds up its social structure and this makes for more stability, more leadership, more agencies for helping the solution of public problems.”<sup>18</sup> Jane Jacobs, author of ‘The Death and Life of Great American Cities’, suggests,

“At best, it merely shifts slums from here to there, adding its own tincture of extra hardship and disruption. At worst, it destroys neighborhoods where constructive and improving communities exist and where the situation calls for encouragement rather than destruction. Like Fight Blight and Conservation campaigns in neighborhoods declining into slums, slum shifting fails because it tries to

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<sup>15</sup> (Anderson, 1964) p222

<sup>16</sup> (Carmon, 1999)

<sup>17</sup> (Urban Renewal Overview)

<sup>18</sup> (Jacobs, 1992) p137



overcome causes of trouble by diddling with symptoms. Sometimes even the very symptoms that preoccupy the slum shifters are, in the main, vestiges of former troubles rather than significant indications of current of future ills.”<sup>19</sup>

The results of urban renewal are mixed. Some projects have been successful in attracting businesses, local customers, and tourists while adding to the local tax base and enhancing the city’s prestige.<sup>20</sup> Detroit’s, Lafayette Park, is an example of a generally successful project. “Lafayette Park became the ideal to which most other urban renewal projects aspired but failed. Francis Grunow, executive director of the architectural society Preservation Wayne believes, ‘It’s one of the few examples of urban renewal that seems to have sustained itself, and the people who have populated it represent the diversity that we all hope to see in our community.’”<sup>21</sup> This urban renewal project was built on the ground of a former neighborhood, composed in large part of African Americans that were losing its population to the suburbs. However, the mayor at the time, Albert Cobo, believed that “if they could replace the aging buildings in Black Bottom with a modern district of high quality homes, then a racially diverse neighborhood might help the city hold on to its people.”<sup>10</sup> Although deemed a success, the definition of a successful urban renewal project appears to be as subjective of the definitions of ‘blight’ and ‘slum’.

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<sup>19</sup>(Jacobs, 1992) p270, 271

<sup>20</sup> (Carmon, 1999)

<sup>21</sup> (Madera, 2006)

### III: Why Urban Redevelopment

#### History and Predicament of Lawrence, MA

“At the present, the solution to the economic problems of the City of Lawrence...is not evident.”<sup>22</sup>

Lawrence Massachusetts was the first planned industrial city in the United States. It was designed by the Essex Company, now known as Enel, in 1847. "The Essex Company owned much of the land area in the north central district of the city and is responsible for the present street and lot layout north from the Merrimack River."<sup>23</sup> The geographic location of Lawrence is ideal to provide water power for mills and factories along the river and subsequent canal waterways. The water, originating from the White Mountains of New Hampshire, was captured for industrial use when the Essex Company built the Lawrence Dam in 1848. Soon after, the city was rapidly built-up with textile mills and other accompanying industries. With the construction of mills and factories came the need for labor. Without automobiles, the labor force was constrained to locate as close to their source of employment as possible. Residential construction was therefore very dense. It was economically necessary that homes be built with little or no side yards, or double lots, to maximize space and accommodate a fast growing demand for shelter. The demand to house such a rapidly expanding work force was so great, “the city hastily erected multiple-story dwellings containing as many as fourteen apartments in the districts that rimmed the city’s mills.”<sup>24</sup> It was characterized that “Lawrence adopted the

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<sup>22</sup> (LRA, Urban Renewal Acquisition Appraisal, 1963)

<sup>23</sup> (LRA, Urban Renewal Acquisition Appraisal, 1963)

<sup>24</sup> (Cameron, 1995)<sup>p91</sup>

‘wiggly-piggy’ method of housing development,”<sup>25</sup> Even beginning as far back as the, “1890’s, ‘tenement sharps’ eagerly purchased available lands in the Plains, throwing up flimsy structures on every open lot.” The builders “jammed as many tenements together as was possible around tiny patches of land.”<sup>26</sup> The homes built, for the primary purpose of housing a labor force, were very basic in construction and amenities. Due to the housing demand, “Large areas of the city close to the plants were developed with what are sometimes referred to as cold water flats, consisting of three to eight tenement houses, three to four stories in height. These buildings were of frame construction with stone foundations, flat roofs with tar and gravel, small toilet room containing water closet with high wood flush tanks, a black iron sink and galvanized iron water pipe with no hot water facilities, no central heat and minimum light facilities. The rooms had plastered walls and ceilings, and floors were usually hard wood in the kitchens and soft wood in the living room and bedrooms.”<sup>27</sup> The tenements in this working class neighborhood were not in any means luxurious, but they were home to the working class residents of Lawrence.

By the 1920s, Lawrence reached the peak of its’ industrial expansion. The city had also developed a strong militant labor force iconized by the Bread and Roses Strike of 1912. However, in corporations’ pursuit for lower cost factors of productions, most important being labor costs, mills began to leave Lawrence. Lawrence experienced a similar predicament to other cities that faced urban renewal. “During the 1920s, mills throughout the Northeast had begun moving south to where cotton was king and unions were weak as peasants. While textile strikes, longer and bloodier than those in Lawrence,

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<sup>25</sup>(Dickens, 1981) p102

<sup>26</sup> (Cameron, 1995) p89

<sup>27</sup> (LRA, Urban Renewal Acquisition Appraisal, 1963)

broke out across the South, mill towns from Maine to Pennsylvania became blighted relics of America's industrial past. In 1949, a boom year elsewhere in America, the city's [Lawrence] unemployment rate was 40%, compared to the United States peak level of 7.9%.”<sup>28</sup> From the years 1946 to 1953, practically the entire woolen textile industry in Lawrence and the surrounding towns either liquidated their business, or relocated elsewhere.<sup>29</sup> The Federal Government declared the City of Lawrence as a ‘disaster area’ because of the unemployment caused by the loss of the textile industry. With the advent of alternative energy sources, the need for water power became less critical. Capital was no longer dependent on locations, such as Lawrence, near large rivers. As a result, many mills were free to locate anywhere, especially *not* near strong unionized labor pools demanding living wages; and that's exactly what they did. Jobs were scarce and many amenities were moving to the suburbs as well. Appraisers in Lawrence characterized the flight of these companies, and the lack of new industrial plants, as the tendency of the industry to locate away from the older industrial centers to locations along or close to super-highways with no traffic problems.<sup>30</sup> In addition, it was stated that, “The popularity of neighborhood, community and regional shopping centers has affected the profitability operation of retail and commercial stores in the downtown business district.”<sup>31</sup> The loss of these large employers in Lawrence had a harmful domino effect that escalated throughout the city.

Lawrence had lost its place as a production capital in New England with the advent of alternative sources of energy. No longer was the location of production

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<sup>28</sup>(Watson, 2005)

<sup>29</sup>(LRA, Urban Renewal Acquisition Appraisal, 1963)

<sup>30</sup>(LRA, Urban Renewal Acquisition Appraisal, 1963)

<sup>31</sup>(LRA, Urban Renewal Acquisition Appraisal, 1963)

determined by the geographically fixed water power sources. The mills were leaving, the residents were losing their jobs and the city was losing tax revenue. Despite the economic downturn, residents were adapting to their environment, and the unemployment situation was improving. Since 1950, there has been a “concerted effort by the citizens of the city to replace the vacant mill buildings with diversified industry. Their efforts have been repaid by a gradual influx of diversified industry.” While a hodgepodge of different companies moved into Lawrence, many of the younger workers have also found employment outside the city, but continue to live in the city. By 1964, unemployment dropped to 6.2%, based on 5,450 unemployed, but at the same time the workforce shrunk by 1,500.<sup>32</sup> Meanwhile, less and less people were choosing to live and work in Lawrence due to the lack of opportunities available to them. At the same time, the City of Lawrence was clamoring to regain the tax revenues it was once accustomed to. Appraisers for the Lawrence Redevelopment Authority in the 1960’s suggest that “there are several factors which affect the financial status of the city; the physically deteriorated and functionally obsolete tenement districts will not produce sufficient real estate tax and Lawrence is plagued by a too extensive commercial district.” Although Lawrence was slowly rebounding, the LRA and city officials believed there were obstacles standing in the way of faster growth and tax revenue.

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<sup>32</sup> (Buckley, Editor's Note, 1964)

## Dilemma of Lawrence

“The thing generally raised on city land is taxes.”  
– Charles Dudley Warner, novelist

The atmosphere in Lawrence had been ripe a considerable amount of time, for a way to regain the peak industrial high point the city experienced in the 1920s. With the departing textile and supporting industries closing up shop in Lawrence, the city needed a solution to stem the exodus of their economic engines; or at least mitigate the damages. The city’s unemployment was still considered high, and most decrease to the unemployment numbers were only due only to a decrease in the labor pool. From 1950 to 1960, the population decreased by 12%, as many residents lacking gainful employment moved. Accompanying the loss in population, were vacancies in housing and stores, especially in the downtown area. Property values were decreasing, tax revenues were down, and there was a great deal of revenue loss from the migration of commercial activity. The incumbent Mayor John Buckley, attested to the city’s dilemma and potential solution in 1964; “Problem and opportunity are nowhere more clearly displayed than in downtown, which is not the rich source of tax revenue it should be, because of vacant stores. The stores can’t be filled until parking and traffic problems are solved, to make the business district more vigorously competitive with shopping centers. Associated with it too, is the problem of blight in areas outside the boundaries (of the downtown); for in a geographically compact and congested city such as Lawrence, all parts must be sound and vigorous to prevent extension of deterioration.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> (Buckley, The Mayor's Address, 1964)

The Housing Act of 1949 was identified as a possible solution to the predicament of Lawrence. The intended goals of the Housing Act were to stimulate housing production, eliminate housing shortages and provide more affordable dwellings. In addition, the act allowed for the elimination of substandard housing to create decent homes, a suitable living environment, and an improved neighborhood. The Act made available an enormous amount of federal funds to combat 'blight', and conditions that stood against the intended Act's goals via an urban redevelopment process utilizing the eminent domain of dwellings. The Act authorized the funds to compensate at least 67%, up to 80%, the difference between acquiring land and selling it to private developers. The price of land sold to private developers was extremely discounted to make the projects economically feasible. The hope was that the subsidized land would entice private investment, which would otherwise not be economically or financially viable. The federal funds were intended for the purpose of increasing access to a suitable living environment, by increasing the supply and affordability of housing. The City of Lawrence officials' hope was that the funds, allocated for 'blight' clearance, would also be an effective means to revitalize the downtown shopping district and shore up tax revenue again.

The redevelopment of the downtown shopping district and the surrounding neighborhoods was seen as essential to make Lawrence more competitive to suburban shopping centers. Changing land use patterns to those which promote drivability, and include open space for ample parking, would be necessary to draw in shoppers. Tenement housing dotting the outskirts of downtown Lawrence also needed a face lift. To city officials, these neighborhoods were seen as 'blighted,' and the premise was that unless something was done, 'blight' would lead to slum conditions. The physical characteristics

of these neighborhoods were the core concern to city and redevelopment officials; most notably the physical conditions of housing. Urban redevelopment was seen as the means to eliminate ‘blight’, stop the spread of ‘slums’, and revitalize the city and downtown. At the time, redevelopment had become a socially accepted phenomenon, occurring across the United States, and endorsed by HUD and the Federal Government. Lawrence had reached its expansion limits, being only 6.5 square miles and built up at the time. It was the consensus among city and redevelopment officials that growth could only come from redeveloping the land, not expanding it. The justification was, when successfully accomplished, urban redevelopment should offer a new built up environment conducive to bringing in companies, shoppers, and increasing the city’s tax base and revenue; of which ‘blight’ was standing in the way. How or why these neighborhoods came to be ‘blighted’ was inconsequential.

Urban redevelopment, and the blanket use of eminent domain, is a drastic means to revitalize a city. The City of Lawrence did not have the means to acquire land and forcefully relocate its residents. However, the creation of a quasi-public entity, known as the Lawrence Redevelopment Authority (LRA), permitted urban redevelopment in Lawrence. The LRA acts as a private development agency, and is not under the same guidelines, or subject to the same ‘red tape’, as a municipality. A redevelopment authority is an independent body, not an agency of a municipality, and therefore does not answer directly to the chief executive. This affords the redevelopment authority more autonomy in planning and implementing revitalization and redevelopment projects.<sup>34</sup> The five member board was appointed by the mayor and confirmed by the city council.

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<sup>34</sup> (Mass.gov)



Federal funds for redevelopment were funneled through the LRA, which has the powers to declare what is ‘blight’, accept gifts, invest funds, obtain property through eminent domain, relocate residents and redevelop an area for a perceived public benefit. The LRA is also the entity responsible for the logistics of planning how an area will be redeveloped.

If the dire situation in Lawrence had any hopes of turning around, it could only be remedied by urban redevelopment. The comment so eloquently put forth from the city administration in the 1963 Eagle Tribune, on October 10<sup>th</sup>, attest to the audacity of disregarding anything, or anyone that stood in the way of redevelopment.

“Downtown is actually, and potentially a tremendous part of the city’s tax base. When the downtown declines, the tax base shrinks, and the tax burden on industry and homes is increased. Downtown is in a state of decline. The public interest of the municipality and the personal interest of the people therefore require that downtown regain its former prestige and receive the stimulus for steady growth. Nobody steps on a man’s toes without angry protest. But, the individual protests are comparable to the trees that obscure vision of the forest. They should not be permitted to blind either the municipal government, or the people to the forest of need, and of opportunity that lies in a plan to maintain and strengthen the downtown.”<sup>35</sup>

Urban redevelopment was coming to Lawrence, and no one was going to stand in the way of it.

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<sup>35</sup> (Buckley, Lawrence Eagle Tribune, 1963)

## **IV: Why the Plains Neighborhood was chosen**

### Milieu of the Plains Neighborhood

“Always the hardest working part of the city, the Plains had always worn the deepest scars of industrialization.”<sup>36</sup>

The Plains Neighborhood is the rectangle of land bounded by Lawrence Street, Haverhill Street, Hampshire Street and the Spicket River. The neighborhood was originally developed in the early 1900s shortly after the Spicket River was straightened to increase water flow and decrease stagnant water, thereby increasing sanitation. The Plains was characterized as a tenement district in the city, and was the exemplification of a working class neighborhood. It was in close vicinity to mill and factory employment, retail shops, community facilities and social clubs. Most importantly, the area was in walking distance to all necessities; social and subsistence. M. Edwards and Sons Appraisers, contracted by the LRA, described the fifteen block area as comprised almost entirely of three ethnic groups, with Syrian, Armenian and Italian Clubs, restaurants, and shopping facilities.<sup>37</sup> The locale was dense with tenement homes and small businesses, which primarily catered to the Plains and nearby neighborhoods. The main shopping district in Lawrence, Essex Street, was less than a quarter mile away. Appraisers who surveyed the Plains commented at the time that "churches and schools are conveniently located within walking distance to the neighborhood" and "together with stores and

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<sup>36</sup>(Cameron, 1995) p96

<sup>37</sup> (Sons, 1966)

services available in the immediate area of the subject property there seems to be adequate facilities immediately available in the neighborhood.”<sup>38</sup>

Illustrated below is a map created by Whipple and Magane Appraisers, differentiating each section of the neighborhood. (Figure 3:1) Whipple and Magane was one of many appraisal companies who surveyed the area for the LRA in the 1960s. Each color represents a section of the neighborhood that shares a similar characteristic in terms of use, function and design. (Table 3:1) Please note that the large unnamed green parcel, right of the City Yard, was eventually taken as part of the redevelopment.

Figure 3:1: Milieu of the Plains Neighborhood<sup>39</sup>



<sup>38</sup> (LRA, 1966)

<sup>39</sup> (LRA, Urban Renewal Acquisition Appraisal, 1963)

Table 3:1 Milieu of the Plains Neighborhood Legend

<u>Color</u>	<u>Description</u>
Red	Tenement buildings
Orange	Haverhill Street was once a ‘prestige’ location. The resulting homes have since been converted into offices and apartments
Blue	Heavily traveled street with mostly two, three and four story buildings with shops on the first floor
Yellow	Less traveled street with mostly two, three and four story buildings with shops on the first floor
Purple	A main thoroughfare with stores and tenements which face the street
Brown	Business only area
Green	Parcels that will not be taken. Includes the Lawrence High School, Church Property, and Elderly Housing

The image below was taken during the redevelopment of ‘Broadway-Essex’ and ‘Common Valley & Concord Project’, which is the main shopping district of the city. (Figure 3:2) The image illustrates the demolition stage of this project, as well as an outline of the Plains Neighborhood in the planning stage. The yellow outline in the aerial view below represents the Plains, defined as the “Project Area.” It is approximately 61 acres of highly built up land, where in 1960, there were 742 families, 155 individuals, and 126 businesses residing.<sup>40</sup> To put the size into context, the average redevelopment area is 48 acres.<sup>41</sup> Also, viewable in the aerial image, is the Common Valley & Concord Redevelopment Project, defined as ‘Urban Renewal Area under Development,’ that was in progress at the time this photograph was taken. Note, not all identification numbers are on the image.

<sup>40</sup> (LRA, Survey and Planning Application, 1961)

<sup>41</sup> (Anderson, 1964) p136

Figure 3:2 Aerial Image of the Plains, circa 1960<sup>42</sup>

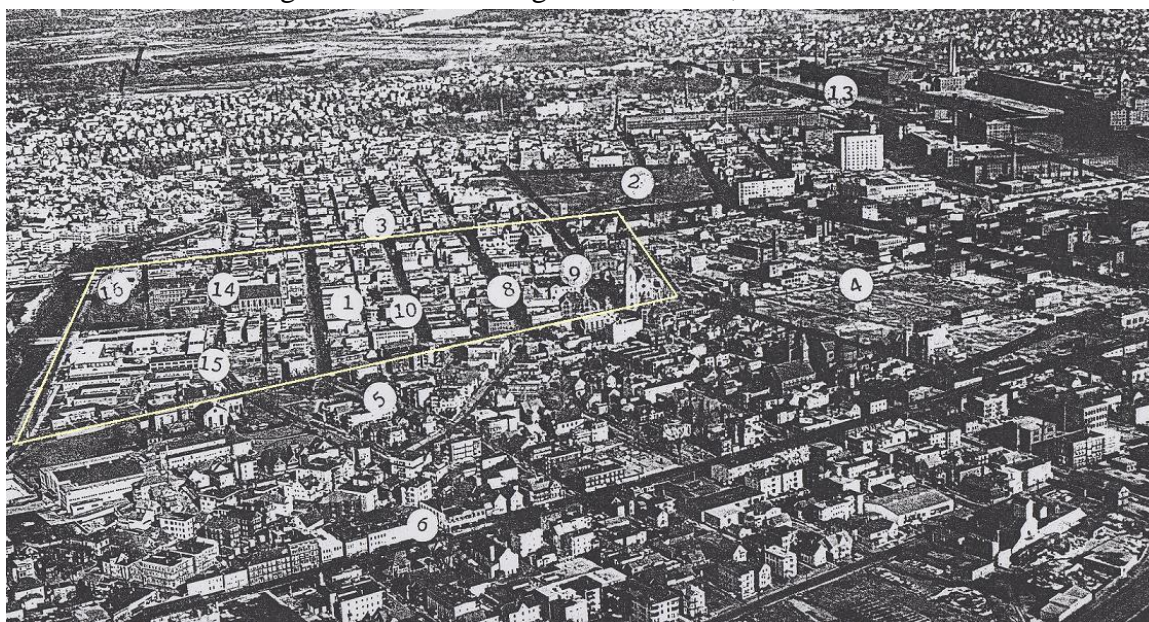


Table 3:2 Aerial Image of the Plains Legend

1) Project Area	10) Elm Street
2) Lawrence Common	11) Essex Street
3) Lawrence Street	12) Chestnut Street
4) Urban Renewal Area Under Development	13) Merrimack Street
5) Hampshire Street	14) Maple Street
6) Broadway (Route 28)	15) Auburn Street
7) Spicket River	16) Cetillion Street
8) Oak Street	17) Bennington Street
9) Haverhill Street	*some location markers are missing

<sup>42</sup> (LRA, Urban Renewal Acquisition Appraisal, Neighborhood Analysis, 1963)

## The Plains Neighborhood: Perspective of Physical and Community Characteristics

“In many poor areas, residents struggle to build community in the midst of abandonment. Blight, while sometimes obvious, remains in the eye of the beholder.”<sup>43</sup>

To fully comprehend why and how a large neighborhood could be razed in the name of progress, we need to understand the importance of perspective, and how influential rhetoric can be. I have broadly differentiated the milieu of the Plains Neighborhood into a perspective of persons living in, or containing intimate knowledge of the community; and of a more bird’s eye view of persons not living in the Plains, with an outside perspective. The many unique vantage points assembled together collectively portray the neighborhood’s characteristics. These sources encompass Lawrence Redevelopment Authority employee statements, reports, minutes, and many contracted appraiser records, in addition to pertinent newspaper articles. Most enlightening, are seven transcribed interviews, each with a unique perspective of the Plains redevelopment. Each oral history provides an enlightening impression of urban renewal in the Plains. At times, the perception of the neighborhood is so drastic, it is inconceivable to think that the same place is being described. Nevertheless, it is crucial in grasping how perspective influenced the LRA’s decision to redevelop the Plains.

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<sup>43</sup>(Pritchett, 2003)

## Outsider Perspective

“What we see depends mainly on what we look for” – John Lubbock, biologist

The ‘outsider’ perspective consists mostly of internal Lawrence Redevelopment Authority records. These records were very meticulous in detailing the Plains’ physical characteristics and were shared among the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Lawrence City Council, and other city officials. The majority of reports attesting to the Plains Neighborhood were done by three main appraisal groups; Whipple and Magane, M. Edwards and Sons Appraisers, and Candeb, Fleissig and Associates, but there were also other consultants. The documents created by these appraisal groups were compiled and organized by the LRA and eventually used as the justification for urban renewal funds dispersed from HUD. Therefore, the records are very precise with information pertinent to what is needed to obtain finances and approval for redevelopment. The internal records also provide insight into how other entities viewed the Plains Neighborhood, as well as possible causes of disinvestment; unbeknownst to even the Plains residents.

