

Chapter 14

PUBLIC BUILDINGS

The Official City Plan of 1925 said: "... the chief trouble with the public buildings of Cincinnati is their haphazardness; each seems to have been located entirely independently of all others." The Civic Center Report of 1934 made similar observations. For the past twenty-five years or more, during which Cincinnati has been talking about having a Civic Center of the formal type, nothing tangible has been accomplished. No building has yet been placed in planned relation to an officially-recognized civic center site.

From earliest times cities have sought to arrange their public buildings in orderly, visually effective architectural groups. The term "civic center," customarily applied in this country to such a grouping connotes to many an impracticable, grandiose scheme, and excessive expenditures. Many cities seem to have felt that they were not properly planned unless they had made provision, at least on paper, for an arrangement characterized by monumental buildings in rectilinear relationship, facing a broad open plaza. Today planners have more practical reasons for seeking groupings of public buildings. Much greater flexibility in planning such groups is invited by the contemporary concept of buildings designed to perform their functions efficiently rather than in conformity with preconceived traditional exteriors.

By dropping insistence on symmetry and monumentality it is possible to achieve more effective and varied designs of buildings and the areas around them. Functional planning results in significant economies in site development and structure, as well as fresh and stimulating visual effects.

The Master Plan report on Public Buildings is concerned only with major public and quasi-public buildings of the central type — "central" implying their location at approximately the center of vehicular transportation, public and private, so as to be readily accessible to all the people in the Area. That focal point is Downtown Cincinnati.

Buildings of the central type may be classified in two groups. The first consists of structures having administrative or service functions. These serve the Metro-

politan Area, or major parts of it, such as the City of Cincinnati or all of Hamilton County. They are referred to as the Administration-Service Group. Obvious examples are the City Hall, Court House, Federal Building and the Main Public Library.

The second group involves assembly of people as spectators or auditors of presentations to be heard and seen and having a cultural, recreational or commercial nature. Examples are an auditorium, exposition hall or arena, stadium and museums. These are referred to as the Assembly-Exhibition Group.

Benefits of Grouping

Standing alone a public building runs the risk of undesirable buildings and land uses as neighbors. In a group it benefits from the proximity of others of its kind. Each building secures environmental protection through open space provided for the others and each one gains amenity from inclusion in a harmoniously-planned design. Furthermore, the effectiveness of many fine buildings is lost because it is impossible to get a good view of them. In a well-planned group each building can be viewed satisfactorily from many angles.

Occupants of each building having occasion for mutual contact benefit from the closer co-operation and saving of time which is possible when the buildings are grouped. The joint use of many facilities — information bureau, reference library, parking space, access roads, assembly rooms, central heating, and general setting, for example — may be provided for.

The combination of assembly facilities needed for large conventions — such as an exposition hall or arena, and an auditorium — with the addition of a permanent industrial and commercial exhibits building would place Cincinnati at the forefront of convention cities and complement the city's natural advantages as a transportation center. The same buildings in separate locations would have less than the total of their combined potentialities.

There is increased convenience and saving of time to citizens when they have occasion to visit two or more