The Plains Neighborhood was located in what was called a General Neighborhood Renewal Area, or GNRA. The GNRA was approximately 200 acres of land, roughly in the center of Lawrence, which was designated to be revitalized in some way. Previous and subsequent urban redevelopment projects in Lawrence were also located in the GNRA. To qualify to be in this area, only 20% of structures needed to be considered ‘deficient.’<sup>44</sup> The Plains did surpass this standard, according to appraisers contracted by

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<sup>44</sup> (LRA, Urban Renewal Acquisition Appraisal, 1963)

the LRA. Of the 300 buildings in the project area, 252 need to be acquired and demolished. Of the 252, more than 77% (194) were substandard to such a degree that they warranted clearance. 243 or 96% distributed throughout the project area contained deficiencies which were deemed a blighting influence on the area as a whole. The study revealed that the remaining 9 buildings were sound and non-deficient. However, the study concluded, that based on an examination of these buildings, and of the location they occupy, they must be acquired in order to effectively prepare a sound plan for the reuse of the whole area.<sup>45</sup>

A preliminary survey conducted in 1960, for initial HUD approval and funding for redevelopment, depicted the neighborhood and only the exterior of structures. It reported conditions in the Plains Neighborhood as being overcrowded with an inadequate street layout and not enough play space, stating; "the high school has no contiguous play area necessitating use of the Commons (across a major thoroughfare) for recess and recreation." The Survey and Planning Application to HUD also reported excessive dwelling unit density, incompatible uses or land use relationships, and obsolete buildings not suitable for rehabilitation or conversion. The survey also declared there were other identifiable hazards to health, safety and to the general well-being of the community in addition to, "inadequate public utilities' or community facilities contributing to unsatisfactory living conditions or economic decline."<sup>46</sup> This initial survey documented only the exterior of structures and was conducted without any contact, or involvement, of the Plains residents. The preliminary survey declared that, 156 or 52.9% of the total 295 structures were noted to contain one or more building deficiencies. 52.9% was the

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<sup>45</sup> (LRA, Detailed Analysis of Project Area, 1962)

<sup>46</sup> (LRA, Survey and Planning Application, 1961)



significant number that identified the Plains Neighborhood as a candidate for redevelopment. "An area is appropriate for clearance and redevelopment if more than 50% of the buildings in the area are shown by reasonable criteria to be substandard to a degree warranting clearance; or more than 20% of the buildings must be substandard requiring clearance, and substantial other clearance must be warranted to effectively remove blighting influences such as: there is 156 or 52.9% substandard."<sup>47</sup> By a margin of less than three percent, the Plains Neighborhood was on track to be redeveloped.

With the funding provided by HUD's acceptance of the initial survey, subsequent surveys documented conditions in much greater detail, down to each individual parcel. These property assessments were instrumental in the validation of redevelopment; so much depended on the plumbing and heating capabilities of these structures as *raison d'être*. The more specific surveys and appraisals revealed there were approximately 150 vacant dwelling units (not buildings) in the project area.<sup>48</sup> These surveys were also more precise, as they also examined the interior dwelling conditions. M. Edwards and Sons Appraisers report on housing is as follows: "With exception to a small number of structures, these are wood framed structures more than 60 years of age; almost without exception they are without central heat, most of them having two-piece baths or toilet facilities only. In general these properties have hot water."<sup>49</sup> Please see Table 3:3 for the condition of structures and dwellings inspected by appraisers.

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<sup>47</sup> (LRA, Survey and Planning Application, 1961)

<sup>48</sup> (LRA, Urban Renewal Acquisition Appraisal, 1963)

<sup>49</sup> (LRA, General Discription of Structures within the Area, 1966)

Table 3:3 Plains Neighborhood Condition

<b>1963 Appraisal Report of Neighborhood Condition</b>				
	<u>Structure Conditions</u>	<u>Structures</u>		
		Number	Percent	
abandoned, not repairable or negligent maintenance no hot water, bath, or toilet	Dilapidated/Derelict	171	65.8	(a)
	Plumbing deficiencies	57	24.7	(b)
at least one dwelling in structure needing repair no central heat	Containing dwelling in need of major repair	164	71	(b)
	Heating deficiencies	178	77.1	(b)
(a)based on all 260 structures (b)based on 231 entered & inspected				
	<u>Dwelling Condition</u>	<u>Dwelling Units</u>		
		Number	Percent	
	Lack of adequate heat	503	78.5	
	Lack running hot water	150	23.4	
	Lack private bath	73	11.4	
	Lack private toilet	17	2.7	
	Lack 1 or more of above	519	81	
*641 Dwelling were entered and inspected				
	<u>Condition</u>	<u>Other Factors</u>		
		Number	Percent	
	Dilapidated	462	72.1	
	Overcrowded	24	3.7	
	Lack of dual egress	10	1.6	
	In rear structure	44	6.9	
*641 Dwelling were entered and inspected				
Source: Final Project Report, Part I March, 1963 Conducted August, 1962				

Of the 260 structures that contain housing accommodations, 231 were inspected and 171 were found to be dilapidated or derelict. 57 units contained plumbing deficiencies. 164 units were need in of major repairs and 178 units had heating deficiencies. Based on the daunting statistics, the contracted appraisers, Caneub, Flessig and Associates stated, “In the opinion of our consultants the area is detrimental to safety, health, morals, welfare and the sound growth of Lawrence, since 254 or 84% of the total buildings are deficient and 196 of the buildings are substandard to a degree warranting clearance. This meets the requirements of the laws of the Commonwealth which defines a substandard area as follows: “Substandard area, an area wherein dwellings predominate

which, by reason of dilapidation, overcrowding, faulty arrangements or design, lack of ventilation, light or sanitation facilities, or any combination of these factors, are detrimental to safety, health, morals, welfare or sound growth of a community.”<sup>50</sup>

In addition to the detailed account of the number of toilets and lack of central heat, the Plains Neighborhood’s residents were also characterized by contracted appraisers and consultants. Being the pinnacle of a working class neighborhood, the Plains had very little political clout or power in Lawrence. In a survey conducted by Whipple and Magane, the consultants declared, under the category 'Prestige in terms of Social Standing,' that “The neighborhood has no prestige in terms of social standing.”<sup>51</sup> The members of the Plains community were also illustrated as undesirable residents of the City of Lawrence. Whipple and Magane reported in their neighborhood analysis: “There is at the present time an infiltration into the neighborhood of residents of a lower economic status with less desirable social and cultural backgrounds.”<sup>52</sup> These views were congruent to the general consensus held by those outside the Plains Neighborhood as well. These views were particularly held by institutions such as banks, which viewed the Plains Neighborhood not worthy of investment funds. The attitude of financial institutions were unmistakable; “A survey of all the banks in the greater Lawrence area indicates that they will lend no money for mortgage financing in this neighborhood based on the security of the property itself.”<sup>53</sup> The lack of outside investment in the Plains was definitely a contributing factor for redevelopment. In the Neighborhood Analysis of the Plains, appraisers summarized that, “the subject neighborhood has reached the point of

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<sup>50</sup> (LRA, Detailed Analysis of Project Area, 1962)

<sup>51</sup> (LRA, Urban Renewal Acquisition Appraisal, 1963) No.10

<sup>52</sup> (LRA, Urban Renewal Acquisition Appraisal, 1963)

<sup>53</sup> (LRA, Urban Renewal Acquisition Appraisal, 1963) No.12

disintegration. It is very seldom in the sale of real estate, in the present age, that a purchaser has available the cash necessary to buy the property outright. Therefore, with financial institutions unwilling to lend their funds for mortgage purposes in the neighborhood, the result is that there will be very few sales and present owners being unable to sell, are inclined to let their property deteriorate physically and functionally, so that the degree of economic depreciation becomes extremely great.”<sup>54</sup>

There was one outlier in the appraisal records of the Plains Neighborhood which offer a different ‘outside’ perspective. M.Edwards and Sons Appraisers reported: “The area in general is fairly well-maintained. Most of the housing would be considered ‘standard,’ however there was some substandard housing. That would be housing with no bath facilities or hot water facilities.”<sup>55</sup> Nevertheless, these appraisers also consented that there was a lack of outside investment. Their comment is as follows:

“In considering these appraisals the Appraiser talked with the mortgage officers of the main lending institutions in the City of Lawrence. Having outlined to them the project boundaries of this area, and questioning them as to the availability of mortgage money from their institutions to potential buyers, he found that without exception, these bankers were not interested in the average applicant for a loan in this area. That is to say, they did not feel the area was a desirable one in which to loan money, and unless the applicant had sufficient security and sufficient reputation and established credit with them, they would not be interested in loaning money in the area. This was a feeling held without exception by these bankers and it most certainly reflected in the market-ability of property in the area.”<sup>56</sup>

The general consensus is that if the status quo were to remain, the Plains Neighborhood would degrade. What was certain was the lack of available credit and

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<sup>54</sup> (LRA, Urban Renewal Acquisition Appraisal, Neighborhood Analysis, 1963)

<sup>55</sup> (LRA, General Neighborhood Characteristics for the Entire Project Area, 1966)

<sup>56</sup> (LRA, Comment on Availability of Mortgage Money, 1966)

investment in the Plains. Additionally, the surveys conducted assured that every toilet and source of hot water was accounted for.

## Plainsmen / Plainswomen Perspective

“I never knew I lived in the slums until somebody told me that. As far I was concerned, it was not a slum. It was well maintained. I don’t mind saying that. The house was always painted.”- Mr. DiFruscia, former Plains’ resident

The only aspects of the Plains Neighborhood that contracted surveyors could grasp with any confidence, were the number of toilets, heating capabilities and hot water facilities in dwellings. However, a neighborhood is more than how residents heat their homes or their running water. Not captured in the appraisal reports were the important idiosyncrasies that make up a community. Viewpoints of informed perspectives representing the Plains community were not accounted for in LRA documents, reports to HUD, or included in any assessments of the neighborhood. The Plains’ residents could have provided insights into the actual community characteristics; insights, either by ignorance or indifference, were unbeknownst to LRA and city officials.

Inside the superficial facades of dwellings, are the persons whom live within them. Below are brief backgrounds of seven persons with intimate knowledge of the Plains Neighborhood and its redevelopment. (Table 3:4) They make up seven oral histories regarding urban redevelopment, which were recorded at the Lawrence History Center from 1994 thru 1998. All the persons represented are, or were, residents of Lawrence. Six of them lived in the Plains Neighborhood throughout the redevelopment process, and two of them worked for the LRA. Their perspective is paramount to any outside surveyor or contractor who assessed the Plains Neighborhood.

Table 3:4 Backgrounds of Narrators

<p>Narrator: Robert Hatem  Interviewer: Joan Kelley  Date: December 6, 2006  Transcribed by: Paul Trespas  Record Number: OH 662  <u>Background:</u> Narrator was a Lebanese resident who lived at 4 Auburn Street.</p>
<p>Narrator: Matthew Nastasia  Interviewer: Joan Kelley  Date: November 8, 2006  Transcribed by: Margaret M. Wall  Record Number: OH 661  <u>Background:</u> Narrator lived at 294 Elm Street as well as 339 Oak Street. Oak Street has since been renamed Lebanon Street. He has lived his entire life in the Plains Neighborhood, and resided in the last house demolished.</p>
<p>Narrator: Albert P. Manzi  Interviewer: Henry Young  Date: March 16, 1994  Transcribed by: Pamela Dollon  Record Number: OH 333  <u>Background:</u> Narrator lived at 217-221 Elm Street. He started Manzi Electrical in the Plains in 1945.</p>
<p>Narrator: Joseph Defillippo  Interviewer: Henry Young  Date: February 3, 1994  Transcribed by: Margret M. Wall  Record Number: Tape OH 330  <u>Background:</u> The narrator lived at 156 Maple Street. He worked for city of Lawrence and with the LRA as an interviewer of residents.</p>
<p>Narrator: Francis O'Connor  Interviewer: Joan Kelley  Transcribed: Margaret M. Wall  Date: December 20, 2006  Record Number OH664  <u>Background:</u> The narrator is a lifelong resident of Lawrence who has always been interested in municipal planning. He got involved in the LRA when he read a 1959 newspaper article reporting that the city was going to do a slum clearance program in downtown Lawrence. The program was the Common Valley Project. He was employed starting in July 1959 as a property manager and relocation officer for the LRA, and later for the Plymouth Redevelopment Authority and Massachusetts State Department of Urban Renewal.</p>
<p>Narrator: Theresa DePippo  Interviewer: Henry Young  Date: February 8, 1994  Record Number: OH 332  Transcribed by: Geraldine Kirk  <u>Background:</u> The narrator lived at 205 Chestnut Street and operated a bakery, with three tenements above it on Elm Street. She comes from an Italian family who settled in Lawrence in the early 1900 century and opened the bakery on Elm Street with \$100.</p>
<p>Narrator: Atty. Anthony DiFruscia  Interviewer: Joan Kelley  Date: July, 11 2008  Record Number: OH 701  Transcribed by: Paula Trespas  <u>Background:</u> The narrator lived at 79- 83 White Street; which was renamed to Amesbury Street.</p>

The Plains was a very unique community. It may have been poor, economically speaking, but was very rich culturally. It was safe neighborhood with residents who took pride in their homes and surpassed ethnic boundaries to develop a friendly atmosphere. The density of the Plains Neighborhood, with a common working class background, created an environment conducive to forming strong relationships with a high level of reciprocity. The neighborhood was so dense in population, that at one point, “The Plains housed 1/3 on 1/13 of city land.”<sup>57</sup> Density, although a rationale for redevelopment, is not correlated to blight or unhealthy living conditions. The ‘Report of the Lawrence Survey, 1912 studies in relation to Lawrence, Massachusetts’ stated, “in regards to congestions, especially close to mills, high density is not associated with poor health, rather poverty is associated with health problems.”<sup>58</sup> Density was not a negative aspect, on the contrary; “Close living conditions provided opportunities for immigrants to cross ethnic lines, but it was the performance of daily tasks that lasting bonds and close neighborhood networks formed and solidified.”<sup>59</sup> Mr. Hatem recalls;

“Those were glorious years, even though there was a world war going on and shortages, there was a bonding that took place in the neighborhood, that If you can recall, “I love mama,” and “Molly Goldberg” television show, well that’s the way our backyard was. Actually, the tenements were so close together, that the neighborhood, when urban renewal was announced, was talked about as the most congested population center in America. It was second to Harlem, NY. And those tenement houses were squeezed together so closely, that when you went up to the roof to dry your mint and dry mint products that the older mothers used – herbs and other ingredients – we could actually jump from one roof to the other. We in the tenement world, the asphalt world, we didn’t have many spots to plant, so what we’d do is utilize the rooftops, and we’d grow tomatoes and we’d grow cucumbers by filling boxes with earth and sand, and cultivating the vegetables on the rooftops, and this went on. You didn’t use the roof as a play pen, you used the

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<sup>57</sup>(Cameron, 1995) p83

<sup>58</sup>(Francis H. McLean, 1912)

<sup>59</sup>(Cameron, 1995) p91



roof as an opportunity to gather some sunshine to grow plants, so on one roof, you might have tomato plants, on another you might have cucumbers, and on a third there were the ones growing mint, and this is what the community gardens looked like.”

Mr. DiFruscia reminisced about cultural food as a catalyst to bringing the neighborhood together; “Well the neighborhood was a nice neighborhood. I felt it was a real mixture of different ethnic groups. We would exchange ethnic food, so your common denominator was food. There was some Lebanese people there, there was some Italian... a lot of Irish people because of St. Marys’ Church, Mary Immaculate. There was some French in the area because of the orphanage. There were also some Polish individuals of ethnic background, there were some Jewish ethnic background; we had a synagogue on Hampshire Street.” Conveying a similar sentiment of reciprocity in the neighborhood, Mr. Hatem stated, “Everyone shared; absolutely. Everybody shared. If the Italian tenement had the tomatoes and we needed tomatoes or two, we did.” Ms. DePippo recalled, “It was one big happy family.”

There was also a high level of social capital that had developed over generations in the Plains Neighborhood. Residents viewed themselves as equals despite racial and class tensions that still existed in the United States. Ms. Defillippo reminisced, “The Plains was really a mixture of Lebanese, Italian, Irish, Polish. It was really, really a melting pot. There was no other area in the city that was like the Plains area.” Of the same mindset was Mr. Nastasia, who recalled, “The heart of the Lebanese neighborhood was Elm Street. And the Plainsmen’s Club was on Elm Street. And everybody came over and it was such a friendly, friendly neighborhood. You didn’t think Lebanese. You didn’t think Italian. You didn’t think Polish. You just thought, you know, we were Plainsmen. We

were in the Plainsmen area and this is the way it is.” When asked if ethnicity was an issue, Mr. Nastasia replied, “It was not an issue. It was a great melting pot.” Mr. DiFruscia recalled, “There were Arabic bakeries, there were Italian bakeries, there were French bakeries.”

The Plains Neighborhood was not only an affable community, but a very safe one. Mr. O’Connor, who was a relocation officer for the LRA recalls, “In fact neighborhoods were all broken up by nationality in those days and my end of South Lawrence was kind of an Irish section. Sacred Heart Parish was the French section. Downtown Urban Renewal Program was pretty much the mixed bag of nationalities. It was a hodgepodge, but it was a good type of hodgepodge, in that because of the proximity of the homes and the families to each other, there was little crime at that time. You wouldn’t dare, like you couldn’t steal anything because 25 people would see you all the time. There were always plenty of witnesses around. So it was relatively safe.” Ms. Kelley, who interviewed Mr. Nastasia, asked him, “All the years that you lived in the Plains area, the front door to access the different floors was always open?” He verified, “Yes, it was completely open. There wasn’t even a lock mechanism on the doorknob. And when I decided to lock that door, I had to go and buy a padlock.” Mr. DiFruscia also had the same attitude, “It was just a fun place to live. We didn’t have to lock our doors.”

Pride and ambition were also overlooked characteristics of Plainsmen and women. Many residents found it possible to open small businesses, own homes and gardens in the neighborhood, which they took pride in. Ms. DePippo reminisces about her parent’s bakery, “They had a thriving business. They had people coming from all over.”

When Mr. Young, who interviewed Ms. Depippo, responded, “Sounds like your dad really took care of it;” Ms. DePippo responded, “They [parents] were so proud of that property. I remember, even as a kid; if you did something...painted your house, everybody painted. That’s the way it was. Everybody had to outdo the other. Their gardens had to be better than yours and all this kind of thing. This is your immigrant. Their lifeblood was in these homes that they worked so hard for. It was a kind of pride... for people who lived in my area, they were comfortable. There were some beautifully kept houses with gardens and everything else.” The same ambitions and aspirations were also passed on to the next generation. Mr. DiFruscia wanted to make evident, “I want to point out one more thing about the Plains area. The Plains area was really an area where the immigrants that were there, instilled within their own children a sense of hope, something that we don’t see too much today. There was no question that all of us that were growing up in the area would go to college. There was not even a thought about not going to college. And your parents wanted you to do better than they did. And that sense of learning about other societies and going on to college I thought was critical, and so you find that a lot of professionals started off in the Plains area; I’m talking doctors and lawyers.”

## Perception of ‘Blight’

‘Blight’ for whom, by whom?

Despite the discrepancies in the description of the neighborhood, the Plains was still considered a neglected area by outsiders. What the accounts of the outside consultants ultimately portrayed, was so eloquently summed up in with one word; ‘blight.’ Arguably, defining a location as ‘blighted,’ invokes sentiments of undesirable building facades, and undesirable people who inhabit them. Therefore, ones’ perception of what they consider as undesirable is crucial to what they would label as ‘blight.’ The rhetorical use of ‘blight’ is also instrumental in negatively characterizing something. Conversely, the one whom has been granted the legitimization to decide what is ‘blight’ is indeed in a position of power.

“‘Blight’ is a descriptive characterization, not an ascertainable fact.”<sup>60</sup> It has its origins in describing a plant disease. The term was used heavily during urban redevelopment in the United States to describe run down, physically deteriorating parts of a city. The use of this term is meant to conjure up negative images and assumptions on the noun it is describing. However, the definition is so vague, it can mean anything from a lack of parking and low property values, to high crime and unsafe or unhealthy conditions.<sup>61</sup> As far back as 1932, President Hoover’s ‘Slum Committee’ declared, “A blighted area is an area where, due either to the lack of a vitalizing factor or to the

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<sup>60</sup> (Sullivan, 1957)

<sup>61</sup> (Paso Robles)

presence of a devitalizing factor, the life of the area has been sapped.”<sup>62</sup> In addition to ‘blight,’ the term, ‘deficiency’, has been used to illustrate negative aspects of dwellings. Much like blight idioms, ‘deficiency’ has been used as justification for redevelopment. However, even the term ‘deficiencies’ is so subjective, the United States Census Bureau is hesitant to quantify this. “Housing quality is determined by many conditions, among them age, size, availability of modern facilities and adequacy of maintenance. The U.S. Census does not attempt to quantify housing deficiencies in any great detail. This is primarily due to the fact that a variety of standards exist as to what constitutes a substandard dwelling unit. However, two data items are enumerated (availability of plumbing and overcrowding) which are used to identify substandard housing.”<sup>63</sup>

Although there is some ambiguity to terms such as ‘blight,’ ‘substandard,’ or ‘deficient,’ one thing is for certain; they all convey something negative. All these descriptive adjectives constitute some problem, which needs to be fixed, lest it spread. “Blight, renewal proponents argued, was a disease that threatened to turn healthy areas into slums. A vague, amorphous term, blight was a rhetorical device that enabled renewal advocates to reorganize property ownership by declaring certain real estate dangerous to the future of the city.”<sup>64</sup> Playing on persons’ discernment of ‘blight,’ allowed for the declaration of ‘blight’ as justification for eminent domain and the subsequent redevelopment of the area. ‘Blight’ conditions, which in turn could lead to a slum, were seen as a contagious threat. Urban Redevelopment was seen as the cure. At least, this was the theory at the time. Physical attributes were legitimized more than neighborhood

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<sup>62</sup> (Conference on Home Building and Ownership, Slums, Large Scale Housing and Decentralization, 1932)

<sup>63</sup> (Newmarket)

<sup>64</sup> (Nedelsky, 1988)

attributes and physical structures were seen as an indicator of social structures. The premise was a vegetative disease metaphor, that being ‘blight’, could spread into disease metaphors of contagious slums that breed delinquency. Perceived ‘blight’ was justification; the key word being perceived. Similar to beauty, ‘blight’ is in the eye of the beholder. However, erroneous language was used to describe otherwise culturally vibrant and safe neighborhoods, to legitimize eminent domain and the spending of public monies.

Traveling up the hierarchy of negative adjectives describing neighborhoods and dwellings, an increase in deficiencies was also dreaded, as this could lead to ‘blight’, which could develop into a slum. The slippery slope argument even went so far as to characterize the people who inhabited the dwellings. It is not far-fetched to allude that the high ethnic population in the Plains would generate an atmosphere encouraging deficiencies, which would create a blighting influence, which would eventually lead to a slum; lest it be stopped. As stated earlier, appraisers depicted the Plains community as residents of a lower economic status with less desirable social and cultural backgrounds. Although, if one were to asked the Plains’ residents, they would get a different perspective. “To the working class people who lived in ‘The Plains’ and experienced economic decline..., the loss of income, economic deterioration, sickness, and poverty were not understood as individual failures, but rather as the outcome of forces beyond their control.”<sup>65</sup> “High rents and food prices, dirty parks and sick children, appeared not as isolated events but as somehow connected to wages, to ‘the powers that prey’.”<sup>66</sup>

Equally, if not more important than the obscure terminology used to describe a

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<sup>65</sup>(Cameron, 1995) p137

<sup>66</sup>(Cameron, 1995) p165

neighborhood, are those who decide what is a 'blighted' location. The LRA is the Redevelopment Authority with power, clout and the supremacy to declare what is 'blighted' and what *needs* to be redeveloped. The ironic beauty of the word 'blight,' for those who have the authority to declare its presence, is a wide margin of interpretations, from actual to perceived conditions. That distortion granted redevelopment authorities enormous influence. 'Blight' was a powerful term used as a justification for taking neighborhoods, but it was the entity who decreed what was 'blight', which had the absolute power. Who controls the use of 'blight' can also affect people's perceptions of what the controller declares as 'blighted;' which in this case, is the Plains Neighborhood. The LRA's perspective and their understanding of what a 'blighted' community is, and how to fix it, also influenced their behavior. From the LRA's point of view, the dwellings inhabited by the Plains' residents are mostly deficient. In their eyes, "These improvements do not meet socially acceptable standards. Thus, their destruction does not represent the waste of a socially valuable resource, and the improved allocation of land resources justifies the use of public assistance."<sup>67</sup> As a result of the Redevelopment Authority's insight, the presence of 'blight' grants the means necessary, the means being neighborhood clearance, to alleviate the harmful conditions. In addition, the LRA had the means to guide the project toward what they perceived as the best use of that land.

It's important to understand that what is defined as 'blight' is one sided and subjective to whoever declares it. The Lawrence Redevelopment Authority and their contracted consultants were the entities that declared the Plains Neighborhood 'blighted.' Their opinion is however skewed to their ideals, prejudices and backgrounds. Although,

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<sup>67</sup> (Schaaf, 1964)

there are different perceptions of 'blight' and interpretations of a proper community, the fate of the Plains was decided by those without any intimate knowledge of the community that was destroyed. What will become evident, further herein, is that the validation for redevelopment was at the sole discretion of an elite perspective without any prudence from those who would be directly affected. Even the goals of redevelopment are not representative of those residents who were displaced by the program. Redevelopment had the basis of being designed by a privileged group, not connected to the Plains; with objectives designed for a more affluent set of inhabitants, not those currently living there. It was implemented by 'outsiders,' with 'outside' goals.



## **V: Implementation of the Plains Neighborhood Redevelopment Program**

“Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”  
–George Santayana, philosopher and poet

The process of identifying, surveying, planning, and executing the redevelopment of any urban renewal project is an immense undertaking. The average amount of time it takes to complete a project, including three years of just planning, is approximately twelve years.<sup>68</sup> Nevertheless, many cities throughout the United States took part in their own redevelopment projects. By December 31, 1962, around the time the Plains Neighborhood was in the planning stages, 259,504 families had already been affected by the federal program.<sup>69</sup> By June 1964, there were already 1,560 projects throughout 750 cities.<sup>70</sup> The Plains was one of five redevelopment projects that took place in Lawrence. The following is the implementation of urban redevelopment in the Plains Neighborhood.

On November 20, 1959, the LRA voted to initiate a GNRA of 200 acres. The Plains, as well as the other subsequent and previous projects, were located in this zone. This designation was the precursor to redevelopment. At a minimum, 20% of structures had to be considered deficient to qualify in this area. Given the time needed to determine the percentage of structures deficient, this would mean that consultants were surveying in these neighborhoods long before 1959. On September 11, 1961, Lawrence City Council, without any commitment of the Council or of any city funds, approved the undertaking of surveys and plans for the Plains urban renewal project. With this, the LRA applied for

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<sup>68</sup> (Anderson, 1964)

<sup>69</sup> (Anderson, 1964)

<sup>70</sup> (Anderson, 1964)

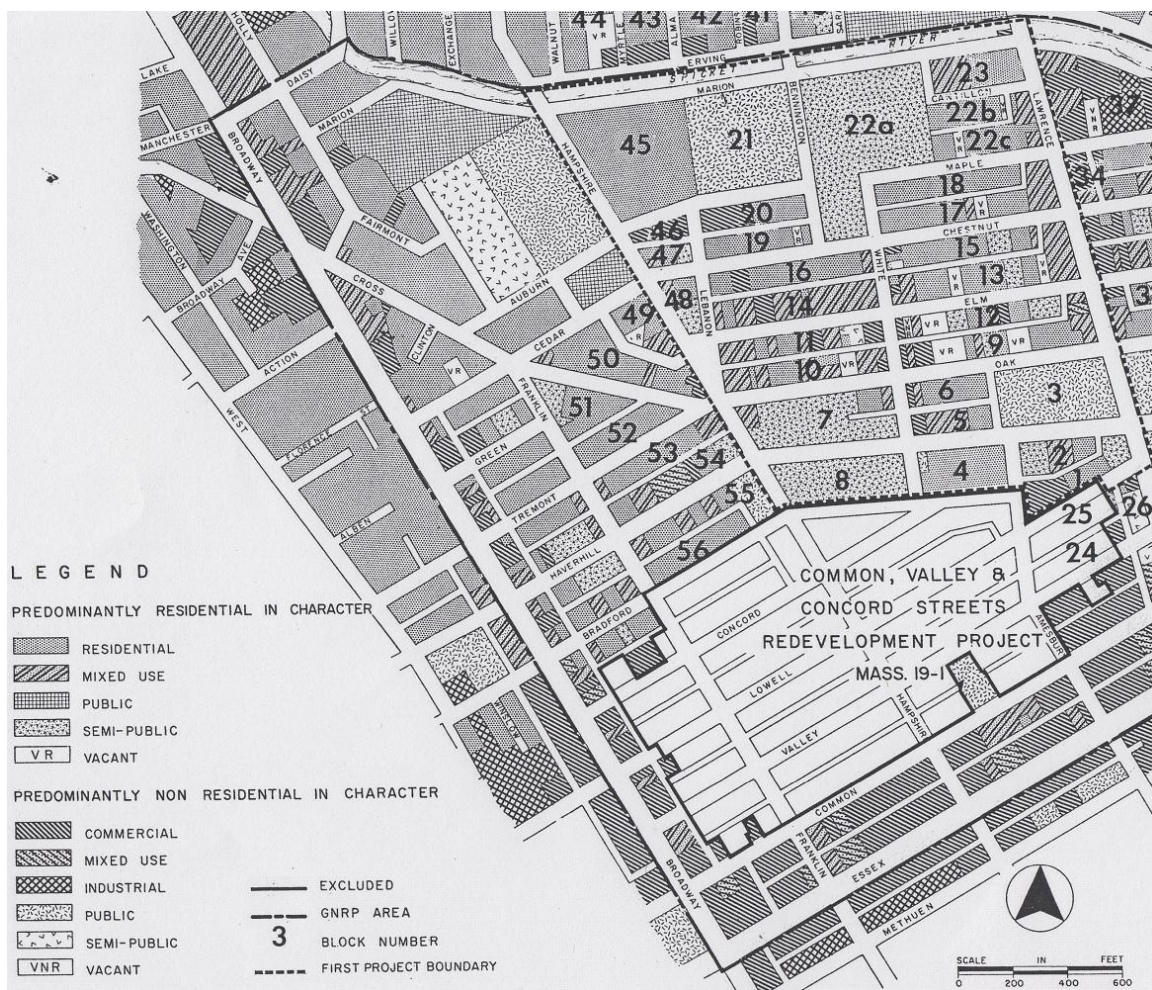
federal monies with a document called a ‘Workable Program.’ The ‘Workable Program’ included information regarding city codes, ordinances, a neighborhood analysis, financing sources and the administration organization of the LRA. In that same month, the LRA submitted to HUD, a Survey and Planning Application of a Field Survey done in October 1960.<sup>71</sup> Much information regarding dwelling deficiencies used in the application was already recorded from preceding surveys of the GNRA. For this reason, the application contained information dated before the City Council’s approval of the ‘Workable Program.’

Below (Fig. 4:1) is a Land Use Map of the Plains Neighborhood prepared by Candeub, Fleissig and Associates consultants, as part of the Survey and Planning Application. It provides an extremely detailed description of the physical aspects of the Plains.

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<sup>71</sup> (LRA, Survey and Planning Application, 1961)

Figure 4:1 Land Use Map of Plains Neighborhood, September 1961<sup>72</sup>



<sup>72</sup>(LRA, Detailed Analysis of Project Area, 1962)

BLOCK	STRUCTURES				DWELLING UNITS	
	RESIDENTIAL		NON-RESIDENTIAL		STD	With Def.
	STD	With Def.	STD	With Def.		
1	4	0	1	0	8	0
2	4	0	1	0	6	0
3	0	0	1	0	0	0
4	8	3	0	1	16	18
5	5	0	1	0	25	0
6	1	7	1	0	8	0
7	3	3	0	0	7	11
8	2	0	0	0	0	0
9	10	8	1	2	29	25
10	3	13	1	0	20	47
11	5	4	3	0	24	9
12	3	6	2	0	6	13
13	4	17	1	0	9	52
14	1	11	0	0	3	47
15	4	13	0	0	7	18
16	9	10	1	0	20	23
17	9	14	0	0	24	52
18	12	7	0	0	30	18
19	1	13	0	0	3	30
20	0	9	1	0	0	27
21	0	0	2	0	0	0
22 A	0	0	4	0	0	0
22 B	1	4	0	0	3	57
22 C	8	5	1	0	17	21
23	4	0	1	0	16	0
45	7	0	0	0	83	0
46	0	0	3	0	0	0
47	2	4	0	0	3	12
48	3	2	0	0	9	7
SUB-TOTAL	113	153	26	3	376	508

BLOCK	STRUCTURES				DWELLING UNITS	
	RESIDENTIAL		NON-RESIDENTIAL		STD	With Def.
	STD	With Def.	STD	With Def.		
24	0	0	1	0	0	0
25	1	0	0	0	0	0
26	1	0	2	0	0	0
27				PARK		
28	4	1	4	0	1	6
29	15	5	1	0	60	15
30	1	4	0	0	3	15
31	2	4	2	0	13	9
32	1	13	2	1	11	54
33	5	4	1	2	16	21
34	0	1	0	2	0	6
35	4	10	0	0	10	35
36	9	4	0	1	21	11
37	0	2	4	0	0	4
38	12	6	2	0	32	19
39				PARK		
40	0	7	0	1	0	16
41	0	13	0	1	0	37
42	4	8	1	0	10	22
43	5	2	1	0	12	9
44	6	5	1	0	22	20
49	1	8	0	0	1	26
50	20	9	1	0	45	22
51	7	3	0	0	19	5
52	10	3	0	0	27	9
53	11	1	1	0	31	3
54	8	0	2	0	26	0
55	7	1	0	0	17	2
56	8	2	0	0	3	30
SUBTOTALS	142	116	26	8	380	396
TOTALS	255	269	52	11	756	904

The LRA application was approved, and planning funds were dispersed to finance an initial study. On December 6, 1961, The Lawrence Eagle Tribune read; “Lawrence got ‘green light’ to begin surveying and planning for two urban renewal projects (The Plains and Broadway Essex) that will cost almost \$5 million. ‘Families will be offered relocations in decent, safe, and sanitary quarters,’ the Urban Renewal Administration said. Ultimately, the plan calls for the relocation of 742 families from the Plains project and 109 from the other. When planning is complete the Plains project will require a Federal capital grant of \$2,392,180 and the Broadway Essex \$2,585,758. These funds have already been reserved.”<sup>73</sup>

Around August of 1962, a detailed analysis was conducted by Candebub, Fleissig and Associates that would be included as part of a ‘Final Project Report, Application for Loan and Grant.’ The more detailed survey of the Plains identified conditions inside dwellings, cost estimates, timelines and updated neighborhood characteristics. As of August 1962, there were 451 families of 2 plus persons and 182 individuals, 106 commercial establishments and one institutional organization to be displaced.<sup>74</sup> As a result of this study, it was determined that a redevelopment project, which meant the acquisition and demolition of most of the structures in this area, was necessary to carry out the following:

1. To eliminate blighted conditions
2. To eliminate haphazard land uses which are impairing the sound growth of the community
3. To provide land for new residential structures which will offer the people of the community desirable housing accommodations close to down town Lawrence

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<sup>73</sup>(Buckley, Boston Globe, 1961)

<sup>74</sup>(LRA, Detailed Analysis of Project Area, 1962)

4. To provide land for expansion of community facilities
5. To provide land for expansion of high school facilities
6. To improve the streets system by the elimination of several inadequate streets and by the improvement of other streets<sup>75</sup>

In addition to the justification listed above, the report also outlined ‘specific objectives,’ which are as follows:

1. Improve traffic and community facilities and public improvements
2. Improve total living conditions
3. Improve transportation system
4. The effectuation of the Plains will provide for development of local commercial facilities and utilities to meet the needs of *new* residents.
5. The effectuation of the Plains will provide for improved housing facilities, a small park and enhancement of existing public and semipublic uses

It is interesting to note verbiage in ‘specific objective’ number four. The adjective ‘*new*’ is used to describe the residents for which facilities and utilities will be developed for. The report stated that, “All site occupants will be relocated into housing that will be decent, safe, sanitary, and suitable to their needs and adequate standards of such housing has been established. The renewal plan for the reuse of the land is chiefly residential with some commercial establishments to service the area together with professional office space. It is estimated that there will, of course, be sufficient off-street parking to service both residential and commercial use.”<sup>76</sup> The original ‘Application for Loan and Grant,’ submitted in March 1963, declared, the estimated net cost of the entire program will be \$4,917,153. Of this amount the share of the city's grant will be \$1,657,051. Relocation

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<sup>75</sup>(LRA, Application for Loan and Grant, Part I, 1962)

<sup>76</sup>(LRA, Detailed Analysis of Project Area, 1962)

cost is \$280,720. Total federal grant, including such relocation payment is estimated to be \$3,594,822.00.<sup>77</sup> The estimated completion date was December 1969.<sup>78</sup>

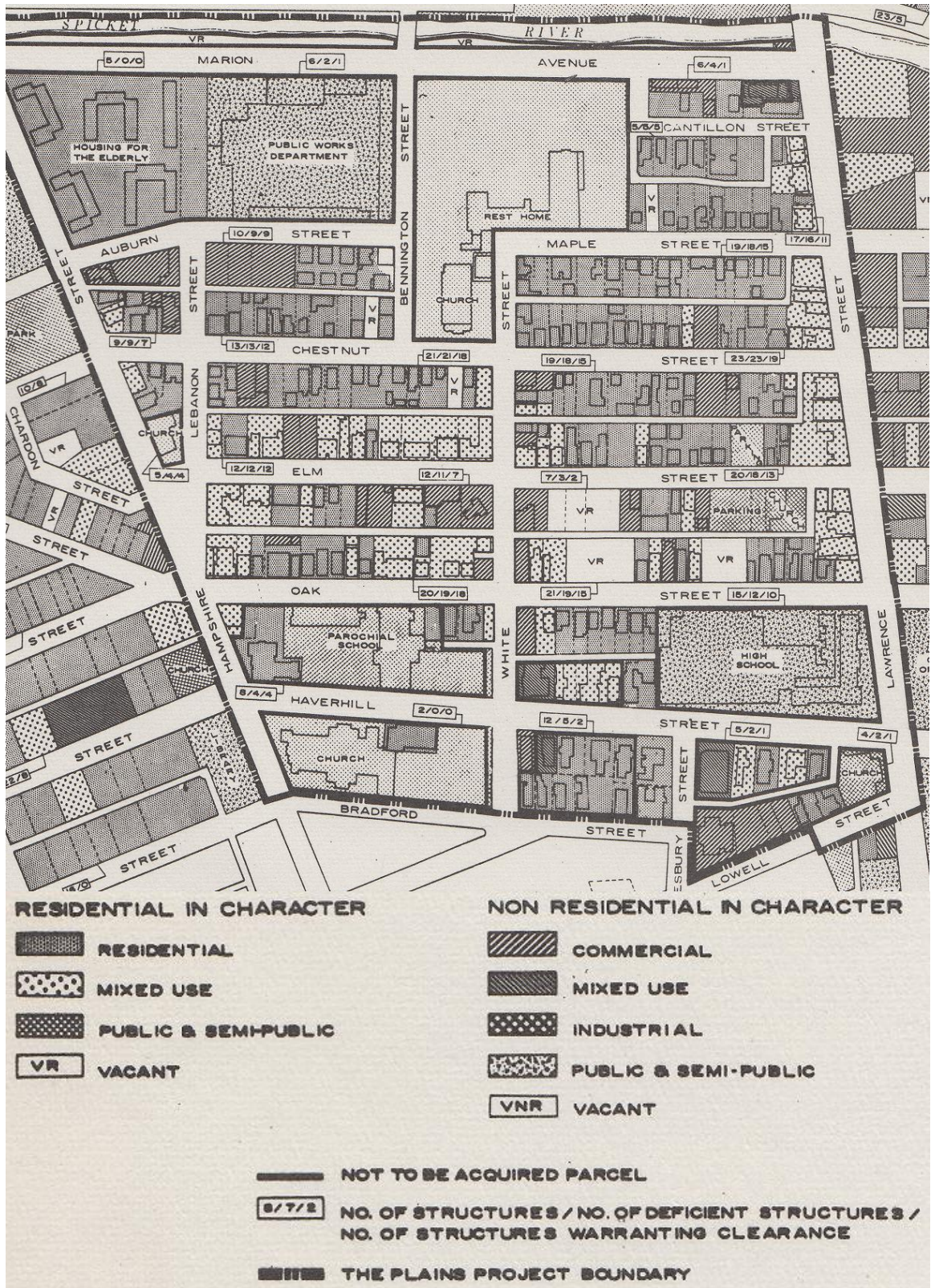
Below (Fig. 4:2) is a Land Use and Structure Condition Map, prepared by Candeb, Fleissig and Associates in August 1962, illustrating the number of structures on a block, including how many are deficient and how many are deficient warranting clearance.

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<sup>77</sup> (LRA, Application for Loan and Grant, Part I, 1962)

<sup>78</sup> (LRA, Application for Loan and Grant, Part I, 1962)

Figure 4:2 Land Use and Structure Condition Map





On October 19, 1964 the project moved out of the planning stage when the Lawrence City Council gave the LRA approval to initiate the redevelopment of the Plains Neighborhood. As of November, 1964, The Project Cost Estimate and Financing Plan reported the total project expenditures cost was up to \$4,215,300, of which the burden to the City of Lawrence was only \$481,142. Below is the estimated timetable for the project.

Table 4:1 Project Activity Timeline

PROJECT ACTIVITY	STARTING DATE	COMPLETION DATE
1. Land acquisition	September 1965	December 1967
2. Relocation of site occupants	September 1965	December 1968
3. Demolition and site clearance	March 1966	February 1969
4. Site preparation, installation of site improvements	September 1966	December 1969
5. Disposition of land	January 1966	December 1969
6. Rehabilitation to meet project completion requirements	-	December 1970
Source: Application for Loan and Grant (slum clearance and urban renewal program)		

Land acquisition involved the LRA paying the Plains residents fair market value for their property as well as a moving stipend. There were however, contested appraisal reports, but they were all eventually settled. The goal in relocating site occupants was to move the residents into suitable dwellings that were safe, sanitary and had no deficiencies. The first Relocation Report documents that of the 451 families of 2 or more; 100 will purchase housing, 120 will relocate to public assisted housing and 231 will relocate to private rental housing. Of the 182 individual households in the Plains that will be displaced; 100 will relocate to public assisted housing and remainder will rent private.

The Relocation Report also indicates that there was a substantial number of elderly. 267 dwellings had a head of household over 65. The Relocation Report does not account for 106 non-residential establishments. In addition, of the 451 families, 250 are not eligible for public housing, while the rest are. The Relocation Report also states that 374 of the 451 families originally rented, while 77 were owners, indicating a 21% ownership rate. However, not all residents were accounted for, at least 19 moved without notifying the LRA.

The updated Relocation Report of April 1969 documented where the residents actual moved. The report showed that a total of 450 families have been relocated; 20 to public housing, 380 to private rental housing, and 50 to sales housing. The relocation had slashed in half the original ownership rate of 21%, to 11%.

Originally, according to the 1960 consultant survey, there were 742 Families, 155 individuals, and 126 business concerns in the Plains Neighborhood.<sup>79</sup> In the 1962 survey, the population dropped to 579 families and 182 individuals, of which 451 families and 182 individuals would be displaced. By the time the project was executed in late 1965, only 308 families and 164 individuals resided in the area, based on an LRA survey. Many families had left the area in anticipation of the redevelopment, even those whose homes were not part of the project, but in the area. Of the original 163 families whose homes were not slated to be redeveloped, only 22 were left residing in dwellings not taken.

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<sup>79</sup> (LRA, Survey and Planning Application, 1961)

Below (Fig. 4:3 and fig. 4:4) are aerial views of the Plains Neighborhood during the site clearance process. The large building in the lower right was Lawrence High School. There are also asterisks in the image for a point of reference.