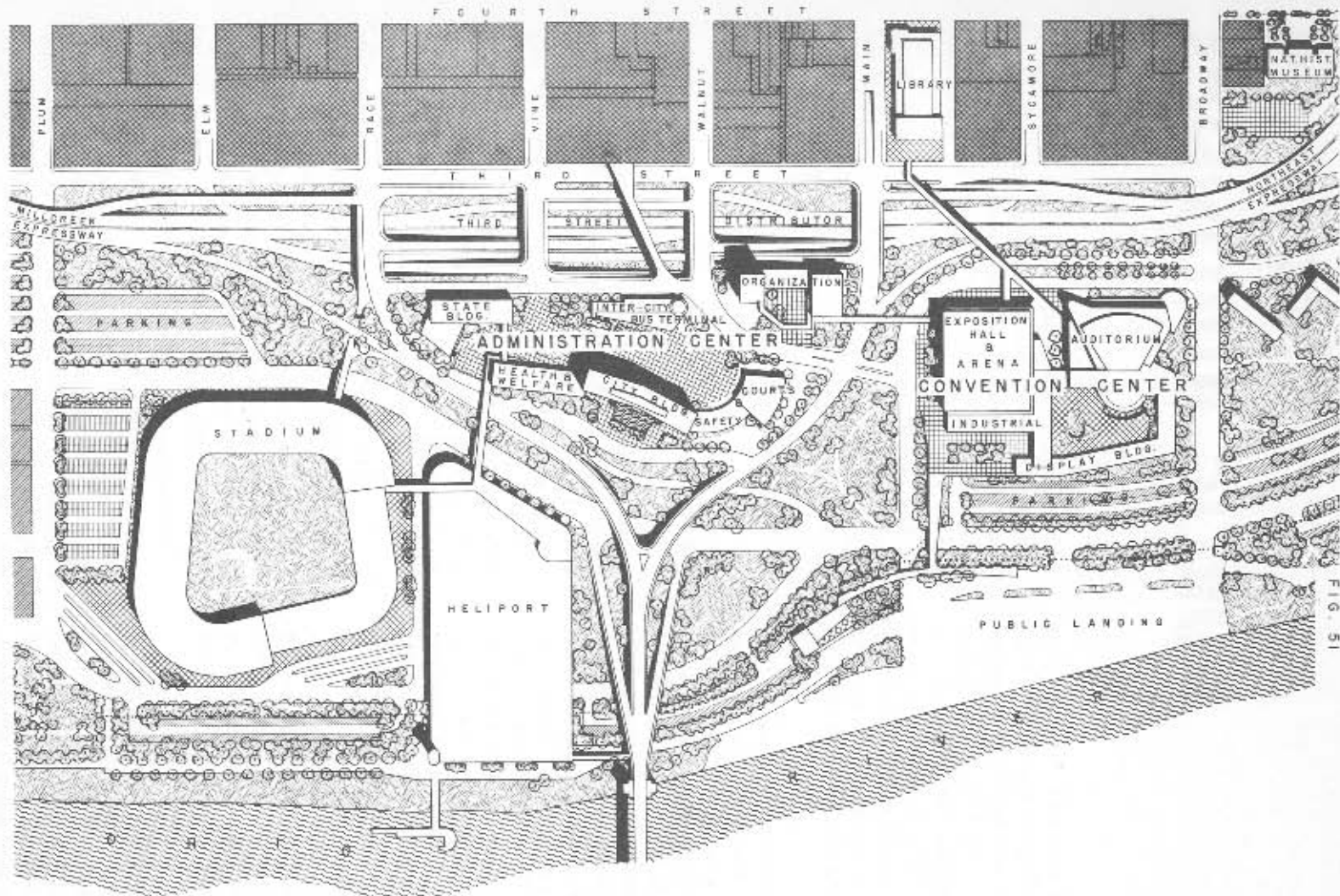


FIG. 51

PUBLIC & QUASI-PUBLIC BUILDINGS
 IN THE
 RIVERFRONT REDEVELOPMENT PLAN



SCALE IN FEET
 400 0 400 1200

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public buildings on the same trip, if these buildings are near to each other. A central information bureau would save time and effort for those uncertain what building they need to visit.

A grouping provides a focal point for expressing the civic pride and progressiveness of the city — it constitutes a "trade mark" or symbol of public spirit. The masses of people who would use it would warrant special transit facilities and more convenient service.

The following significant economies are implied in some of the benefits previously mentioned:

Total site requirements may be less than for the same buildings on separate sites;

The same is true of development costs and operation of the physical plants;

Time is saved in inter-relationships of personnel housed in the buildings and by the public using the buildings;

Appropriate location of the center can help materially to stabilize the Central Business District.

Cincinnati's Need for Public Buildings

The present Federal Building and the County Court House are the only buildings of the Administration-Service type which can be regarded as "permanent."