Figure 4:3 Demolition of the Plains, Aerial View<sup>80</sup>

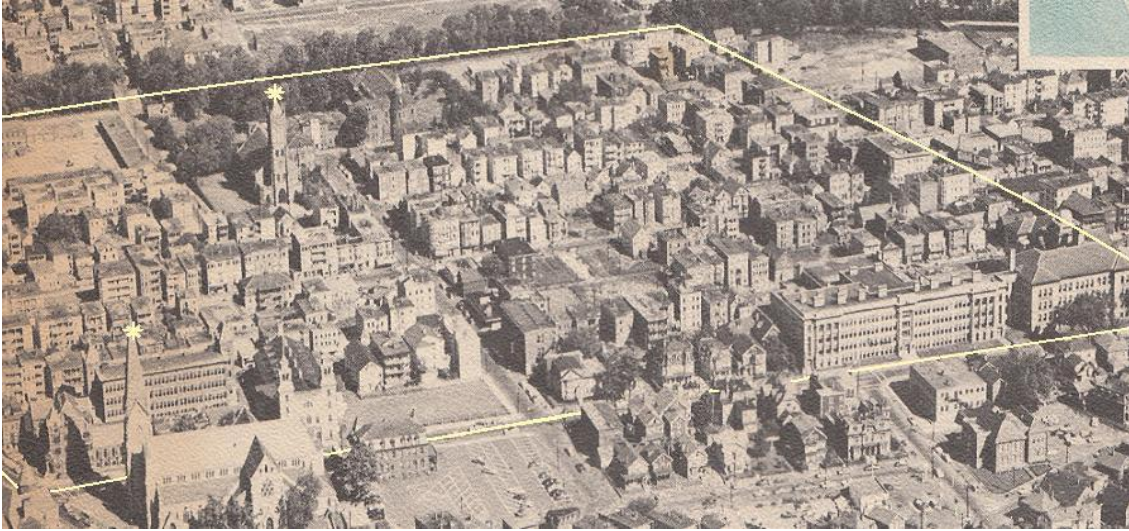
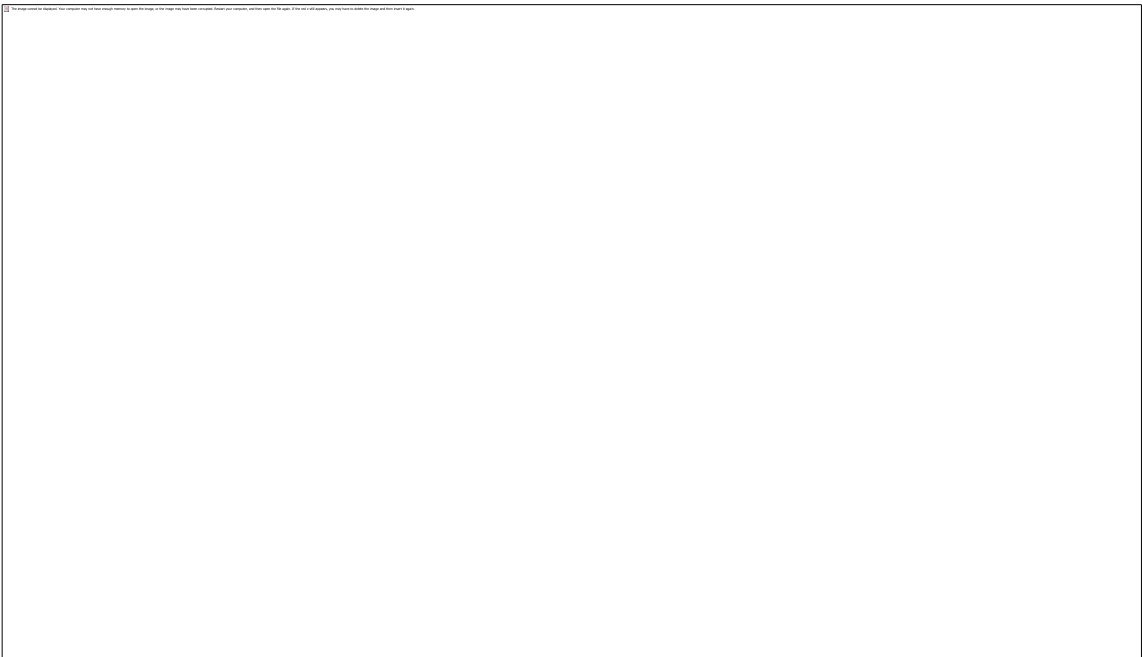


Figure 4:4 Demolition of the Plains, Close Up Aerial View<sup>81</sup>



<sup>80</sup> (Club, Thursday, March 4, 1971)

<sup>81</sup> (Club, Thursday, March 4, 1971)

After the residents had been relocated and the site cleared for development, it was up to private developers to build up the land. By this time, the cost of the Plains Redevelopment Project had more than doubled. The third Amendatory Total Project Expenditure Report from January 19, 1971, illustrated the huge jump in spending. The table below (Table 4:2) is a comparison of the original cost estimates from 1962, to the updated cost estimates for 1971.<sup>82</sup>

Table 4:2 Plains Project Expenditure

Plains Project Expenditure		
Year:	<u>1962</u>	<u>1971</u>
Federal Grant	\$ 3,682,158	\$ 7,459,408
Total Local Grant in Aid	\$ 1,580,682	\$ 3,518,705
Gross Project Cost	\$ 5,078,237	\$ 10,980,438
Source: Total Project Expenditure January 19, 1971		

A June 5, 1970 article in the Lawrence Eagle Tribune quoted that the total redevelopment for the Plains project rose to \$1,808,461. Conversely, “the city will be reimbursed by additional state and federal funds, and pay only 1/6<sup>th</sup> or \$301,440.”<sup>83</sup> Of the gross expenditure of the Plains project, the City of Lawrence incurred a portion of only 2.7% of the total gross project cost. The estimated completion date, which was December 1970, had been delayed almost two years, to a new date of September 31, 1971.<sup>84</sup> However, it was not until June 30, 1973 that the Lawrence Redevelopment Authority officially closed out the Plains Project. However, just because the project was closed, does not mean it has been completed, only that the last part of federal aid had been received. It does not mean that the construction is done, residents have moved in, or the land is even tax producing. For example, according to the City of Lawrence Assessors

<sup>82</sup> (LRA, Total Project Expenditure Report, 1962)

<sup>83</sup> (Buckley, Lawrence Eagle Tribune, 1970)

<sup>84</sup> (LRA, Total Project Expenditure Budget No. 3, 1971)

records, the average estimated year built for improvements in the Plains is 1977.

Therefore, the Plains project began around 1959, with the designation of the General Neighborhood Renewal Area (GNRA) and although officially ending in 1973, wasn't built up until approximately 1977. The Plains during that long stretch of time experienced diminished tax collections until about half the land was built up with dwellings, in around 1977. Below (Fig. 4:5) is a current picture of the Plains Neighborhood.

Figure 4:5 The Plains Neighborhood, 2011<sup>85</sup>



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<sup>85</sup> (local.live.com, 2011)

## **VI: Analysis of Redevelopment**

“We live in the present, we dream of the future, but we learn eternal truths from the past.” – Madame Chiang (b.1898) Chinese reformer

The adequate length of time that has passed since the completion of the Plains provides an opportunity to objectively analyze the impact redevelopment had on the neighborhood. Without a comprehension of how the program affected the neighborhood, residents, and the City of Lawrence, the desirability and influence of the program cannot be assessed. The following is a synopsis of the redevelopment’s impact on the Plains Neighborhood’s population, characteristics, and dwelling rent, as well as census figures and a tax revenue analysis.

### **Tax Revenue Analysis**

“Well you asked me Joan whether or not that thing was a failure, the urban renewal program. It probably was, probably was not as successful as it could have been. I doubt if it paying as much in taxes as it did, you know, in 1967 dollars.”- Francis O’Connor, City of Lawrence resident

The original land and buildings, which were acquired for clearance, brought in \$180,000 in tax revenue to the City of Lawrence in 1960. This is the earliest year for which revenue data exists, although it is likely somewhat depressed, as rumors were circulating well before 1960. Candeb, Fleissig and Associates study of the Plains, in August 1962 assessed the land and building value at \$1,475,000.00, bringing in tax revenue of approximately \$118,000.<sup>86</sup> Within two years, property tax collections had

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<sup>86</sup>(LRA, Detailed Analysis of Project Area, 1962)

fallen \$62,000. This is an approximately a 35% drop in tax receipts in only two years.

The baseline used in the analysis below makes use of 1960 tax receipts, being an accurate representation of tax revenue before property values began drastically decreasing from the intimidation of urban redevelopment. The following Plains Tax Revenue Analysis is partitioned into four scenarios; three representing the possible tax collections, and one representing the actual collections in the year 2008. Using Lawrence Assessors data, from 2008 and 1960 tax rates, the analysis is intended to provide an estimate of tax revenue under redeveloped and undeveloped conditions, with current and previous tax rates.

Scenario 1: Undeveloped, 1960 Tax Rate. If the Plains had not been redeveloped, and the tax rates did not change, the 2008 revenue collected would be \$1,309,275. It is important to note that this figure is the baseline adjusted for inflation; it assumes that real estate values did not rise faster than inflation. Being that most real estate values did in fact rise faster than inflation, this number is a good gauge of the minimum possible tax collection.

Scenario 2: Undeveloped, 2008 Tax Rate: If the Plains had not been redeveloped, and the 2008 tax rate was applied to the original land and buildings, the tax revenue collected would range from \$168,455 to \$345,830. The reason for this wide distribution of revenue is due to the change in property tax rates. Under 2008 tax rates, there is a two tier rate; commercial property is taxed at a higher rate than residential property. In 1960 there was a flat property tax rate for commercial and residential property. Given this predicament, \$168,455 represents all property taxed at a residential rate, and \$345,830 represents all property taxed at a commercial rate; the real revenue figure falls somewhere in the middle.

Scenario 3: Redeveloped, 1960 Tax Rate: Under the current configuration of land and buildings, but with a 1960 tax rate, the Plains would bring in \$2,027,174 in property tax revenue. In this scenario, all taxable property is taxed under the 1960 rate of .078 per \$1,000.

Scenario 4: (Actual Representation): Redeveloped, 2008 Tax Rate: This represents the current redeveloped Plains, with 2008 tax rates. Aside from property which is tax exempt, each property is taxed under a commercial or residential rate. In 2008, \$283,618 was collected from the Plains Neighborhood.

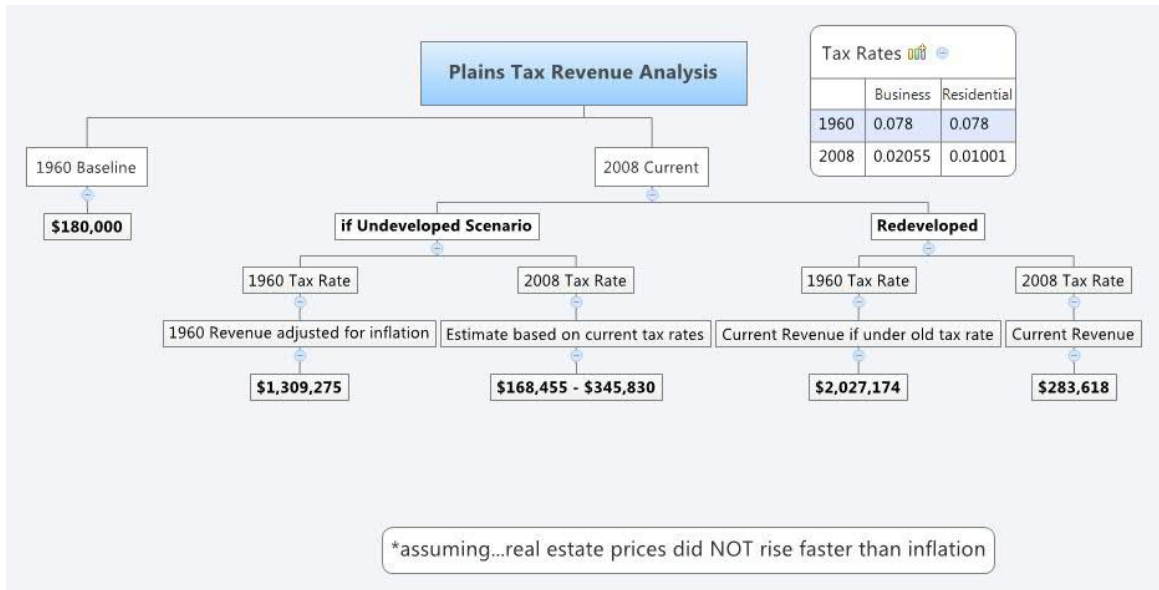
This analysis illustrates the City of Lawrence property tax revenue was impacted very little, if at all, by the redevelopment project. In 2008, the city collected \$283,618 in property taxes from the Plains Neighborhood. If the baseline is adjusted for inflation, under the lower 1960 tax rates, and not redeveloped, the city would be collecting \$1,309,275. Under the same circumstances, but under the current arrangement of land and improvements, the City of Lawrence would be collecting \$2,027,174. This does however show that the assessed value of the Plains has increased, but the decrease in current tax rates outweighs the increase in the assessed value, leading to an overall lower revenue collection. Also, the current revenue collected falls in the estimated range of revenue that would be collected if the Plains had not been redeveloped. This is the range in which all 1960 property is taxed at either a commercial or residential rate. Therefore, it is safe to say that this project has had very little impact of tax revenue collections for the City of Lawrence. Unfortunately, what is not reflected in the analysis, is that tax revenue decreased drastically in the years leading up to the project, greatly decreased during redevelopment, and did not pick back up until the mid 1970's. In addition, given that



property value might have been negatively impacted before 1960, since rumor of redevelopment existed then, the true value of the tax collected maybe underestimated. If this is the case, there is a greater loss in tax revenue then the analysis leads on.

The chart below (Fig. 5:1) is a concise snapshot of the current and possible tax revenue scenarios.

Figure 5:1 Tax Revenue Analysis



### Population Characteristics

A multitude of uniform, unidentifiable houses, lined up inflexibly, at uniform distances, on uniform roads, in a treeless communal waste, inhabited by people of the same class, the same income, the same age group, witnessing the same television performances, eating the same tasteless prefabricated foods, from the same freezers, conforming in every outward and inward respect to the common mold. – Lewis Mumford, *The City in History* (1961)

The Plains is composed of two Census Tracts, Tract 1100 and 1200. (Table 5:1) For the most part the Plains Neighborhood is represented in Tract 1100, as the dwellings south of Haverhill Street are not considered as truly representative of the neighborhood. (Fig. 5:2) The parcels between Lebanon Street and Haverhill Street are also composed mostly of church property and a Lawrence elementary school. Please see the map and chart, Figure 5:2 and Table 5:1, for reference of the census tracts and their socio-economic characteristics.

Figure 5:2 Plains Census Tract



Table 5:1 Census Tract Statistics

<b>2007 American Community Survey: Census Tract and Block Group</b>			
<b>Block Group:</b>	<b>2511001</b>	<b>2512001</b>	<b>Lawrence Average</b>
<b>Median Age</b>	74.2	34.4	29.9
<b>Median Household Income</b>	\$11,002	\$18,917	\$ 29,599
<b>Renter Occupied</b>	99.6%	95.4%	67%
<b>Average Family Size</b>	2.59	3.26	<b>3.5</b>
<b>Total Below Poverty</b>	27.0%	27.7%	<b>24%</b>
<b>Tract:</b>	<b>2511</b>	<b>2512</b>	<b>Lawrence Average</b>
<b>Total Below Poverty</b>	30.6%	27.7%	24.30%
Source: 2007 ACS			

The redevelopment of the Plains greatly affected the density and population of the neighborhood. The estimated total population was cut approximately 60%, decreasing from 6,115 people to a current population of 2,440. The population table (Table 5:2) is a detailed analysis of the 1963 population, the proposed population after redevelopment, and the current population which exists as of May 2011. The table is also further segmented into a permanent population and a transient delineation.

Table 5:2 Plains Population Analysis

Permanent Population Existing in 1963		Proposed Permanent Population		Estimate of Permanent Population June 2011	
761 Families x 3.5 avg. Family Size	2,664	386 Units Section 221(d)(3) x 3.2 avg. size	1,235	Misc. Housing	406
				M.I. Nursing/Care	585
		107 Units Elderly housing x 1.5 avg. size	160	Amesbury Garden	160
106 Businesses x 2.3 Employees	244	5 proposed business establishments x 2.3	12	M.I. Nursing/Care & Apartment personnel*	300
				Misc. Housing/ Apartment Personnel*	30
St. Mary Immaculate 122 beds + 18 nuns	140	Demolished	0	Demolished	0
St. Joseph's Rectory	3	St. Joseph's Rectory	3	Became St. Joseph Melkite Greek Church	5
St. Mary Convent Nuns	34	St. Mary Convent not acquired	34	St. Mary Convent Nuns	9
Total:	<b>3,085</b>	Total:	<b>1,432</b>	Total:	<b>1,495</b>
Transient Population Existing in 1963		Proposed Transient Population		Estimate of Transient Population June 2011	
Lawrence High 1,892 Students + 108 Teachers/Admin.	2,000	Lawrence High 2,000 Students + 110 Teachers/Admin.	2,110	Became Oliver k-8 618 Students + 55 Teachers	673
St. Mary High 565 Students + 25 Teachers/Admin.	590	St. Mary High 565 Students + 25 Teachers/Admin.	590	St. Mary Closed Sept. 1996. Became Notre Dame High	257
City Stable Employees	75	City Yard Employees	75	Estimate 10-19 Employees	15
Protectory of Mary Immaculate Employees	125	Demolished	0	Demolished	0
St. Mary Grammar School 230 Students + 10 Teachers/Admin	240	St. Mary Grammar School 230 students + 10 teachers/admin	240	St. Mary Grammar Closed April 2011	0
Total:	<b>3,030</b>	Total:	<b>3,015</b>	Total:	<b>945</b>
<b>Total Population Existing in 1963</b>	<b><u>6,115</u></b>	<b>Total Proposed Population</b>	<b><u>4,447</u></b>	<b>Estimate of Total Population June 2011</b>	<b><u>2,440</u></b>

As the Population Analysis (Table 5:2) demonstrates, both transient and permanent populations were dramatically decreased. The characteristics of the population

have also not been ‘revitalized.’ A newspaper article in the June 30, 1964 Boston Globe stated that, 18.5% residents of Lawrence made under \$3,000, or were poverty stricken.<sup>87</sup> According to the 2007 American Community Survey data, approximately 27% in the Plains’ two Census Block Groups are below the poverty line, compared to the City of Lawrence average of 24%. In addition to having a diminished population, the current population is also far below the average median household income for the city. (Table 5:1) Consequently, the current population has less disposable income, than the average Lawrence resident. The average family size is also smaller than the city average, and the median age is dramatically higher. The reason for a large population of poor elderly residents is due to the improvements that were built in the Plains. Of the 1,151 units of housing built, 566 were designated for elderly and 585 are part of Immaculate Mary Immaculate Health Care Services, an Elderly Living and Nursing Center and Amesbury Garden, housing for primarily the elderly. It is an exceptional peculiarity in whether to count an elderly population in a nursing center, as a transient or a permanent population, given their unique characteristic as not affirmably fitting in either category. Ultimately, it is debatable whether the population at Mary Immaculate is transient or permanent population. The average length of stay for these residents in an assisted living residence is about 28.3 months. 59% percent of these residents will move into a nursing facility, 33% will pass away, and the remaining will move home or to another location.<sup>88</sup> During those 28 months, if one were to distinguish the Assisted Living and Nursing Center as a transient population, then the permanent population of the Plains has been decreased by 2/3<sup>rds</sup>. This huge reduction in population has ultimately led to a diminished local

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<sup>87</sup> (Buckley, Boston Globe, 1964)

<sup>88</sup> (NCAL, 2011)

economy. This is evident in the number of business establishments that decreased from 106 in 1960, to only 6 businesses in the Plains in 2008. This also correlates to Mr. O'Connor's statement. He declared, "The businesses were the ones that were hit the hardest. I did feel some sympathy for the businesses, because for the most part, they went out of business." To put into perspective the desecration of local economy; in an average urban redevelopment project, only 1 in 4 businesses go under.<sup>89</sup> The Plains lost well over 90% of its businesses.

### Rent Characteristics

"We must stop talking about the American dream and start listening to the dreams of Americans." –Reubin Askew, former Governor of Florida

Another peculiar population characteristic of the Plains Neighborhood is the high number of renter occupied property; 99.6% of residents rent. The average renter occupied rate for Massachusetts is 40%, and for Lawrence it is 67%. The 251110 Census Tract characterized the Plains as a very far outlier in these terms, even compared to the rental status of the Plains before it was redeveloped. In 1960, the neighborhood had a 79% rental rate compared to a 68.2% average rental rate for the city. Interestingly, while the average rent occupancy rate for Lawrence decreased by one percent, the Plains jumped to approximately 100% rented.<sup>90</sup> However, an important distinction is that in 1960, there were 219 unique property owners in the Plains Neighborhood.<sup>91</sup> For the most part, these were owners of multifamily homes who lived in and rented out additional rooms. As of

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<sup>89</sup> (Anderson, 1964) p69

<sup>90</sup> (LRA, Appraisal Report)

<sup>91</sup> (LRA, Final Project Report part 1 for Loan and Grant, 1963)

2008, 1,059 of the 1,151 dwellings in the Plains are owned by four property owners. The dramatic shift in the distribution of assets owned is also a reflection of a loss in equity of residents in who lived in the Plains. Rental income which was once widely dispersed throughout the neighborhood is now siphoned off by a few large landlords. In addition, the owners of these large apartment complexes do not live in the area, nor contribute a great deal to the local economy.

Not only has the percentage of dwellings that are rented increased as a result of redevelopment, but the rental costs have too. However, due to the high rate of rent subsidization in the Plains, the increase in rent affects state and federal entitlement program expenditures more than the average current Plains resident. In 1962, the minimum rent charged for federal aided and commonwealth aided housing was \$35 a month, or \$420 a year. A rent survey completed in the Plains in 1962, (Table 5:3) clearly exposed that the residents in the neighborhood were paying very inexpensive rent. This is especially evident when compared to average rent charged for standard housing, which was two to three times greater in cost. For example, a December 21, 1963 article in the Lawrence Eagle Tribune reported that construction on a 28 unit, 3 story building complex, would charge rent (with maintenance included) of \$113 to \$135 month, or \$1,356 to \$1,620 a year.<sup>92</sup> The following tables (Table 5:3, 5:4 and 5:5) illustrate the average rent expense for residential dwellings in the Plains, variance in the rent paid and rental expense for standard housing in Lawrence.

Whether the residents in the Plains were living there out of want or necessity, it is apparent that their rent was a minimal expense, especially compared to other locations.

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<sup>92</sup> (Buckley, Lawrence Eagle Tribune, 1963)

Table 5:3 Rent Survey, 1962

<b>Plains Neighborhood 1962 Rent Survey</b>					
Residential Dwellings	No. of Rooms	Maximum Rent a week	Minimum Rent	Average Weekly Rent	Average Yearly Rent
2 Family	6	10.00	6.50	8.50	\$ 442.00
	5	15.00	5.00	8.00	\$ 416.00
3 Family, 3 Story	4	4.00	3.00	3.50	\$ 182.00
	6	11.25	7.00	9.00	\$ 468.00
	5	12.00	3.50	7.30	\$ 379.60
Excess of 3 Family	4	13.00	4.00	6.50	\$ 338.00
	6	8.00	5.00	6.30	\$ 327.60
Small Retail Store	5	9.00	5.00	6.50	\$ 338.00
		7.38	4.62	5.63	\$ 67.56

Source: Whipple and Magane Appraisers (1962)

Table 5:4 Schedule of Rent for Standard Housing

<b>Schedule of Average Annual Gross Rent for Standard Housing in Locality, Plains Project No. Mass. R-62. May 11, 1965, with 1969 amendment</b>			
Bedrooms	Gross Annual Rent, 1965	Bedrooms	Gross Annual Rent, 1969*
0	\$ 828.00	0	\$ 876.00
1	\$ 924.00	1	\$ 996.00
2	\$ 900.00	2	\$ 1,080.00
3	\$ 984.00	3	\$ 1,236.00
4	\$ 1,104.00	4	\$ 1,344.00
5	\$ 1,260.00	5	\$ 1,404.00

Source: Resolution of LRA, LRA minutes, May 18, 1965. Schedule of average annual gross rentals for standard housing. \*Amended for HUD 7/3/1969



Table 5:5 Variance in Rent Paid, 1962

<b>Example of Variance in Rent in 1962</b>					
Address	No. of Rooms	Floor	Facilities	Weekly Rent	Yearly Rent
283 Elm St.	5	2	Toilet, lavatory, tub	\$ 8.50	\$ 442.00
284 Elm St.	5	2	Toilet, tub	\$ 10.00	\$ 520.00
293 Elm St.	5	1	High tank toilet, tub	\$ 5.40	\$ 280.80
359-365 Elm St.	5	3	High tank toilet, lavatory, tub	\$ 5.00	\$ 260.00
203-205 Elm St.	5	2	High tank toilet, tub	\$ 8.00	\$ 416.00
		3	High tank toilet, tub	\$ 10.00	\$ 520.00
215 Oak St.	5	1	High tank toilet, tub	\$ 7.00	\$ 364.00
		2	High tank toilet, tub	\$ 6.00	\$ 312.00
		3	High tank toilet, tub	\$ 6.00	\$ 312.00
254 Oak St.	4	1	Toilet, lavatory	\$ 4.00	\$ 208.00
		2	Toilet, lavatory	\$ 4.00	\$ 208.00
		3	Toilet, lavatory	\$ 4.00	\$ 208.00

Source: Whipple and Magane Appraisers (1962)

## **VII: Why Urban Redevelopment Failed to Revitalize the Plains Neighborhood**

“I know up on the top you are seeing great sights, but down at the bottom we, too, should have rights.” – Dr. Seuss, “Yertle the Turtle and Other Stories”

There are a multitude of reasons why the redevelopment project had a detrimental effect on the Plains Neighborhood and its residents. However, most negative consequences stemmed from the LRA and city officials’ “omniscient” assumptions of how to increase tax revenue by focusing resources to creating a strong downtown shopping district. The Plains was, therefore, part of this larger strategy to create a more aesthetically pleasing atmosphere in Lawrence and thus, draw in revenue. As a result, redevelopment ignored the underlying causes of disinvestment in the Plains; as the real concerns for the architects were not the residents, but the attractive close proximity of their land to the downtown shopping area. The LRA made use of 1949 Housing Act funds for slum clearance, not chiefly to secure standard housing for its residents, but as an opportunity to increase the city’s diminishing revenue coffers. The Plains made an easy target for redevelopment officials to declare as ‘blighted’ and justify the subsequent clearance of the neighborhood for its own development goals. Ultimately, the Plains redevelopment failed to meet the intended goals at the city’s and residents’ expense.

## Uncertainty

“If you are planning for a year, sow rice; if you are planning for a decade, plant a tree; if you are planning for a lifetime, educate people.” –Chinese Proverb

A lack of communication between residents and those implementing the redevelopment created immense uncertainty, rumors, and ultimately negative outcomes for both parties. For the most part, the areas of Lawrence known as the General Neighborhood Renewal Area, or GNRA, eventually became redevelopment projects. (Fig. 6:1) “The GNRA was a preliminary step to getting federal urban renewal acceptance and monies.”<sup>93</sup> It is a defined area in which at least 20% of dwellings are deficient. If a GNRA turned into a redevelopment project in Lawrence, analogous to other cities in the United States, the neighborhood dwellings would be taken and demolished, despite community opposition. Up until December 31, 1962, less than 1% of federal funds went to the rehabilitation of neighborhoods.<sup>94</sup> Therefore, if one were a resident that resided in Lawrence, in an area labeled a General Neighborhood Renewal Area, (GNRA) there was a very good chance it would eventually be redeveloped, *not* renewed or rehabilitated. By the time redevelopment had reached the Plains’ residents, it had become increasingly clear to most residents what would be in store for them. The previous renewal areas in Lawrence had all resulted in clearance projects. Figure 6:1 is an illustration of the extent of the GNRA for reference. It also displays that the GNRA surrounds the central shopping district of the city.

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<sup>93</sup> (Sobel, December 1975)

<sup>94</sup> (Anderson, 1964) p<sup>21</sup>

Figure 6:1 1961 Locality Map<sup>95</sup>



The consequence of declaring a region a GNRA was the crowding out effect it had on investment. This simple label stopped neighborhood growth and development

<sup>95</sup> (LRA, Detailed Analysis of Project Area, 1962)

right in its tracks. There was little to no unsolicited construction and investment in GNRA's due to uncertainty that dwellings would be taken by eminent domain. This was especially true considering the precedent of eminent domain and taking of property in other previous redevelopment projects. The presence of LRA officials surveying and inspecting areas also created an atmosphere of uncertainty pre-GNRA declaration. There was also a spillover effect, as other areas of the city which showed signs of wear, not in a GNRA, were wary to invest fearing they may also become a GNRA. Additionally, the LRA's takings of 'non-blighted' property in 'blighted' areas resulted in property owners fearing upkeep and dwelling expenditures, even necessary ones, would be in vain. The director of the LRA wrote in a letter to HUD about the need to acquire dwellings in pristine condition, saying, "The City, on its part, is prepared to develop this facility, and such acquisitions as are necessary, to make the Plains project and the GNRP area an outstanding success"<sup>96</sup> All said created an atmosphere which encouraged the opposite of renewal and investment.

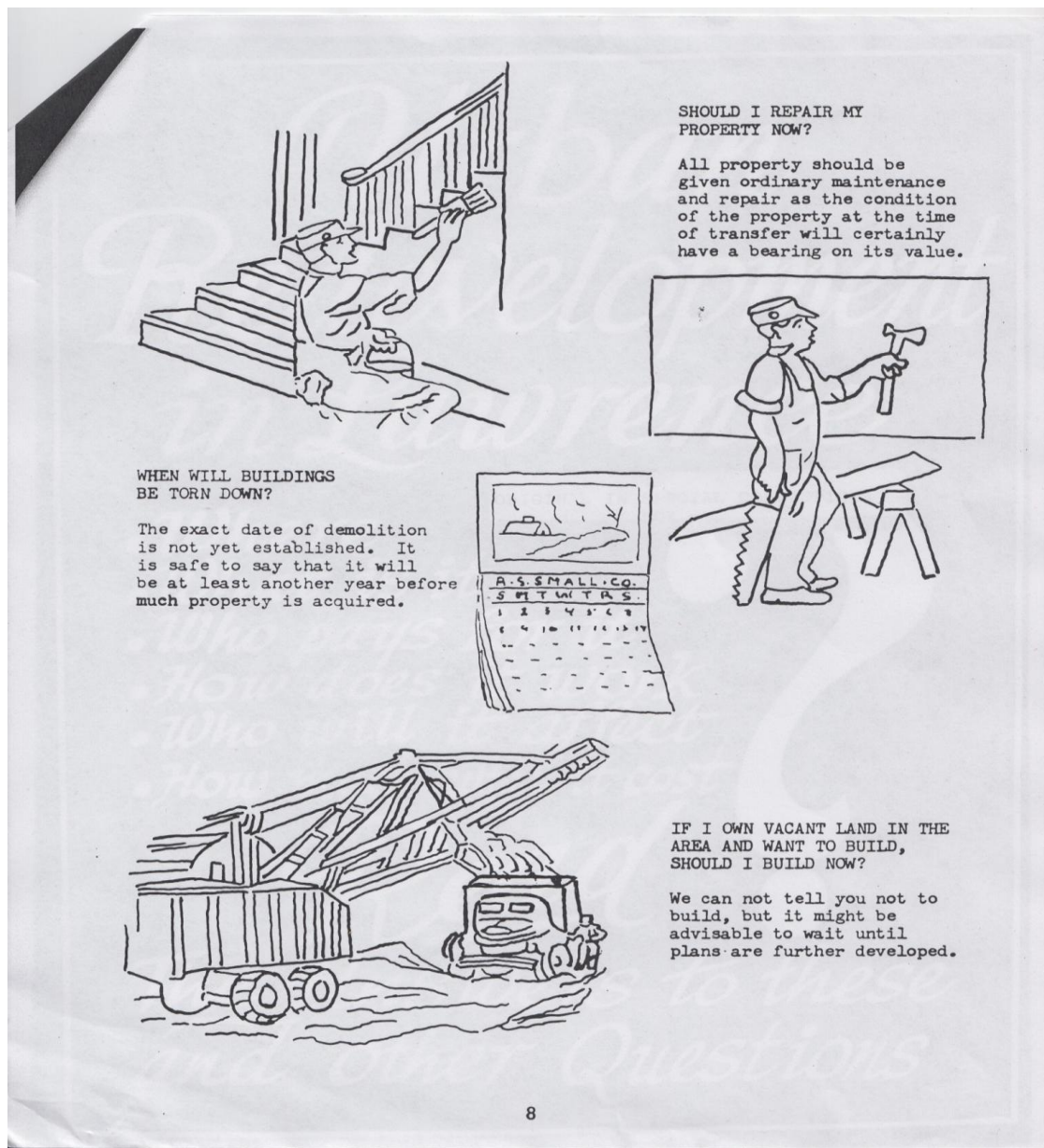
It is clear now that most dwellings were taken, but at the time it was uncertain to some residents whether this would be the case. Regardless, it did not stop the owners in the GNRA from being concerned, and they had every reason to fret. There was sparse communication to the public about the redevelopment project, and the information that property owners were given only created more confusion. Figure 6:2 is a page from an informational pamphlet dispersed to residents, describing urban redevelopment in Lawrence. The excerpt, "We cannot tell you not to build, but it might be advisable to wait until plans are further developed," consistent with other information released, was vague

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<sup>96</sup> (LRA, Amendatory application 1-18-1965 to 11-27-1968 , Letter Sent 1967)

and indecisive. Using words such as ‘might,’ and phrases such as ‘we cannot tell you not to’ further contributed to the vacillating atmosphere.

Figure 6:2 Redevelopment Informational Pamphlet<sup>97</sup>



As a result, property owners, who were at least mindful of what was going to happen, ceased to maintain their property. Mr. Defillippo, former LRA employee, recalled, “We did run into some landlords who said... ‘He knows the property is going to

<sup>97</sup> (LRA, “Urban Redevelopment Information, Lawrence MA.”)

be taken. Why should he fix all the-” In the Neighborhood Analysis of the Plains, appraisers also documented that investment had dropped off. In 1963, four years after GNRA declaration, Whipple and Magane appraisers cited, “The neighborhood at the present time is stagnant with little or no improvement or new construction.”<sup>98</sup>

From the very first step in the redevelopment of Lawrence, initiating the GNRA, anxiety as to what exactly was going to happen, was rampant. The initiation of the GNRA, a procedural step in gaining federal funds, created ambiguity as well as crowded out construction and investment. “Inertia, ignorance, and uncertainty are common causes of real estate market imperfections.”<sup>99</sup> Whether accidental or intentional, the declaration of the GNRP and the subsequent destiny associated with it, casted a cloud of uncertainty in the areas that most needed investment. Consequently, this labeling, much like the rest of the implementation of redevelopment, created a self-fulfilling ‘blight’ scenario. If ever there were a way to create an atmosphere of disinvestment and ‘blight,’ perplexing the community to one’s intentions, this was the way to do it.

## Rumors

“How often could things be remedied by a word. How often is it left unspoken?”  
–Norman Douglas, British novelist

As a result of the Plains not being informed about the redevelopment plans of their *own* neighborhood, rumors began to spread unchecked. These rumors created more uncertainty, and as the speculation became widespread, so too did the disinvestment.

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<sup>98</sup> (LRA, Urban Renewal Acquisition Appraisal, Growth of Neighborhood, 1963)

<sup>99</sup> (Schaaf, 1964)

Before the rumors, the neighborhood was in a tolerable repair that did not warrant clearance. When Ms. DiPippo was asked if her property was in good conditions, she replied, “Yeah, O yeah!” Mr. Difruscia shared a similar sentiment of his property being well maintained. Like most of the dwellings built in the Plains, his was built in the early 1900s. When asked if his property was well maintained, he responded, “Yes. It wasn’t upgraded, but it was comfortable, livable, and it was fit for human habitation.” However, many years before the redevelopment and the GNRA became official; these rumors were circulating and creating apprehension. When Ms. DiPippo was asked if the residents were aware something was going to happen to them, she recalled:

“It was just a rumor. Nothing in the papers. Nothing official. Nothing. Just this rumor that persisted. Do we fix the roof? We might have moved out. When is it going to be? We had no idea. Some people didn’t want to sell to these outsiders who were doing it for an investment purpose. Do you trust them? We thought, perhaps naively, that perhaps we might get a better deal from the city.”

The many perplexing thoughts running through the minds of the Plains’ residents manifested themselves in the neighborhood. The most visible affect of these rumors were visible in the physical deterioration of buildings. When an interviewer inquired about uncertainty in the Plains to Mr. Manzi, asserting, “That seems to be a common complaint that the process just-and then the property ran down as nobody did anything in the area because of the axe hanging over their heads;” Mr. Manzi responded, “Well, that was the other part that’s bad. You don’t know what the hell’s going on... You have to remember one thing. At the time, we never got a full report as to what was going to be urban renewal. They came in pieces.”



Unfortunately, the residents who maintain their property did so in vain. Whipple and Magane appraisers reported the dwellings which were maintained became overwhelmed by dwellings neglected, “Over the years some of these tenement blocks were modernized to various degrees. However, the physical deterioration and functional obsolescence of the remaining buildings, where no attempt had been made to modernize or maintain the building physically, has limited the effectiveness of the improvements.”<sup>100</sup>

Another reaction to rumors, aside from not maintaining property, was an exodus of long term residents out of the Plains Neighborhood. Mr. Defillippo recalled the actions of residents leaving, “Naturally, they didn’t like moving. But, the area became so run down, people moving out into the suburbs. That was a time when people were flying out of the city.” The very threat of redevelopment had caused residents, at least those with the means, to leave the area. Mr. Defillippo explained, “Well that was the whole thing. One house you’d find, you’d say, gee, this is pretty nice. This isn’t bad at all. And then the very next one and the one behind it were like all broken down. People had moved out.” An appraisal report done by Harold Oliver Realtor summed up the general condition of the neighborhood in a post threat of redevelopment atmosphere, “The area is in a general rundown condition, although some properties have been maintained in good condition. There is an over abundance of vacancies due to urban renewal. Many people have moved from the area fearing eviction due to taking by the authority.”<sup>101</sup> This was repeatedly echoed by Harold Oliver Realtor Appraisal, “Many residents of the area have

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<sup>100</sup> (LRA, Urban Renewal Acquisition Appraisal, 1963)

<sup>101</sup> (LRA, Harold Oliver Realtor Appraisal Report , 1967)

moved away leaving many vacant tenements. This was caused because of the urban renewal takings.”<sup>102</sup>

When residents began to sell their property and leave the Plains, many of the tenements were snapped up by absentee landlords. At the same time, uncertainty and gossip kept many other stores and dwelling unrented, or rented at reduced prices. Ms. DePippo reminisced, “The rumor kept getting stronger and stronger. You didn’t know, would it be better to-you know, the people were buying property. They were moving out. Some moved out and the property was being bought by absentee landlords. That helped contribute. There’s nothing like that to ruin a neighborhood like absentee landlords. I think that, that started it, but it was a gradual thing. A lot of us were in a quandary. What do we do know? If this is true, should we sell to these people whom we didn’t know? Then they allow people like the Rocky Club to come in.” The Rocky Club was a night club that catered to the changing community characteristics. Ms. DePippo explained, “It was just a different kind of people coming in.” Many residents who were displaced from previous redevelopment projects in Lawrence were filling the void of residents who had left the Plains Neighborhood; soon enough, these new refugees would again be displaced. This corroborates with Whipple and Magane Appraisers observation in which they recalled, “There is at the present time an infiltration into the neighborhood of residents of a lower economic status with less desirable social and cultural backgrounds.”<sup>103</sup>

Ms. DePippo was also the owner of a tenement with 15 people paying rent. She recalled, “We had tenements, but the people started moving out. They started moving out and nobody wanted to move in. The ones that moved in didn’t want to pay. They wanted

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<sup>102</sup> (LRA, Harold Oliver Realtor Appraisal Report , 1967)

<sup>103</sup> (LRA, Urban Renewal Acquisition Appraisal, 1963)

low rent, so to rent the houses, we rented them out for three or four dollars, or whatever we could get.” When the interviewer questioned if it had to do with a decrease in city population, “...and that was because the city was losing people?” Ms. DiPippo replied, “...losing people and then the rumor was keeping people out. We couldn’t rent.” When the interviewer suggested, “People thought they’d move and then have to move again?” Ms. DePippo concurred, “Yeah, and who wants to do that? We were losing tenants who were paying very little, so we had very little money. I’ll never forget when we got the tax bill, the real estate tax bill from the city we didn’t have money to pay the taxes. That never happened to us. We always had enough money. We didn’t have enough money to pay for it and they threatened that if we didn’t pay, they would take the property and all that stuff.”

It is clear that the rumors looming in the atmosphere contributed to the Plains rapidly deterioration prior to the redevelopment. By the time LRA inspectors began to canvass the neighborhood, years of neglect had already passed. When Ms. DiPippo was asked when she became aware of redevelopment, she responded, “I would say in the 50’s. We didn’t know. There was nothing in the paper. Nobody talked about it officially.” Mr. Manzi recalled, “I know they were going to start demolition in the Plains in about 1965. But, they had ideas *way* before that.” The LRA voted to initiate the GNRA on November 20, 1959, but interest in redevelopment can be traced as far back as 1957. An article in the November 23, 1959 Lawrence Eagle Tribune read, “Approximately 200 acres should be studied as part of General Neighborhood Renewal Area.” However, the GNRA was supported by the Greater Lawrence Chamber of Business, “which has been studying redevelopment and renewal efforts here *several years*” It goes on to say “The

Authority emphasized that it was selected because it contains the ‘core of urban blight within the city, and because of its strategic location on the immediate fringe of Lawrence central business district...it is indented to increase the effectiveness of the present redevelopment project and to achieve the comprehensive revitalization of the city’s business, cultural and residential center. It is expected that sections of the area will be cleared. The treatment of the GNRA must be carried out in stages because of its’ size and cost involved.’<sup>104</sup> The Common Valley Concord was a previous redevelopment project that was implemented before GRNA was put into effect. The Lawrence Eagle Tribune read on December 6, 1961; “Lawrence got ‘green light’ to begin surveying and planning for two urban renewal projects that will cost almost \$5 million.” This ‘green light’ was after five years of bewildering residents of the Plains Neighborhood. Five years in which property owners were hesitant to invest, vacancies increased, and rental costs fell.

It can’t be said that rumors and uncertainty alone were solely responsible to the rapid deterioration of the Plains, but it did play a significant role. The significance of the environment of uncertainty in the Plains cannot be overstated. Ms. DePippo recollected, “We didn’t have money to make any kind of repairs to the house. The small ones we could, but big things-I remember we didn’t want to make any big- to get into that much debt. We didn’t have that much money and we didn’t have the-. Well, the thing that they might take the property away. Then finally, they did tell us that they were going to take it. Then of course, we couldn’t put any money in. We didn’t want to do anything.” An interviewer responded to Ms. DePippo’s comment, saying, “The program seemed to have

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<sup>104</sup> (Buckley, Lawrence Eagle Tribune ‘Council Favors Study of Renewal Area’, 1959)

caused so much trouble, as it was such a long period of time in which property was then allowed to go down, because the people were so uncertain as what to do about their property.” Ms. DePippo responded back, “I’ll say that, yeah. It was part of the big plan.”

Regardless of whether the planned physical deterioration was part of the ‘big plan,’ or not; the neighborhood did rapidly decline. The rumors and GNRA label created a prophecy of self-fulfilling disinvestment. By the time the LRA contracted inspectors and appraisers to enter the neighborhood, many residents had already stopped investing in their property. The neighborhood became stigmatized, and the act of labeling it ‘blighted’ lead to ‘blight.’ Mr. DiFruscia recalled:

“The area just started to disintegrate. Fires were prevalent then. It was dangerous to live in the area. I think, frankly, they almost created their own self-destiny by calling it ‘blight’ and it became ‘blighted’. It got to the point where people were moving out and abandoning the property- getting their money from the city or the federal government. As a result, if there were vacant houses, vacant houses brought in all kinds of problems, health wise and otherwise. There was a tremendous rodent problem once the houses started coming down. And everybody made sure they had a few cats, and the cats would take care of the rodents, so to speak, and they would also take care of the roaches.”

When LRA inspectors entered the Plains to assess the neighborhood, they were not assessing an accurate representation of the Plains per say. The inspectors were documenting the results of self-inflicted disinvestment caused by years of rumors and uncertainty. It was an unreasonable baseline in which to assess the neighborhood. When the LRA appraisers began canvassing the neighborhood, the affect of rumors which had persisted for years was already evident. Unfortunately, what ultimately got documented, and used as justification for redevelopment, was this post rumor atmosphere. A January

1, 1963 article in the Lawrence Eagle Tribune described the Plains as a ‘rapidly deteriorating district.’ A December 12, 1963 article in the same newspaper, quoted director of LRA, Mr. Sirois who proclaimed, “The cost of this revitalization is high, too high to have to pay for years of neglect, but a price we must pay or eventually face up to the consequences.”<sup>105</sup>

Ms. DePippo summed her sentiment of the redevelopment:

“Oh well, I’m stage struck. The agony... I’m going to put it that way. The agony of having these rumors all over the neighborhood-everybody you talked to. The uncertainty. The years. I’m putting it a little differently than I did. The years that we lived in this uncertainty. People were reluctant to make any major improvements on their property or major repairs because we felt we may not be reimbursed. We took care of immediate things that didn’t cost too much and the houses deteriorated. It seems to me, and this is a thought I’ve had all the time, that it seemed to be a deliberate thing that they had this long period of time, so that the houses would become deteriorated. There were people who inhabited them who would not do anything to maintain them properly, so that the value of the property was diminished. There were 15 tenements and a store, and 3 full size garages in the back...\$18,000. I think my father paid more when it was built. I feel they impoverished us. They really did. I don’t think we were treated properly. The properties were already in ruins practically. It would cost more to renew them, to rehabilitate the property, than go through with urban redevelopment. But we went through this charade, if that’s what it was. My sister and I just felt like we had reached a point of no return. What are you trying to do?...revive the dead? That’s how you destroy people as well as destroying buildings. Any other questions?”