There is need for a new City Hall (including special provision for Criminal Courts and Public Safety offices), a State Office Building, a Federal Office Building, a Main Public Library, a Board of Education Office Building, a Health and Welfare Building, and an Organizations Building to serve as headquarters for numerous quasi-public associations.

There is need for a Convention Center, including an auditorium and exhibition hall-arena, an industrial products exhibit, and a merchandise mart (the auditorium could be so designed that the sides could be opened in connection with use for Summer Opera); a natural history museum, and a stadium for major league baseball and other outdoor sports events.

There is evidence of sufficient interrelated activities among most components of the Administration-Service type of buildings to make their grouping worthwhile from that standpoint.

The economic value of the component buildings mentioned for a Convention Center is many times greater if they are made distinct units in an efficiently-designed combination than if built in separate locations without any structural relationship.

Criteria for Available Sites

Factors considered in determining a proper location included: environmental relationships and land use characteristics; property and developmental costs; accessibility; flexibility of the building arrangement; and present and future availability.

After an exhaustive survey six possible areas were selected for careful analysis. All six lie in a belt a few blocks wide, adjacent to the north, east and south sides of the Central Shopping District defined by frontage on Race, Seventh, Main and Fourth Streets. These areas are analyzed in detail in Chapter 4 and illustrated in Fig. 9 in the Master Plan report on Public Buildings.

Riverfront Site Chosen

Analysis proved the superiority of the Central Riverfront area over the other five areas. (Fig. 51.) This tract lies for the most part between Race Street and Broadway, from Pearl to Front Streets, adjacent to the Third Street Distributor which will occupy the blocks between Third and Pearl Streets. The Public Building group would be part of the larger redevelopment plan for the Central Riverfront, from Central Avenue to Butler Street presented in the chapter on Riverfront.

The area is now predominantly blighted or obsolescent and unless acquired, replanned and eventually redeveloped as a whole, is likely to deteriorate further and depreciate the adjoining business district. That portion of the riverfront designated as Site 6 can accommodate practically all public buildings, both of the Administration-Service and Assembly-Exhibition types. No other central site can do this at comparable cost and with similar advantages of good environment, access of all kinds, flexibility and expansibility of site, ample space for parking, and social and economic benefits to the entire Metropolitan Area.

The Riverfront site provides an adequate and potentially very satisfactory area. Assuming the passage of necessary State enabling legislation to permit public acquisition, a comprehensive plan can be prepared and the entire area redeveloped over a period of time in accordance with this official plan.

Provision is made in the Riverfront Redevelopment Plan for all buildings previously referred to except the Central Library, Board of Education offices, and a Federal Office Building.

The Main Public Library

The Master Plan gives attention to special requirements of a site for a new Main Public Library, funds

for which are now available. Of ten sites carefully analyzed three were adjudged worthy of serious consideration: Site A, bounded by Fourth, Main, Third, and Hammond Streets; Site B, the northeast corner of Fifth and Main Streets, and Site J, bounded by Garfield Place, Race, Ninth, and Elm Streets.

Of these, Site A appears best on all counts. It is as close as possible to the heart of the Central Business District. It is the only available site that can be related visually to the Central Riverfront Redevelopment area. Site A, however, is inherently a highly desirable location, quite independently of the great advantages it would gain from the redevelopment of the riverfront.

Board of Education Office Building

The Board of Education Office Building, also a

project on which early construction is probable, is not included in the Riverfront Plan for that reason. If the Library Board selects the site at Fourth and Main Streets, the Board of Education might well choose an adjoining site on Fourth, Main, or Hammond Streets, to the mutual advantage of both buildings.

Federal Office Building

A Federal Office Building, not included in the Riverfront Plan for lack of space (though it could be an alternate for the State Office or Organizations Buildings) might well be located in planned relationship to the Library and Board of Education Building. This would place it only a block or so from the present Federal Building.