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<sup>105</sup> (Buckley, Lawrence Eagle Tribune 'Lawrence-Summing up and Looking Ahead', 1963)

## Redevelopment Goals not congruent community aspirations

“Lawrence’s educated classes, organized to reform the ‘hardworking but ignorant’ foreigner whose standard for themselves and their families is often miserable. In the growing effort to ‘clean up Lawrence,’ it was the immigrant more than his or her surroundings that became the focus of concerned attention.”<sup>106</sup>

The lack of communication, and input into the decision making process, resulted in redevelopment objectives that were not congruent to the Plains community’s aspirations. The use of Housing Act funds for slum clearance and increased access to standard housing was second to increasing the city’s revenue. The redevelopment of the Plains was part of the larger strategy to revitalize the downtown shopping district and increase the tax base. The term revitalizing, however, was only meant in terms of improving the aesthetics of buildings. The LRA Urban Renewal Plan, under ‘Types of Renewal Action,’ states, “Redevelopment will further provide for the attractive design of public improvements and a visually interesting, efficient and safe system of roads, off street parking, and open space that will function with respect to new and existing uses, and provide attractive and functional settings for new uses.”<sup>107</sup> It was anticipated that improving the physical features of downtown Lawrence and the surrounding neighborhoods would increase city income. The LRA director was quoted in the November 6, 1962 Lawrence Eagle Tribune, “Unless the city expands its tax base, it is going to be in trouble” Sirois, Director of the LRA said, “There is very little open space left in Lawrence...the tax base can only be improved by improving what we’ve got. To maintain valuations in Lawrence’s central business district is not alone the business of

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<sup>106</sup> (Cameron, 1995) p101

<sup>107</sup> (LRA, Urban Renewal Plan, 1969)

property owners in Essex Street, and that much of it has to do with improving housing facilities in the city.” He goes to assert, “If the entire area is brought up to standard, it will pay handsomely; the city will be able to hold its residents, and many of them will be within walking distance of the business area. Businesses will benefit considerably.”<sup>108</sup> These desires were also held by the incumbent Mayor at the time. A March 23, 1964 article in the same newspaper spelled out the importance of making more money, “The effect on the tax base cannot be over emphasized. Broadening the tax base is a prime purpose of urban redevelopment and, as Mayor Buckley repeatedly has pointed out, must be accomplished to ease the tax burden on home owners and enable Lawrence to finance adequate public services.”<sup>109</sup>

Ultimately, the Plains residents were expendable in the goal of increasing tax revenue. Mr. O’Connor stated, “That was part of the object, of which was to bring in all these businesses that would pay higher taxes.” There was an immense fixation to use redevelopment funds at all costs, even to its own residents. A June 4, 1961 article in the Boston Globe danced around how money hungry the municipality was, “For the urban redevelopment area. . . please no public buildings, please. Lawrence likes them, needs them, but not in that area. They pay no taxes. The LRA, in the role of land merchant, eyes these choice areas for their municipal payoff possibilities.”<sup>110</sup> The basis for redevelopment never really took into account the residents’ perspectives. As a result, the goals and motives never reflected those of the Plains residents. It was the prerogative of an elite constitution of persons headed by the LRA, who labeled what they desire as

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<sup>108</sup> (Buckley, Lawrence Eagle Tribune, 1962)

<sup>109</sup> (Buckley, Lawrence Eagle Tribune, 1964)

<sup>110</sup> (Buckley, Boston Globe, 1961)



‘blight’. These motives and goals were not representative of the Plains community “Many ‘blighted’ areas supported viable businesses and provided affordable housing to working class people. The problem with a ‘blighted’ area, however, was that it was not profitable enough – it did not produce enough tax revenues for the city, and it did not create profit opportunities for those who most coveted the land. The residents were not considered an asset, but viewed as burdensome to the City’s agenda for increasing revenue. As sociologist Scott Greer explained in his 1965 assessment of the urban renewal program, the definition of ‘blight’ was ‘simply that’ “this land is too good for these people.”<sup>111</sup>

### Lack of Communication with No Checks and Balances

“It isn’t that they can’t see the solution. It is that they can’t see the problem.”  
-G.K. Chesterton, English writer

The intended goals of the Housing Act, to increase the supply and affordability of housing, did not materialize. The proposed use of the Act’s funds was circumvented to be more in line with the administration’s agenda of increasing tax revenue. In addition, there were breakdowns in communication and other deviations from the Plains Project’s intended goals. Regrettably, many of these predicaments could have been avoided, had there been open communication with the Plains’ residents, and the administration promoting the redevelopment. For example, the conditions reported, in the Survey and Planning Application to HUD, are vague, indistinct and contradicting to future surveys of the Plains Neighborhood. With the funding from HUD after approval of the initial Survey

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<sup>111</sup> (Greer, 1965)

and Planning application, the LRA financed a more precise survey. Although overcrowding was used as a rationalization for the *preliminary* HUD funds, a 1963 appraisal report stated the condition of overcrowding affected only 3.7% of dwellings. This is also consistent with census figures revealing a population loss in the city throughout the 1950s and 1960s, leaving many vacancies. In addition, the initial survey for funding stated there were, “inadequate public utilities or community facilities contributing to unsatisfactory living conditions or economic decline.” This statement was also not consistent with community sentiment or even later appraisal reports which noted the public utilities and stated, “The entire project area has city water, city sewer and utility company gas and electricity.”<sup>112</sup> The neighborhood also had ample community facilities. To quote a previous appraiser’s statement, “churches and schools are conveniently located within walking distance to the neighborhood” and “together with stores and services available in the immediate area of the subject property there seems to be adequate facilities immediately available in the neighborhood.”<sup>113</sup> Community sentiment of the Plains, covered in an earlier section, also reveals much satisfaction in living conditions and a fierce opposition to redevelopment. Under what auspices the establishment of “inadequate public utilities or community facilities contributing to unsatisfactory living conditions or economic decline” came from, remains to be found.

A significant inconsistency is apparent in the Plains Redevelopment Project ‘Qualifications for Title I Assistance.’ Title I of the 1949 Housing Act funded 2/3<sup>rds</sup> of urban redevelopment costs. The Plains neighborhood did not qualify for this funding due to the vulnerability to flooding. In the 1961 Plains Project Planning Application, which

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<sup>112</sup> (LRA, Urban Renewal Acquisition Appraisal, 1963)

<sup>113</sup> (LRA, Appraisal Report of Andrew Pica Property, Block 11, Parcel 1 , 1966)

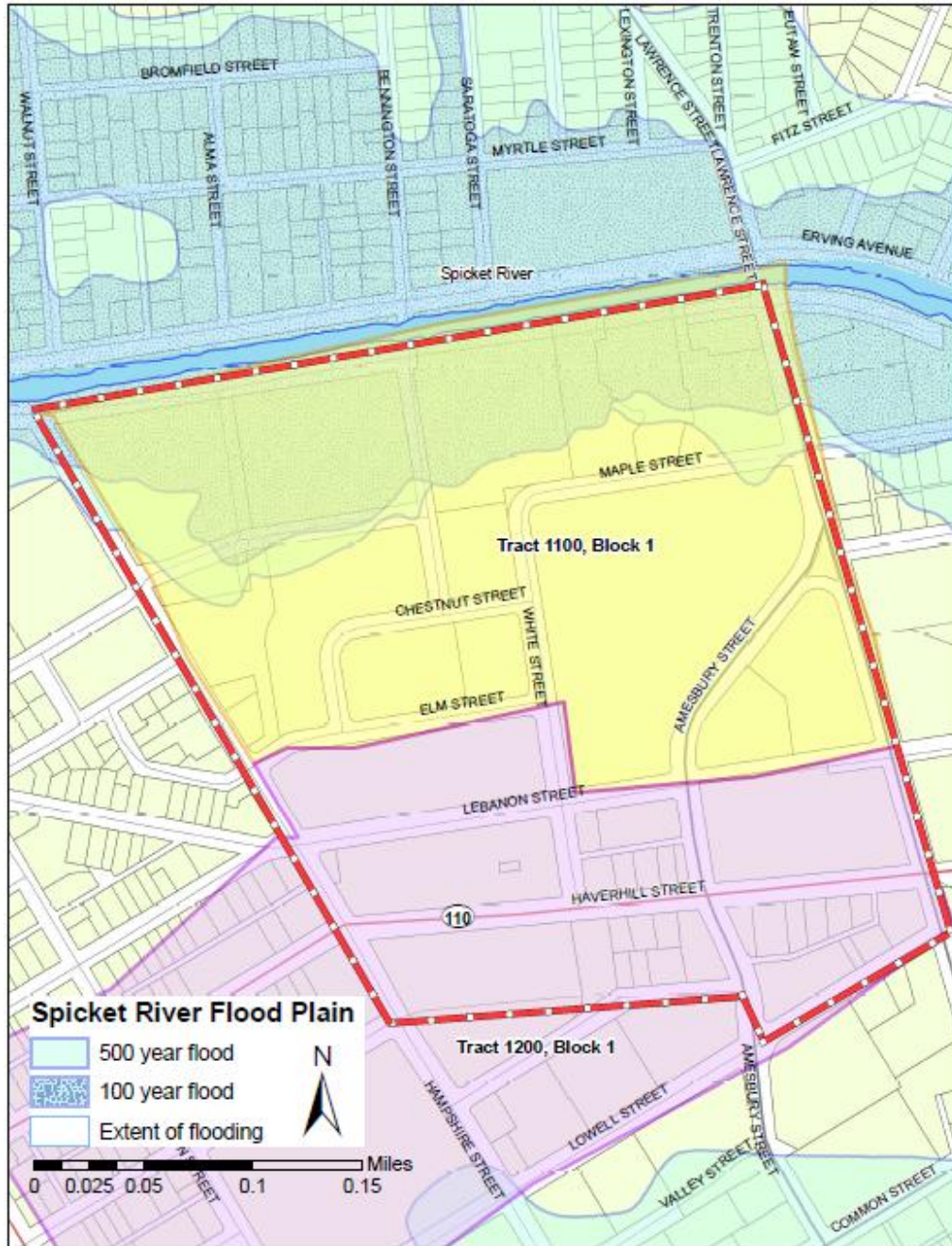
was conducted in 1960, question number seven inquired about the ‘susceptibility to flooding.’ The LRA’s response was, "The urban renewal area is not subject to flooding."<sup>114</sup> This is not necessarily true. The Plains Neighborhood borders the Spicket River, which empties into the Merrimack River. The word ‘plains,’ in which the neighborhood is named, is defined as an area of flat land free of obstacles. Whipple and Magane Appraisers even documented that, “Topographically the neighborhood is level.”<sup>115</sup> It should have been relatively clear that a level area of land that borders a river would be susceptible to flooding, yet somehow this was misrepresented in the application for federal redevelopment funds. Nevertheless, the residents who lived in the Plains surely knew that the river flooded, as there were many flood events that affected the Neighborhood since it was built up. However, with no open lines of communication, this information was never allowed to be disseminated. Below is a map of the floodplain (Fig. 6:1) in which the Plains lies, illustrating the susceptibility and extent of flooding.

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<sup>114</sup> (LRA, Plains Project Planning Application, Question number 7, ‘Susceptibility to Flooding’, 1961)

<sup>115</sup> (LRA, Urban Renewal Acquisition Appraisal, 1963)

Figure 6:3 Flood Plain Map



The consequences of this information not being dispersed, aside from having possibility of affecting the redevelopment process at the time of the application to HUD, is the current circumstance of what has been built in the floodplain. In the area susceptible to flooding, the State of Massachusetts's third largest nursing home has been

built. The unfortunate ramification of an at risk population being housed on a floodplain is documented below:

On May 15, 2006, the Spicket River rose eleven feet, three feet above flood level creating the worst flood in 70 years. The following is a recount of the event:

“Officials at Mary Immaculate Health/Care Services, a nursing home that sits on the banks of the Spicket River, had set up two five-foot berms to keep the floodwaters from breaching the facility. But, as the unrelenting deluge continued, the Spicket rose another foot, drowning out any hopes that the berms might hold. In the early morning hours of May 16th, the berms gave in to the overflowing river. As the floodwaters inundated the nursing home, rising up the elevator shaft to the first floor, officials ordered an emergency evacuation. The water also flooded the road leading up to the home, making it impassable. The main issue then became how to evacuate and safely transport Mary Immaculate's 245 mostly elderly residents. Kathleen Bouchard, who was on duty that day at the Patriot Ambulance dispatch center in Chelmsford, describes what happened next. "They decided at the last minute when the sandbags weren't working that they needed to evacuate - so we had to very quickly ensure we had the staffing and trucks in place to evacuate and transport the residents. It was very involved," she says. As ambulances lined up on a street nearby the nursing home, National Guardsmen, first responders and emergency transport crews converged on the scene to help. A makeshift road was built along the back entrance of the home and then the delicate task of transporting the frail residents began. Rescuers waded through knee-deep water, floating many of the residents out to dry ground and waiting vehicles in waterproof laundry bins. Just before 5pm on Tuesday, May 16th the last of the Mary Immaculate residents was evacuated to safety. When all was said and done, all 245 displaced residents had been shuttled out of the flood zone to safe havens in 30 nearby cities, without incident or injury.”<sup>116</sup>

“Many of the approximately 240 residents were moved to other nursing homes, some as far away as Worcester. It took about 17 weeks to complete repairs so that residents could begin moving back into the state's third-largest nursing home this week. Officials say about 20 residents died in the intervening months. About 50 others settled elsewhere and are not returning.”<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> (Kathleen Bouchard: 2007 PSAPS' Finest Line Supervisor of the Year, Volume 3, Issue 6 - Q4 2007)

<sup>117</sup> (Advisor, 2011)

A nursing home, full of vulnerable patients, also became the victims of urban redevelopment. Had there been clear communication, there may not have been a nursing home, of all buildings, built on a flood plain. In addition, the original plans of redeveloping the Plains called for a Spicket River Park, citing, "Improvements of the Spicket River is an important element of the urban renewal plan. It is proposed to improve the southern bank with landscaping, trees, benches which will provide recreational area for the two adjacent facilities for the elderly and proposed residential uses."<sup>118</sup> Also, LRA minutes from October 26, 1967 reveal; "Discussions were held relative to the closing of Marion Ave and developing a river side park along the bank of the Spicket River."<sup>119</sup> Like other intended goals, these plans never materialized, and much of the cited reasons and justification for redevelopment were actually never addressed. Recalling the Application for Loan and Grant the LRA sent to HUD for funding, the initial goals were given, as such: "To eliminate haphazard land uses, provide land for expansion of community facilities, and for the expansion of High School facilities."<sup>120</sup> These were in addition to 'specific objectives,' which were to improve total living conditions as well as improve transportation system. As the redeveloped Plains stands, a nursing home was built parcels over to the Department of Public Works Yard which also lies in the flood plain, even though it was recommended by HUD to be removed. The DPW technically represents the largest 'haphazard land use,' in a completely residential location, yet was left untouched in the floodplain. It is "used as the

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<sup>118</sup> (LRA, Final Project Report, Part 1 of Application for Loan and Grant, August 1962: submitted to Urban Renewal Administration, March 1963 )

<sup>119</sup> (LRA, Meeting LRA office, 1967)

<sup>120</sup> (LRA, Final Project Report, Part 1 of Application for Loan and Grant, August 1962: submitted to Urban Renewal Administration, March 1963 )

storage and service yard for DPW vehicles; the facility is also the drop-off location for motor oil, batteries and other environmentally hazardous materials.”<sup>121</sup> All of which are exposed to flood waters. Community and business facilities also dwindled after the redevelopment, and the high school was never expanded. In addition, alley ways and a trolley system which created a walkable environment in a pre-redeveloped Plains, were demolished.

An open dialog between residents and the administration may have prevented an elderly nursing home from being built in a flood plain, and created a more accountable and transparent process in reaching the intended goals, which might have benefited the community. However, a close analysis of LRA statements to HUD, and internal records, exposed many inconstancies and communication failures. These inconsistencies reveal either an ignorance of the Plains Neighborhood, a blatant disregard for its residents, or both.

## Gentrification

“If a policeman must know the Constitution, then why not a planner?” – William J. Brennan Jr., Supreme Court Justice (1906-1997)

The goals of redevelopment eclipsed the aspirations of the residents, while at the same time ignoring the root of disinvestment. In addition, the means in which these goals were carried out were extremely detrimental to the community. There are essentially two

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<sup>121</sup> (Trabajando, June 30, 2006)

reasons a person chooses where to live; necessity or desire. Mr. Defillippo recalled, “People lived in an apartment or an area, either because they can’t afford anything else or that’s where they like to live.” The Plains was the working class neighborhood and was relatively poor. When an outside force attempts to change the community characteristic in such a way as to promote wealthier, more affluent residents into a neighborhood, they are endorsing gentrification. The LRA attempted to court private developers that would build up the *new* Plains Neighborhood in a way that would support a more ‘well heeled’ type of resident. The means, by which redevelopment goals would be met, involved gentrification of the resident population.

Redevelopment projects that occurred elsewhere also put the aspirations of others ahead of their own residents. The sociologist who published a well-known study of the West End redevelopment project in Boston, MA also believed that the large-scale clearance occurred because the redevelopment agency valued the interests of the redeveloper and his luxury rental tenants over those of the community as a whole; in other words, the development was primarily for private use.<sup>122</sup> In the case of the Plains Neighborhood, the new private use was not planned for the average Plainsmen and women. During the redevelopment, newspaper articles in the Lawrence Eagle Tribune read, “In the Plains, Developer Joseph A. Leone Jr. plans the city's first semi-luxury high rise apartments, which will include such amenities as a swimming pool or tennis court.”<sup>123</sup> Luxury apartments were not what the residents wanted, needed, or could even afford. Nevertheless, it was the aspirations of the city to attract new revenue. An article on March 6, 1962 in the Lawrence Eagle Tribune quoted a new 180 apartment complex

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<sup>122</sup> (Malamut, 2000)

<sup>123</sup> (Tribune, 1971)



would rent out at \$100 to \$180 a month, or \$1,200 to \$2,160 a year.<sup>124</sup> These rent figures are significantly higher than the figures in a pre-redeveloped Plains. A rent survey conducted by Whipple and Magane Appraisers, in the same year, documented that the *highest* average rent in the Plains was a unit in a two family dwelling with six rooms; rented an average of \$8.50 a month, or \$442 a year (Table 5:3). In tandem, if one were to assume that the rent in the Plains was only artificially depressed in 1962 because of the threat of urban redevelopment looming, it was not fully the case. Although rental costs were somewhat lower due to the threat of urban redevelopment, the rent for ‘standard housing’ was also a great deal lower than what LRA wanted for apartments in the Plains. Standard housing was considered sanitary, healthy and not ‘blighted’. For the City of Lawrence, the ‘Schedule of Average Annual Gross Rent for Standard Housing in Locality’ in 1965 ranged from \$924 for a one bedroom, to \$1,260 for a five bedroom. Please note, this ‘Schedule of Average Annual Gross Rent for Standard Housing in Locality’ is from 1965, and the 1962 figures would have been even lower. The ambitions of the project were not aligned to the Housing Act’s goal of increasing affordability or access to housing. Essentially, the new planned dwellings would price out Plainsmen and women of their own neighborhood.

Although gentrification was promoted by the authorities in Lawrence, the outcome was contrary to expectations of city and LRA officials. The pre-redevelopment state of the Plains’ Neighborhood represented the most efficient use of land determined by the market. When ‘omniscient planners’ and political ideology dictated the redevelopment of the Plains, it was void of any economic or comprehensive analysis at the residents’ level.

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<sup>124</sup> (Buckley, Lawrence Eagle Tribune, 1962)

However, the action taken to increase city revenue was not materializing in the downtown shopping area. LRA officials might not have realized that the absence of private investment may be more a reflection of the intensity of the pre renewal users' demand.<sup>125</sup> Then again, the community's user demand was never taken into consideration. The LRA had their own theory of how to raise revenue. Unfortunately, it was not well informed, lacked input from the community, and was destined not to succeed.

“Tacit assumptions that deteriorated buildings and run-down areas represent by definition an uneconomic use of land overlook important factors in the determination of urban locations. If such factors are ignored, clearance may only waste resources and renewal may not revitalize the changes in the locations of urban land uses that are one of its prime objectives, e.g. the attractions of more high-income households to the central city.”<sup>126</sup> The gentrification process in the Plains did backfire. The richer population and augmented tax base never materialized. A March 3, 1962 Lawrence Eagle Tribune article quoting, Mayor Buckley, warned “The population loss in Lawrence has been in the younger group and that unless the loss is checked it could lead to a ‘welfare population’ here.”<sup>127</sup> Needless to say, the current ‘welfare population’ in the Plains is greater than whatever welfare population could have materialized, absent urban redevelopment. As stated earlier, the redevelopment process created uncertainty that instigated those with the means to depart Lawrence to leave. Those without the means found themselves shuffled from project area to project area, and eventually to a subsidized apartment complex.

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<sup>125</sup> (Schaaf, 1964)

<sup>126</sup> (Schaaf, 1964)

<sup>127</sup> (Buckley, Lawrence Eagle Tribune, 1962)

Similar to the experiences of residents, many businesses went under, while the goal of attracting higher tax paying ones never materialized. Many businesses never returned and new businesses that were expected to come in never materialized. Mr. O'Connor recalled that out of desperation for tax producing property, fast food restaurants moved in, which was not the intention of redevelopment. He said, "They should have just let it (the cleared land) lie fallow- the arguments being that of course there were no taxes coming in. The administration had to be able to say well its tax producing land. That wasn't necessarily the case." The disconnected goals and lack of community involvement lead to the gentrification and redevelopment ambitions backfiring. Instead of attracting residents and businesses with more equity and assets, those with the means, and good sense, left. Considering the aims of redevelopment and the *intended* outcome, aside from the *actual* outcome, it can be said that gentrification was promoted by the LRA and city officials as a means to redevelop the Plains.

### Disregard of the Underlying Dilemma

"Growth for the sake of growth is the ideology of the cancer cell."

-Edward Abbey, novelist (1927-1989)

The opportunity cost of not conferring with community members about redevelopment was a missed opportunity which could have addressed the core of disinvestment and 'blight' in the neighborhood. A March 10, 1962 article in the Lawrence Eagle Tribune proclaimed the importance of financial institutions in community development, "A strong mayor, banks, merchants, churches, educational institutions, and a good redevelopment authority...Greater Lawrence has these vital

assets. None is greater than the banks which as the planner said; through support of community-building programs can change the face of Lawrence.”<sup>128</sup> It was understood that the availability and lending of credit was vital to build community investment. However, local financial institution actions’ of redlining and refusing to make credit available in the Plains Neighborhood was never investigated or addressed. This predicament was well documented by multiple contracted LRA appraisers. The May 1963 Acquisition Appraisal document by Whipple and Magane, stated, “A survey of all the banks in the greater Lawrence area indicates that they will lend no money for mortgage financing in this neighborhood based on the security of the property itself.”<sup>129</sup> Commenting on the availability of mortgage money, M.Edwards and Sons Appraisers also asserted:

“In considering these appraisals the Appraiser talked with the mortgage officers of the main lending institutions in the City of Lawrence. Having outlined to them the project boundaries of this area and questioning them as to the availability of mortgage money from their institutions to potential buyers, he found that *without exception*, these bankers were not interested in the average applicant for a loan in this area. That is to say, they did not feel the area was a desirable one in which to loan money, and unless the applicant had sufficient security and sufficient reputation and established credit with them, they would not be interested in loaning money in the area. This was a feeling held *without exception* by these bankers and it most certainly reflected in the market-ability of property in the area.”<sup>130</sup>

Essentially, monetary investments in the Plains were seen as unproductive and not profitable based on the current ‘average applicant for a loan in this area.’ These actions also reinforced the negative influence outsiders had in the Plains, which lead to ‘blight’ conditions and an atmosphere of disinvestment. The financial institutions bias to lending

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<sup>128</sup> (Buckley, Lawrence Eagle Tribune , 1962)

<sup>129</sup> (LRA, Attitude of financial institutions)

<sup>130</sup> (LRA, Comment on Availability of Mortgage Money, 1966)

funds for investment reflects their perceptions about the neighborhood and thus is a socio-economic failure. John Tomer, author of, *The Social Causes of Economic decline: Organizational Failure and Redlining*, explains this failure:

“The Redlining Example of Socio-Economic Failure: Mortgage lenders, it is frequently alleged, are biased with respect to their loan making in older ‘declining’ urban areas. In this example of the socio-economic failure of the firm, let us assume that in the urban area under consideration, lenders could make a satisfactory rate of profit on loans, given the risk and other factors involved. Therefore, if lenders decide to put, in effect, a red line around this area and not make any loans there, it is hypothesized that micro social forces are the reason. The micro social forces are reflected in a predominate housing market ideology widely shared by housing market participants, such as: real estate brokers, appraisers, home builders, life and fire insurance companies, governmental housing related agencies, mortgage lenders and others. This ideology reflects prevailing prejudices about what types of neighborhoods, housing, and socio-economic groups are desirable and where decline is likely to take place. These micro social forces are in clear conflict with the macro social forces. The macro social forces reflect society's concern for preventing the decline and impoverishment of particular areas as well as entire cities. They also reflect a concern for the well-being of the residents of such areas. If lenders accommodate to the micro forces and refuse loans to the area, it will, by denying funds necessary for the purchase and maintenance of the area's housing, contribute to the deterioration of housing and other conditions in the area. The prophecy of decline reflected in the housing market ideology and practices will have become the reality. In this example, the micro social forces impacting on mortgage lenders have overwhelmed both the macro social forces and market forces.”<sup>131</sup>

The LRA and city officials failed to address source of disinvestment, and instead agitated the predicament. The opportunity to target these anti-community practices should have been paramount to the intended redevelopment goals. Unfortunately, a lack of community input adversely affected the neighborhood and the program’s outcome. The goals of the program promoted gentrification and were planned and executed by

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<sup>131</sup> (Tomer, 1992)

‘administrative elite,’ in which their perception of ‘blight’, in addition to deficient cooperation with community, was counterproductive. This is evident in the neighborhood’s high renter occupation, lack of community owned assets, higher than average poverty, and presence of dwellings on a floodplain.

### Role of Elites

“If you do not raise your eyes you will think that you are the highest point.”  
–Antonio Porchia, *Voices*, 1943, translated from Spanish by W.S. Merwin

In addition to amassing a huge toll of unintended consequences, the Plains redevelopment was unsuccessful in reaching its’ intended goals. Ultimately, it comes down to who the project was designed *for*, and whom it was designed *by*. The director of the LRA, John Sirois, gave his rationale for redeveloping the GNRA locations, including the Plains;

“...embracing an area of 189 acres so big that it must be done in stages. It is natural for people to ask why we must have these projects. At the risk of being repetitious, I must say again, Lawrence is a small area almost entirely built up. Progress and growth must come from redevelopment. The old worn out sections of our City, commercial, residential and industrial are our frontiers and our challenge. The maintenance of the status quo could only result in a reduction in our economy. It could not promote growth; obviously we must have an economy based on growth. We must move ahead or assuredly we shall move backwards. This, none of us want, nor shall we have, so long as the spirit of our people is sustained and the future is faced without fear, but with vision, imagination and the courage which they are so richly endowed.”<sup>132</sup>

This was a statement Mr. Sirois lived by as the LRA director. However, his statements are not applicable to those residents whose homes would be redeveloped. The

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<sup>132</sup> (Buckley, *Lawrence Eagle Tribune*, 1960)

sustained spirit he refers to was not that of the Plains' residents, as they would be displaced. Mr. Sirois' vision did not align with the future the Plainsmen and women would have envisioned for their own community. Furthermore, a future faced without fear is not possible when it is unclear if one's home will be taken. Urban redevelopment was a source of bewilderment which destroyed the spirit of many residents who experienced redevelopment. Unfortunately, it was not these residents' visions, but the aspirations of LRA officials. Consequently, it was the LRA that could face the future without fear; the same could not be said for the Plainsmen, women and children who had no control over the process.

Although Lawrence received guidance from HUD in Washington, redevelopment was executed at the local level, by local officials with local perceptions of what was desirable. While the goal of The Housing Act of 1949 was to 'create a decent home and a suitable living environment for every family;' the notion of what is decent and suitable is subjective and ambiguous. What is *not* unclear, however, is that this goal is heavily influenced by the vision of those with a soap box, power and money behind them to dictate it. The LRA and city officials represented an administrative elite that shaped the redevelopment to fulfill their personal desires of what would be advantageous for the city. Unfortunately, it was their political assumptions, void the due diligence of involving the community, which created redevelopment projects in vain. "If redevelopment programs are to conform to democratic ideals and to common conceptions of fair administration, agency judgments as to basic objectives ought to advance widely shared community goals while agency determinations as to plan particulars ought to be founded

not only upon technical expertness but also upon systematic attention to the effect of such decisions upon the individuals and groups directly concerned.”<sup>133</sup>

“Slum Clearance has been postulated as the basic redevelopment end.”<sup>134</sup> This principle is in part why the Plains project was unsuccessful. The administration’s assumption that simply redeveloping the Plains would be sufficient enough to create revitalization ignores all the social costs the project imposed. The methods by which the displaced and agitated Plains residents could revitalize the area were not the concern. It was a ‘build it, and they will come,’ belief; they being the more affluent residents that the new buildings would attract. There was not however, a comprehensive understanding of how this would happen. The disruption of the Plains by the LRA induced changes that market activity would not otherwise bring about,<sup>135</sup> and the assumption that the market would, without human intervention, carry on in an artificially imposed environment is a naïve understanding of economic forces. The program did not take private market forces into account. An area can only absorb so much construction activity. If there was a demand for new construction, and it was economically viable, then investment would occur, absent the program. Attempting to create an artificial supply of new housing, does not automatically create demand. Unfortunately, political assumptions of how to rejuvenate the area were not based in a coherent, viable reality. Mr. O’Connor recollected, “There was a lot of guess work that went into it. There was no book to follow. We were flying by the seat of our pants in determining what should be done and the service. You’d make a decision and find out if it was feasible and go to plan B as

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<sup>133</sup> (Sullivan, 1957)

<sup>134</sup> (Sullivan, 1957)

<sup>135</sup> (Schaaf, 1964)



quick as you could. In fact, the administration primarily catered to the needs of private developers. Mr. Defillippo explained, “The, where are you going to get a developer to come in and put in this kind of housing? He doesn’t want to build around that house. In fact, we knocked down some single family homes that you would have to close your eyes to see being knocked down.” Below (Fig. 6:4) is an example of one of those homes.

Figure 6:4 Harold the Mailman Delivers the Last Mail<sup>136</sup>



Even private developers understood the feasibility of developing the Plains. The administration’s elaborate proposals did not match up with what developers could

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<sup>136</sup> (Marson)

sensibly build, while still making a return on their investment. Mr. O'Connor recalled the process, "It was very long. It was like pulling teeth to get developers to come in there, and further complicating the issue, was by the mid sixty's, the malls were starting to spring up and the stores were leaving Essex Street to go to the malls. People no longer went to downtown Lawrence to buy their shades and curtains. They went to-wanted to go to someplace where they could park their car and walk in. Downtown Lawrence was not only congested, there was dust. They were tearing the places down. It was certainly not conducive." Nevertheless, the administration put private developers ahead of the community, so much so, that much of the community abandoned the city, and an environment was created that developers were weary to invest in. As a result, the private developers, those the clearance of the Plains was commissioned to appeal to, never materialized. Mr. O'Connor recollected, "It was a bad shame to see that places like MacDonald's and the hamburger stand on Hampshire Street come in there out of desperation. Land wasn't being purchased, but that was not the intent of the thing, to bring fast foods in there."

The administration consciously put their aspirations and the desires of private developers ahead of their own residents. Mr. DiFruscia, a Plains resident, recalled the failed attempt to reach out to the administration; "We got a community organization and we had stickers put out saying 'Save Your Home.' We tried to petition the city council and the Mayor to do spot cleaning up. Spot removal of houses that were below standards of human habitation. Of course they didn't want anything to do with it, the city council and Mayor Buckley, because it was obvious that there were two developers who were ready to build their apartments and they were Joe Leone and Drucker." Similarly, when

Ms. DePippo was asked by an interviewer; “No one, as far as you know, came to interview you and talk about your relocation plans and what the city would do for you, no one?” Ms. DePippo stated, “No, no one seemed to care. They told us—I don’t know how we got this information—that they would pay our moving expenses and that’s about all we got from the city.”

While attempting to pander to developers the administration had little control over, the residents’ concerns were overlooked. In fact, it appears from internal LRA records, that the little public dialog that existed had been *obligatory* to HUD requirements. Regardless of the fact that the project had been in the newspapers for years and rumored even longer, on August 21, 1964 the LRA sent a letter to Mayor Buckley reporting that HUD had approved the Application for Loan and Grant, *contingent* on a public hearing. The letter from Mr. Sirois stated, "In order for this project to become a reality, it is necessary that the plan be approved by the Lawrence City Council after holding a public hearing. We [The LRA] respectfully request the Council to schedule a hearing on this project after publication of a proper notice, the form of which has been approved by the federal government and is attached hereto."<sup>137</sup> It is apparent that void the legal obligation to hold a hearing, there may not have even been one. Regrettably, by the time a hearing was held, the neighborhood was already in disarray. Ms. DePippo recalled the hearing, “At one point in the meeting they asked, the mayor wanted to know how many people wanted this project to stop. All the hands went up except my sister and me... Well, anyways, you know none of those people ever talked to us again. We thought. Let’s speed things up and let’s get out of here. The place is a mess.” The neighborhood had

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<sup>137</sup> (LRA, Final Project Report part 1 for Loan and Grant, 1963)

already sufferer from years of rumors and uncertainty. Two months after this letter was sent, on October 19, 1964 the City Council approved the redevelopment of the Plains. The public meeting was just a procedural process; too much time and money had already been spent to change course.

The city administration had effectively reduced the public dialog to a bare minimum and only involved the public when required to. Similar states of affairs were also held in other communities experiencing urban redevelopment. A February 15, 1961 article in the Boston Globe documented the Boston Redevelopment Authority, Mass Urban Renewal and State Housing Board opposing a bill that would create “an advisory group to include at least nine citizens of the community advising on renewal plans.” Rep. Sumner Kaplan (D.) of Brookline, MA was quoted explaining to the committee, “that his plan would fix responsibility for urban renewal work and make agencies handling it more responsive to the will of the people.” Those in opposition responded, “The bill would centralize too much authority in the hands of mayors and selectman.”<sup>138</sup> Apparently, to those who opposed the bill, the thought of elected members of the community guiding a redevelopment process that would have immeasurably affected its own residents was the real elitism.

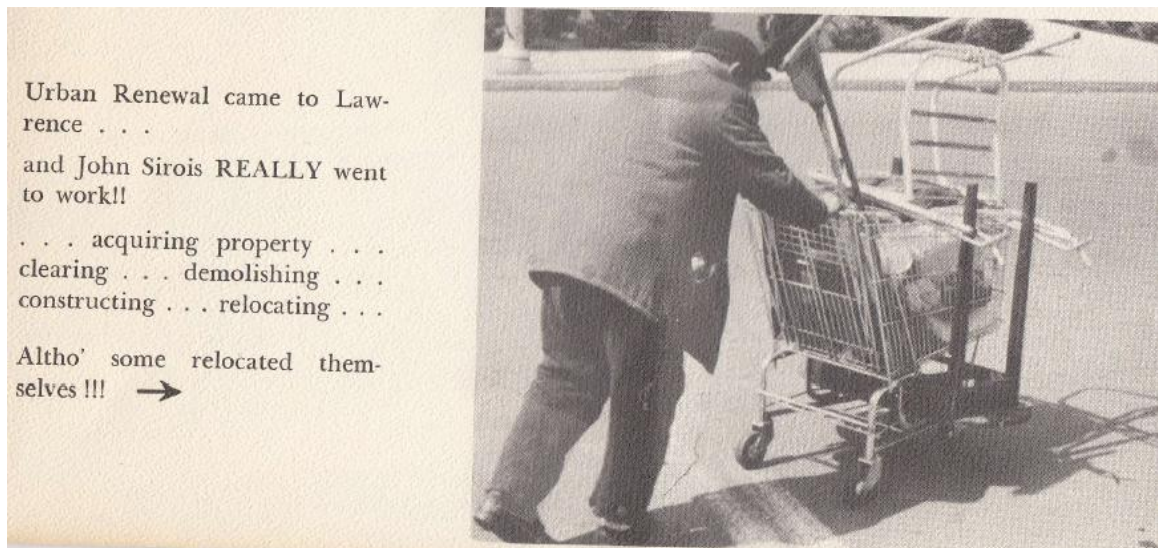
The basis for why the Plains redevelopment produced so many negative consequences was how it was executed. It ignored the underlying predicament the community faced, and aggravated the current problems. The LRA reflected the ideas and values of a social and political elite structure and from this position permitted little and selective attention to its residents. The residents were regarded as last in the city’s

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<sup>138</sup> (Buckley, Boston Globe, 1961)

pecking order. The organization also never allowed for checks and balances, and the top-down planning approach disregarded any community representation. The vantage point of the LRA was so elevated, that their perspective of the Plains was too obscured to even remotely understand the neighborhood's idiosyncrasies. The LRA was disconnected from the community, and the imposed costs their decisions would have on the residents. That disconnect and empathy is nowhere more evident than in the satirist illustration below (Fig. 6:3) of an elderly individual moving his possessions in a shopping cart. This photo was featured in an Andover, MA Country Club publication, demonstrating the great works of the director of the LRA.

Figure 6:5 Satire of Residents Moving<sup>139</sup>



Ultimately, it is those in a position of power who call the shots; and at the end of the day, it is their vantage point which is the most important and influential. However, that does not mean their decision is an informed one, nor representative of the people their choices will infringe on. Indeed, the power of the administrative and political elite

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<sup>139</sup> (Club, Thursday, March 4, 1971)

then operating in Lawrence reduced and constrained the ability of residents and other to gain a voice or input into the planning process. The Plains Neighborhood was redeveloped by this elite, with ideals not in line with those they supposedly represent. These ideals were planned and implemented absent of community involvement. Opinionated assumptions about 'blight', economic development, increasing tax revenue, and revitalization were acted upon without the cooperation of those the project would directly affect. This disconnect created an atmosphere in Lawrence that encouraged the exact opposite of the intended goal; revitalization. With the community detached from those in power who held their neighborhood's fate in their hands; rumors spread, and the uncertainty caused investment to dwindle. The means by which the Plains was 'revitalized' also discounted the residents within the neighborhood; as the post redevelopment neighborhood had no place for them in it. In addition, Housing Act funds were used contrary to their intended purpose, and the redevelopment only agitated an already disenfranchised community. Ultimately, a top-down approach to redevelopment, with deficient communication, had adverse affects. Unfortunately, those with no control over the redevelopment process, who also happened to be the most informed about causes of disinvestment in their neighborhood, were subject to the brunt of redevelopment.

## VIII: Redevelopment Affect on Residents

### Hardship during the Redevelopment

“Where there is no vision, the people perish.” –The Bible, Proverbs (29:18)

The Plains project *unofficially* began roughly around 1959 when the General Neighborhood Renewal Area (GNRA) was initiated, and stretched through June 1973 when the last grant was dispersed for the project. It is clear however, that plans existed much earlier. In addition, construction lingered on past the date the last grant of federal aid was sent to the LRA. Grants for the United States urban redevelopment program, on the whole, ended in 1974, but have been replaced with community development block grants. By the time funding ended for redevelopment projects, such as the Plains Neighborhood, local authorities had been awarded federal support for more than 2,100 distinct urban renewal projects, with grants totaling approximately \$53 billion (in 2009 dollars, adjusted for inflation), in addition to smaller sums for related activities.<sup>140</sup> The lengthy summation of time the Plains project consumed permitted a vast amount of costs to incur.

The redevelopment of the Plains projected an enormous sum of monetary and intangible costs on its residents. Although there is no accounting scheme, or financial analysis that could fully account for these expenditures, it does not negate their existence. The neighborhood was affected on many levels. Taken as a whole, the community has not rebounded to the same level of social capital, community owned assets, and equity it once consisted of. On an individual level, the residents who lived through the process

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<sup>140</sup> (Shester, October 2010)

were adversely affected prior, during, and post redevelopment. They incurred both a financial and emotional toll.

While the whirling rumors created an atmosphere of disinvestment prior to the project's announcement, the residents also faced obstacles during the process. Simple tasks, such as keeping warm in the middle of a triple-decker became a challenge as residents began an exodus out of the Plains. Mr. O'Connor recalled, "I can remember in their [former residents] particular case, in the winter time, they used to hang sheets on the windows for insulation. As a result, the apartment was pitch black and the kids, they're trying to do their homework and the apartment would be, you'd be wearing sweaters because even though you tried to heat it, the people downstairs had moved out for example." Other residents, who owned the homes they lived in, were literally held hostage, in the LRA's feeble attempt to prevent the neighborhood from becoming abandoned *too* fast. Mr. DeFillippo, who worked for the LRA explained, "If you moved out before a certain time date, you were not eligible. No benefits. And we wanted to make sure that people, that is, initiate negotiation. Don't move out before this certain date, or you're not eligible for no payments, because you can understand that if people all started moving out at one time, you just couldn't handle the whole area. Those who were eligible, their age, we would sign them up with the housing authority." Ms. DePippo, as an owner, was on the receiving end of this moving relocation mitigation policy. She recalled feeling captive waiting for the city to buy her home. While looking for a new place out of the city after the project was formally announced, she stated, "It became official so we knew it was just a matter of time. They would settle. Now that it was going to happen... let's get it over quick so we can get out... and they wouldn't. You have to



wait. They just wouldn't talk to us. I don't know how many trips I made to city hall. Nobody would talk to us about it. I said I just want to settle this affair. We want to get out, get the money, get into a house... They wouldn't settle and we couldn't move but we were looking around for another house."

Similarly, most residents ended up leaving the Plains area, never to return. They tended to move within ethnic groups to the areas outside the central city, but not too far, as many wanted to remain close to friends and family. Ms. DePippo called to mind looking everywhere for a new place, but the main concern, she stated was, "we wanted to be close." However, the original residents felt that there was no place for them in the new Plains Neighborhood. Mr. O'Connor empathized, "That was the big thing, the people wanted to move with their friends." When the redevelopment project entered the Plains, the residents were uprooted without a secure location within central Lawrence to relocate. Ms. DePippo stated she did not stay in Lawrence because she "didn't know that if we [her family] went to another area we might be kicked out." Her fear was well founded, as many residents had already migrated from project area to project area; just to find out they would be displaced. Mr. DiFruscia recalled being concerned and disappointed by urban redevelopment, "because obviously, you know, your whole neighborhood and your whole world fell apart and you had to find a new world, and Lawrence didn't provide you a new world."

As the community was displaced, the great melting pot that was the Plains broke along ethnic lines. Mr. O'Connor recollected, "A very funny phenomenon, most of the Jewish people moved to Andover and the Italian people moved to Methuen, the Irish moved to North Andover. We had a dispersal according to nationality but even like the,

we wound up at the synagogues in the heart of the city, and no congregation, and they had to, they built new synagogues in Andover, because the, there was quite a few Jewish people in the urban renewal at the time.” Mr. DiFruscia also remembered the residents moving in ethnic enclaves, “I think those with Italian background moved to Prospect Hill (Lawrence) or to the valley, in Methuen. A lot of French people moved to the west side of Lawrence, going to Tower Hill. There were a lot of lovely homes in the Tower Hill area, where a lot of Irish moved. A lot of Jews moved up there, because there was a Jewish Community Center as you know. The Irish that were displaced moved to South Lawrence in various sections. The Polish moved into the area of Trinity Church, if you can remember, close to the Lawrence side on Newbury St. The Lebanese moved-you name it- some to Methuen, some to Salem, NH. The fact is that once the whole area and neighborhoods dissipated, getting them back when the apartments were built was –a law that I helped pass and I was grateful for, which gave priority to anybody who was displaced by urban renewal that they would have first choice to go back into a new apartment.” Although, a law needed to be passed to give the original residents priority to the new apartments, many were too prideful, to return to subsidized apartments complexes. Mr. O’Connor explained, “Some didn’t want the stigma of living in a housing project. Well I would say 75% of the time, we would be successful in relocating them and the ones that did go to South Lawrence, I think, in the long run, found themselves far better off. But they were leaving friends and relatives in the north side (North of the Merrimack River) are what that – the way that they looked at it. They didn’t feel that was an ideal situation. But in those days not many people had cars. It wasn’t easy to go visit your old gang. You had to take the Eastern Mass bus in order to get across the city.”

Mr. DiFruscia, in regards to his neighbors recalled, “Most of them moved out of the area.” However, previous residents, and new ones that ended up moving into the new redeveloped Plains were not more affluent than their predecessors. When Mr. O’Connor was asked by an interviewer, “Now if people didn’t, couldn’t or didn’t go into a housing project, what did they do?” He responded, “Well, a lot of them went and bought homes. A lot of them relocated out of the city.” The residents, who left the City of Lawrence, were the residents who had the financial means to move out. They took with them their assets and little social capital they had left, leaving behind a welfare population of poor and elderly in a new neighborhood with no community owned assets. Mr. Hatem reminisced, “I think the sad thing about it for the City of Lawrence was that they had nowhere to in the community for people to go, I contend that the way urban renewal was mishandled was why there are so many people who say, “ I’m from Lawrence.” People left Lawrence because there was no place for them to stay or relocate. Ownership is still what –the small amount of ownership that existed in Lawrence, really sets it apart from other communities like Lowell. The neighborhoods had disappeared. Hopefully they will make a comeback, but I think that Lawrence over the last 50 years has been negatively impacted by the lack of coordination and its displaced people.” When Mr. DiFruscia was asked if urban renewal did anything good, he stated, “I can’t think of any. I really can’t. The reason I say that is – it’s difficult to put a plus next to something that has so many negatives. I wish we didn’t do it. I don’t think downtown Lawrence would look this way. I don’t think we would have gotten what we have today. I think you would have kept the mixture of the melting pot process. Right now your melting pot process so to speak is not

happening the way it should. You also have deterioration of the churches. Deterioration of a lot of recreation areas; a lot of social clubs are gone.”

In addition to being displaced from their neighborhood, many residents were financially impoverished. The redevelopment process eroded the value of residents’ assets, imposed higher rental costs, and decreased their disposable income. Many residents who owned dwellings in the neighborhood were compensated at an artificially low price, which impacted their ability to buy a comparable dwelling. The updated Relocation Report of April 1969, which documented where the residents moved, reported that of the 450 families that were relocated; 20 went to public housing, 380 to private rental housing, and 50 to sales housing. The relocation resulted in an ownership rate of 11%. The original home ownership rate of 21% was slashed nearly in half. In addition to the copious businesses that suffered, the of equity residents was also diminished.

Mr. Nastasia recollected, “The ‘interview brigade’ as I called them, came in. They actually said, ‘You know, by 1962, 1963, these houses will be gone.’ At first the notices were very curt, and ‘we’re going to give you \$7,000 for your house and that’s it,’ when I knew the value of the house was at least \$14,000. I remember the 339 Oak Street property because we made significant improvements. And we had a beautiful marble bathroom put in about 1950. We had that work done. It was very expensive and it was one of the sore points in having the house taken by eminent domain.” Mr. Nastasia spent \$2,000 dollars to redo his bathroom, which is almost \$19,000 in 2010 dollars.

It was the consensus of the Plains’ residents that there was a wide gap between what they thought they should be paid, and the amount they actually received. Although

it was possible to have your own appraisal done, Mr. Manzi explained it was futile saying, “Well, you could have your own appraisal, but what good would it do? I did have my own appraisal, but they didn’t come anywhere near it.” Similarly, Ms. DePippo said, “We didn’t know what we were going to get from the city (for the house).” Mr. Manzi recalled the appraisal process, “They appraised it before and between. Because even on Chestnut Street, we had a warehouse there, and they took over the warehouse. They came up with a price and I wasn’t happy with the price, but we had no choice but to go along with them. I would say that they were at least 20-25% low. And actually the person who appraised it, they had everyone working for them [The LRA] so what chance did we have? I had it in very good shape. And the tenants – it was occupied. The walls were solid all the way. Everything was fire proof between the tenements and all. The company building was good and renovated in late 1950’s for \$70,000 to \$80,000.” Mr. Nastasia shared a similar sentiment. In an attempt to hold out for more money for his property, he was the owner of the last house standing in the Plains. He too recalled being grossly underpaid. Mr. Nastasia even justified it by pointing out the discrepancy in his property tax bill. He stated, “So the fact that I had paid the tax right up to the last minute also gave me an insight of how much the market value of the house was, because the tax was over \$600, at \$20 a \$1,000, would come out to what I knew the house was worth: between \$12,000 and \$14,000. And they only were offering me \$7,000. I got \$9,000.”

The redevelopment adversely affected the Plains’ residents’ finances, as they were unfairly compensated for their property by the LRA. Aside from who did the assessments of the property, the appraisal *process* discounted the value of the property.

Not only were property tax bills calculated on a higher assessed value than the amount the Plains' residents actually received; the way in which properties values were assessed also shortchanged the owners. In 1966 Lawrence Redevelopment Authority consultants, Candeub, Fleissig and Associates reported in the Appraisals Master Booklet, "The appraiser has considered the purchase price paid for property in only those sales which have taken place in the *last five years*, and has verified them with either owner, the broker or the buyer. He has put in the indicated sale price in those where the stamps were available. However, he has not verified them back *beyond* a five-year period."<sup>141</sup>

Essentially, the residents were not paid a fair price. Assessed property values had begun decreasing from the threat of urban redevelopment well before 1961. Therefore, assessors were doing their appraisals based on already deflated property values in the five year period between 1961 and 1966. Unfortunately, residents had already experienced huge losses in the equity of their property before 1961. To put this into perspective, from 1960 to 1962, property tax revenue in the Plains fell from \$180,000 to \$118,000, meaning the assessed value of property had decreased approximately 35%.<sup>142</sup> Furthermore, the 35% drop in property values represents the beginning of property values being diminished, as the five year period after 1962, which appraisers took into consideration, were characterized by further decreases in property values. By 1967, the neighborhood on which appraisals were being based was described as having a "general rundown condition, although some properties have been maintained in good condition. There is an over abundance of vacancies due to urban renewal. Many people have moved from the

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<sup>141</sup> (LRA, Appraisals Master Booklet, 1966)

<sup>142</sup> (LRA, Detailed Analysis of Project Area, 1962)

area, fearing eviction, due to taking by the authority.”<sup>143</sup> Consequently, residents were compensated for their dwellings in a post redevelopment atmosphere with decreased property values and all the consequences that go along with declaring their neighborhood “blighted.”

Aside from the owners of property, who received a diminished reimbursement amount for their property, the residents who rented were subject to increased costs. If they were not the 4.5% of families that went into public housing, or the 11% who bought new homes, then they were the overwhelming 84.5% of families who moved into private rental housing. In addition to losing their networks of built up social capital and reciprocity, these residents also faced increased relocation and transportation costs. Those costs ate away at the disposable income they once invested in their community.

The Plains inhabitants preferred to remain in a low rent neighborhood rather than move to better areas with much higher rents.<sup>144</sup> The residents who moved were subject to cost increases in rent, accompanied by a loss of the close walking distance to the downtown area and local shops. The forced relocation created new and additional cost burdens which were not in the original users’ demand. “Location remains, in theory at least, most importantly a question of reducing transportation costs, and many central city slums are located in areas of peak accessibility. It is at least plausible to argue that low income households locate in these areas to reduce transportation costs. They then sacrifice space by accepting high densities, so as to reduce the cost per household of occupying such expensive land. In this way, they minimize their total combined outlay for shelter and transportation. The total rent they pay, however, provides the site with

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<sup>143</sup> (LRA, Appraisal Report , 1967)

<sup>144</sup> (LRA, Appraisal Report , 1967)

greater income than higher income households, with greater space demands, would be willing to pay.”<sup>143</sup> Therefore, occupancy of accessible and expensive land by low income households at high densities in the Plains Neighborhood represent the most efficient use of land.<sup>145</sup> Indeed, the low amount in rent paid allowed for income to be spent on other goods within the community. This multiplier affect allowed for a strong local economy which supported the 126 business establishments. Aside from the relocation disturbance, residents also were forced to allocate more of their income to house themselves. Consequently, more money would flow to landlords, and less to the community.

The Lawrence Eagle Tribune in 1962 reported that the new 180 unit complex in the Plains would charge \$100 to \$180 a month.<sup>146</sup> The same year, a rent survey in the Plains Neighborhood revealed residents were paying from \$17 to \$48 a month. These figures are consistent with Figure. 7:1. Business owners were also affected in a similar fashion. Mr. Manzi recalled never being made whole from the redevelopment process’s increased costs. After his warehouse was taken, he stated, “Our big problem was we had to rent. As a matter of fact, we rented a warehouse here in North Andover, and it cost us a right *and* left arm.” When Mr. Manzi was asked if it was a “good move for you when it was all over, and you had incurred your costs, and moved into the new building;” he said, “Absolutely not. It cost more operating out of that building than it did on Elm.” To which the interviewer responded, “I was thinking that going into a new place would be a big improvement.” Mr. Mazni replied, “It may have been an improvement to look at, but....” For Mr. Manzi it was not a business gain and similarly, many of the residents experienced analogous increases in their cost of living. Ms. DePippo also recalled the

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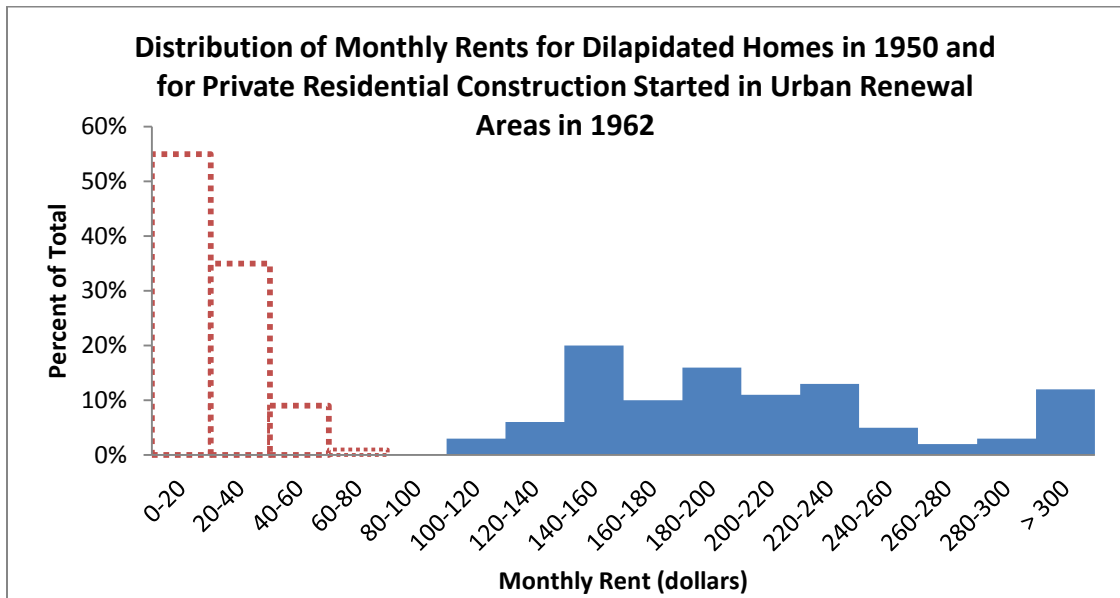
<sup>145</sup> (Schaaf, 1964)

<sup>146</sup> (Buckley, Lawrence Eagle Tribune, 1962)



additional burden of paying for a new place to live after owning her old property, “We had to move. We had to pay a mortgage. We didn’t have anything.” The buildings in the Plains may have been ‘revitalized’, but the residents were not. They still had the same incomes, but had the additional burden of increased rental costs and greater expenses.

Figure 7:1 Distribution of Rent for Dilapidated vs. New Dwellings<sup>147</sup>



<b>Red Dashes:</b>	Rent Distribution of Dilapidated Homes (1.5 million units in 1950)
<b>Blue Fill:</b>	Rent Distribution of Private Residential Construction in Urban Renewal Areas (8,292 units in 1962)

Figure 7:1 represents the increased rental cost distribution moving from what would be considered a dilapidated home, to a standard one. 1.5 million units are representative of Census figures across the United States for dilapidated homes, while 8,292 units represents dwelling units just in an Urban Renewal area.

<sup>147</sup> (Agency, 1962)

## Welfare Population

“Having leveled my palace, don't erect a hovel and complacently admire your own charity in giving me that for a home.” - Emily Jane Brontë, English poet

Appraisers hired by the LRA in the early 1960s reported, “The neighborhood has no prestige in terms of social standing... There is at the present time an infiltration into the neighborhood of residents of a lower economic status with less desirable social and cultural backgrounds”<sup>148</sup> Ironically, the *new* residents were those from past and ongoing redevelopment projects in Lawrence. The ‘infiltration’ was the city’s own residents from other local redevelopment projects trying to stay as close to friends and family as possible, in an area in which they could still afford. However, with each project, the incumbent residents faced two choices; move to a similar neighborhood with affordable rent, which eventually became a redevelopment project, or move out of the area and pay more. There were ongoing redevelopment projects at the time the Plains Redevelopment was initiated and many new residents moving into the Plains were from these ongoing, as well as previous projects in the city.

With each redevelopment project, the process had methodically sifted out residents with the means to relocate themselves out of the area, from those without the means to relocate. While some residents who were fed up with uncertainty and lack of community involvement fled the central city, other residents moved to other affordable areas of the inner city. When the threat of redevelopment became lucid in the Plains and residents started to vacate, they were replaced by refugees of previous projects looking for low rent, and desire to remain close to their social network. For example, some new

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<sup>148</sup> (LRA, Appraisal Report)

residents who moved into the Plains were those displaced from Concord Valley Redevelopment Project. Ms. DePippo recalling the situation, reminisced, “I was afraid of those people that were moving in the neighborhood. It was bad all around.” Like most redevelopment projects, the process simply shifted poor from site to site, just to be moved again. Mr. DiFruscia described the process, “We were in the later stage [of urban redevelopment.] It’s unfortunate, because a lot of poor people who were displaced around the Essex Street area ended up moving, a lot of poor people, into the Pains area. That was short-lived, what a few years?”

Some of the Plains residents, and those from other redevelopment projects in the city, did not have the ability to pay more rent, and thus, when the redevelopment was complete, they moved into the subsidized apartments that were built. The intended goal of a ‘richer’ tax base never materialized, but a welfare population did. Lawrence residents without the resources to move were left behind as the vacuum, intended to suck in higher net individuals and businesses, never quite functioned the way it was expected to. Unfortunately, social and cultural networks were destroyed as families were relocated.<sup>149</sup> The outcome of the redevelopment was a system of institutionalized underclass lifestyle for those it *supposedly* was designed to assist. It encouraged an economic segregation by moving people out wholesale without dealing with the fabric of the community while continuing polarization along class lines.<sup>150</sup> This is evident in the Plains population characteristics of high poverty and depressed quantity of neighborhood owned assets. The community owned businesses and dwellings are gone, replaced with large apartment complexes. The level of subsidization by the government has also increased; as with

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<sup>149</sup> (LHC, vol4. Issue 1, 2005)

<sup>150</sup> (Cleary, 1999)

other relocation projects, the displaced poor people are often left without the social and institutional support structures upon which they relied on in their private neighborhoods.<sup>151</sup> Francis O'Connor, former LRA relocation officer, recalled, "Businesses were the hardest hit by urban renewal, because we took away the people who shopped at their stores and worked there."<sup>152</sup> When Mr. O'Connor was asked, "Looking back now with your later experience and your wisdom, what mistakes were made and what successes did you have?" He replied, "We made a lot of mistakes. There was some substandard housing that probably should have been taken out, but it was a nice neighborhood when you think back. There were people who knew each other, friendly with each other, and they had a lot of community in there. And there was a lot of interdependence in the neighborhoods, which you just don't see today."

The current population lives in dwellings that are almost a 100% renter occupied. The area lacks the opportunity to own assets. "There are specific financial benefits for homeowners; there are also specific social benefits and consequences of homeownership, which include positive impacts with respect to household stability, social involvement, local political participation and activism, environmental awareness, child outcomes, health, crime, and community characteristics. Because homeowners possess reduced mobility, their concern for the quality of their community is naturally stronger. This is further increased due to the financial stake they have with respect to community conditions. Consequently, home owning households are more socially involved in

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<sup>151</sup> (Lietz, Urban Renewal in the United States, prepared for 2010 National Debate Topic Selection Committee)

<sup>152</sup> (Tribune, 2006)

community affairs than their renting counterparts.”<sup>153</sup> In addition, the third largest nursing and assisted living home in Massachusetts contributes to a very large transient population in the neighborhood; approximately 41% of the Plains current population (Table 5:2). The average stay in an assisted living residence is 2.44 years, in which fifty-nine percent of these residents will move into a nursing facility, thirty-three percent will pass away and the remaining will move home or to another location.<sup>154</sup> It is hard to build up a community in which a substantially large number of the community members remain in the Plains for such a short period of time.

Unfortunately, urban redevelopment instigated an outpouring of residents with the financial means to abscond, leaving behind a less stable and disenfranchised population of residents. The redevelopment radically changed the ethnic, class, and community characteristics of the neighborhood. It has entrenched poverty and isolated families from opportunities that once thrived; the opportunities to start your own business, have your own garden, own your own home, and live in an area with a committed, established, stable population.

### Emotional Costs

“Yes that was urban renewal and we haven’t yet gotten over the effects of urban renewal.” - Anthony DiFruscia, former Plains’ resident

Many people know the sensation of being stolen from. The intense feeling of violation and breach of trust can be overwhelming. It is especially impactful when your

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<sup>153</sup> (Dietz, June 18, 2003)

<sup>154</sup> (NCAL, 2011)

own city, which should have your best interest in mind, is the thug. After all, it is the elected officials who are deemed the responsibility to represent its' residents.

Regrettably, the redevelopment process imprinted an emotional toll on the Plains residents. Many residents felt ignored and helpless as they watched their neighborhood slowly deteriorate. As Ms. DePippo expressed the neighborhood's sentiment, she emphasized feeling like, "babes in the woods." Like many other residents who tried to voice their concerns, Ms. DePippo was disregarded. When she was asked if she attempted to make any contact with the City Relocation Office, she replied, "They wouldn't talk to us. I don't remember anybody talking. I went so many times to City Hall to talk to somebody who could tell me something. I was always turned away. This is what I remember and I resent." Mr. Nastasia also stated, "Oh, the emotional impact was huge. I still interact a lot with my friends, who lived either next door, or the next block, to this day. I think I do that just to mitigate some of the emotional impact that- the destruction of that area- what can I call it?" He recollected the memory his home, which was the last house in the Plains before being razed. "About three days later, I went there and the house was just a memory. It was completely gone in a dump truck. It was the most emotional thing that happened to me in a long time. But in another way, it was a relief because this had been going on for five years, this knowing that it was going to be taken, my parents passing, and just all the memories of the neighborhood were just completely wiped out." The photographs below (Fig. 7:2 & 7:3) are a depiction of the demolition of homes, and a testament to the destruction of the neighborhood.

Figure 7:2 Truck That Took the Houses Away<sup>155</sup>



Figure 7:3 Man who Wrecked the Houses<sup>156</sup>



<sup>155</sup> (Marson)

<sup>156</sup> (Marson)

The emotional impact does not end with the end of the project's completion, but lingers each time a resident is confronted with an imposed cost of the redevelopment. They are reminded every time they visit a friend who moved miles away; crave a dish from a restaurant that was demolished, or food from an old neighbor's garden. A familiar smell, a higher rent check, and fond memories all trigger an emotional response that will linger indefinitely. Ms. DiPippo summed up the neighborhoods sentiments toward the project, "We were emotionally, financially impoverished. They robbed us. As I said before, I am glad my father didn't live to see this because he was proud of his house. He was so proud, period."



## **X: Summary**

“So tell me one good thing that happened from urban renewal...? I can’t think of one.” -Anthony DiFruscia, former Plains’ resident

The LRA was not so much concerned with what caused the perceived ‘blight’ in the Plains. The ‘blight’ was just a pretext. It was caused by the negative physical attributes of buildings; of which the only perceived cure was newer, modern, aesthetically pleasing buildings that pay more in tax revenue. However, physical attributes are not correlated with the quality of a community. It was not necessary to demolish everything and relocate residents, if indeed the residents were the chief concern. Improving physical appearances was not conducive to community development. The deliberate goal was to help the city’s purse, with what means the city has at its disposal. In this case, it was urban redevelopment funds.

If one agrees that people cause ‘blight’, not negative building aesthetics; then the expenses of any ‘blight’ would only be shifted to another neighborhood by the relocating of people. Ironically, in a way, people did shift; and it wasn’t just those poor residents associated with ‘blight’ who moved. Unfortunately for Lawrence, those people with a good sense and the economic means did move; they relocated out of Lawrence and took their assets and potential tax revenue with them, leaving behind a destitute population. ‘Blight’ was not causing the economic problems in the city; it was the other way around. The root cause of ‘blight’ is the lack of investment and economic development. The community sees themselves as the victim of economic forces beyond their control; the city sees them as the problem, and at the time, an opportunity to increase tax revenue.

However, it remains inconsequential what caused the blight, as clearly the cause was no concern to the redevelopment authority. The rhetoric of ‘blight’ just enabled urban elites to craft and implement these broad powers of condemnation, such as the validation for eminent domain and neighborhood clearance.<sup>157</sup> It is clear now, that the policy, as well as the means, were not effective in meeting the goals of revitalizing the neighborhood. Private development and the lure of more tax monies were more important than revitalization or community development. ‘Blight’ was simply the justification. Evidently, the City of Lawrence’s tax revenue problems warranted the redevelopment of the Plains Neighborhood. The city had lost its economic engines, and the new Plains Neighborhood was postulated to increase the tax base, via a new set of more affluent residents, who would revitalize the downtown. Regrettably, if resident well-being was really a concern, why wasn’t the housing code enforced? Lawrence has had a history of being at the forefront of health, safety, housing and sanitation issues; even the Spicket River within the Plains Neighborhood which was once curvy, slow and stagnant, was straightened for sanitation purposes. Why, only when federal funds appear, permitting clearance of a neighborhood, does attention get paid to the Plains Neighborhood? This palliative attempt to revitalize the city by ignoring the underlying cause of disinvestment, led only to the destruction of vibrant ethnic communities. The urban redevelopment program was a desperate response to decreasing tax revenue. What urban redevelopment really endorsed was not the advancement of the community, as the residents were not aided or revitalized, but rather the pursuit of revenue. It was promoted by elites who equated the physical facades of property to the city’s growth and as an answer to the

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<sup>157</sup>(Pritchett, 2003)

city's economic decline. Communities foster problem solving within themselves, not by outside observers who contend they know what ails a community, and proclaim they can fix the *perceived* problem. Ultimately, the huge disconnect of perceptions, motives, and goals amid the instigators and the residents, created an environment in which the program was destined to fail. Assuming, that what essentially amounts to a face lift and nothing more will revitalize a city, while ignoring underlying economic and community issues was outlandish. However, with an atmosphere of diminished tax revenue in and the availability of federal funds that dictated and encouraged redevelopment, the city was left with limited options; none of which addressed the underlying causes of disinvestment. Neighborhood clearance was the wrong use of federal program funds for a misunderstood cause of 'blight,' or disinvestment. Much like the quote: "When you have a hammer, every problem looks like a nail;" incongruously, when all you have are federal funds for urban redevelopment, then every city woe looks like a potential redevelopment project. In this case, the Lawrence Redevelopment Authority and the City Administration were holding the hammer.

The administration completely disregarded the aspirations of their fellow residents. United States Federal Judge, E. Barrett Prettyman, even goes so far to advocate that the program was potentially unconstitutional. The following is his testament to the legality of the federal program, in specific what Judge Pettyman refers to an "area which is not a slum, but which is out-of-date, called by the Government 'blighted' or 'deteriorated'.":

Its fault is that it fails to meet what are called modern standards. Let us suppose that it is backward, stagnant, not properly laid out, economically Eighteenth Century -- anything except detrimental to the health, safety or morals. Suppose its owners and occupants like it that way. Suppose they are often old-fashioned, prefer single-family dwellings, like small flower gardens, believe that a plot of ground is the place to rear children, prefer fresh to conditioned air, sun to fluorescent light. In many circles, all such views are considered 'backward and stagnant'. Are those who hold them 'therefore blighted'? Can they not, nevertheless, own property? . . .

Is a modern apartment house a better breeder of men than is the detached or row-house? Is the local corner grocer a less desirable community asset than the absentee stockholder in the national chain or the wage-paid manager? Are such questions as these to be decided by the Government? And, if the decisions be adverse to the erstwhile owners and occupants, is their entire right to own the property thereby destroyed? . . .

We are of the opinion that Congress, in legislating for the District of Columbia, has no power to authorize the seizure by eminent domain of property for the sole purpose of redeveloping the area according to its, or its agents', judgment of what a well-developed, well-balanced neighborhood would be . . . .<sup>158</sup>

Large sufficient records exist meticulously documenting physical characteristics, land statistics, population density, and physical deficiencies. However, nothing in the internal LRA records or those sent to HUD, concern the neighborhood aside from these physical attributes. Surely, a neighborhood's health and social well-being is more than building facades and the number of toilets per person. Although private developers did eventually build new apartment structures, the physical environment is a fraction of what makes a vibrant community; and that cannot be manufactured. There is no longer any more pride in ownership. The small businesses are gone; so are the people who shopped there. The community churches and social clubs have disappeared. Residents were dispersed, and lost their equity, assets and community along the way. The social capital that existed was literally bulldozed over, along with community gardens and the

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<sup>158</sup> (Prettyman, 1955)

numerous doors without locking mechanisms. Let's be clear, this was not a program to improve the conditions of those living in the area, or improve *their* quality of life. These residents did not have the means, support, monies or political power to help themselves. The Plains was not renewed, revitalized or rehabbed. It was institutionalized, structured, and void of pride, and the vibrant neighborhood community that once stood. Regrettably, the use of public funds for a supposed 'public purpose' did not benefit the public, alas at the consternation of a vibrant neighborhood.

## **XI: Biological Sketch of the Author**

“To avoid criticism, do nothing, say nothing, be nothing.”

–Elbert Hubbard, American writer

My experience with the topic of urban redevelopment in Lawrence results from my work as a researcher in the Lawrence Redevelopment Authority (LRA) and a research paper I completed in a course on ‘Sustainable Housing and Land Use’. Working as a researcher in the LRA gave me a strong understanding of the history of the agency. The LRA was instrumental in changing not only the urban, but community landscape, in Lawrence, MA. In addition, my paper which researched a cooperative owned housing development in Lawrence that was created as a result of urban redevelopment, directed me to the Lawrence History Center; where records had recently been acquired documenting the LRA’s influence. Given the failed cooperative status of the housing development I researched in the redeveloped area, and the rich historical records, I became interested in how the program altered the city and its residents.

## Motivation for Research

“The moment one gives close attention to anything, even a blade of grass, it becomes a mysterious, awesome, indescribably magnificent world in itself.”

–Henry Miller, American novelist

Communities make up neighborhoods, which together make up a city. Each has its own culture and identity, as well as its own stereotypes and perceptions portrayed by other communities and neighborhoods. The public policies we create, which affect our cities, are created in reflection of our values and beliefs. Therefore, we can judge our society by how we treat not only the poor disenfranchised members of our community, but also the neighborhoods characterized by them. Community and urban development is effective when it is sown, propagated and made fruitful by its own members from the bottom up, not strangers. The process of demolishing a vibrant neighborhood and relocating residents is extremely disrupting, and it is important to comprehend how and why urban redevelopment would come about, as well as its effects.

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