

Baltimore Urban Design Concept Team

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•I WOULD like to share with you our experiences on a project in action. One of the best ways of doing research is to get going and do it and see what one runs into. This case is the Baltimore Urban Design Concept Team, which began October 3, 1967. It is a 2-year project. The client is the Maryland State Roads Commission, Interstate Division. The Team is composed of four primary firms, with consultants: Skidmore, Owings and Merrill; Wilbur Smith and Assoc.; Parsons, Brinckerhoff, Quade and Douglas; and the J. E. Greiner Co.

There is a good deal of new methodology on the far horizon. For now we believe that we have an initial start on what promises to be the best way of going about the design of highways and cities. I am reminded of Hans Blumenfeld, a planner in Toronto, who described to a city planning student the most important thing for a planning student to learn: "Know when to jump from the frying pan of inconclusive research into the fire of arbitrary decision." I think we have come a good distance from that, but there is still not quite the systematic, total process that we all wish were here.

The central issue is to plan the urban highway not in isolation, but in full relation to the needs of the surrounding area and the city as a whole. Our work corresponds, in a way, to the public recognition that issues of mobility are inseparable from quality of place. In the book, "Traffic in Towns," Colin Buchanan made the analogy of designing a hospital in which one first designs the corridors and then later thinks about the rooms. This is obviously ridiculous, but it has, unfortunately, been the case in many cities. The simple intent is to do the thing right—to plan the corridors and rooms simultaneously.

To accomplish this in fact and not in theory is the goal. This requires a new kind of design team, a new design process, and a new vehicle for implementation. The design team is composed of city planners, architects, engineers, urban designers, social scientists, and specialists in acoustics and lighting—each bringing his own special skill plus a deep interest in making the whole greater than the sum of its parts. The forming of an interdisciplinary team is much easier said than done. It is a tremendous challenge to communication and we are beginning to see it take shape. It is hard, but as we have seen in the three months that we have worked on it, it is certainly possible. Today, the process of urban highway planning must focus on three aspects of what is really a single product: the road, joint development, and urban programs.

The road includes the highway in relation to the complete transportation system, taking into account rapid transit, parking, parkways, city streets, and pedestrian movement.

Joint development defines multiple facilities within and adjacent to the rights-of-way for schools, recreation, housing, and commerce, and other functions vital to urban areas. They link both sides in what has been in many cities a massive barrier. These developments must not only replace things taken by the road, but must provide needed sites for improved urban development.

The idea of joint development was first articulated in a memorandum under Rex Whitton in a speech by Frank Turner. He says, "How do we get started?" In order to make a start in this activity, it is necessary to focus almost immediately on specific problems in specific areas. Otherwise we can generalize from now until doomsday and nothing much would happen. I suggest that you identify those projects where you are having, or may anticipate having, relocation problems, and where redevelopment is

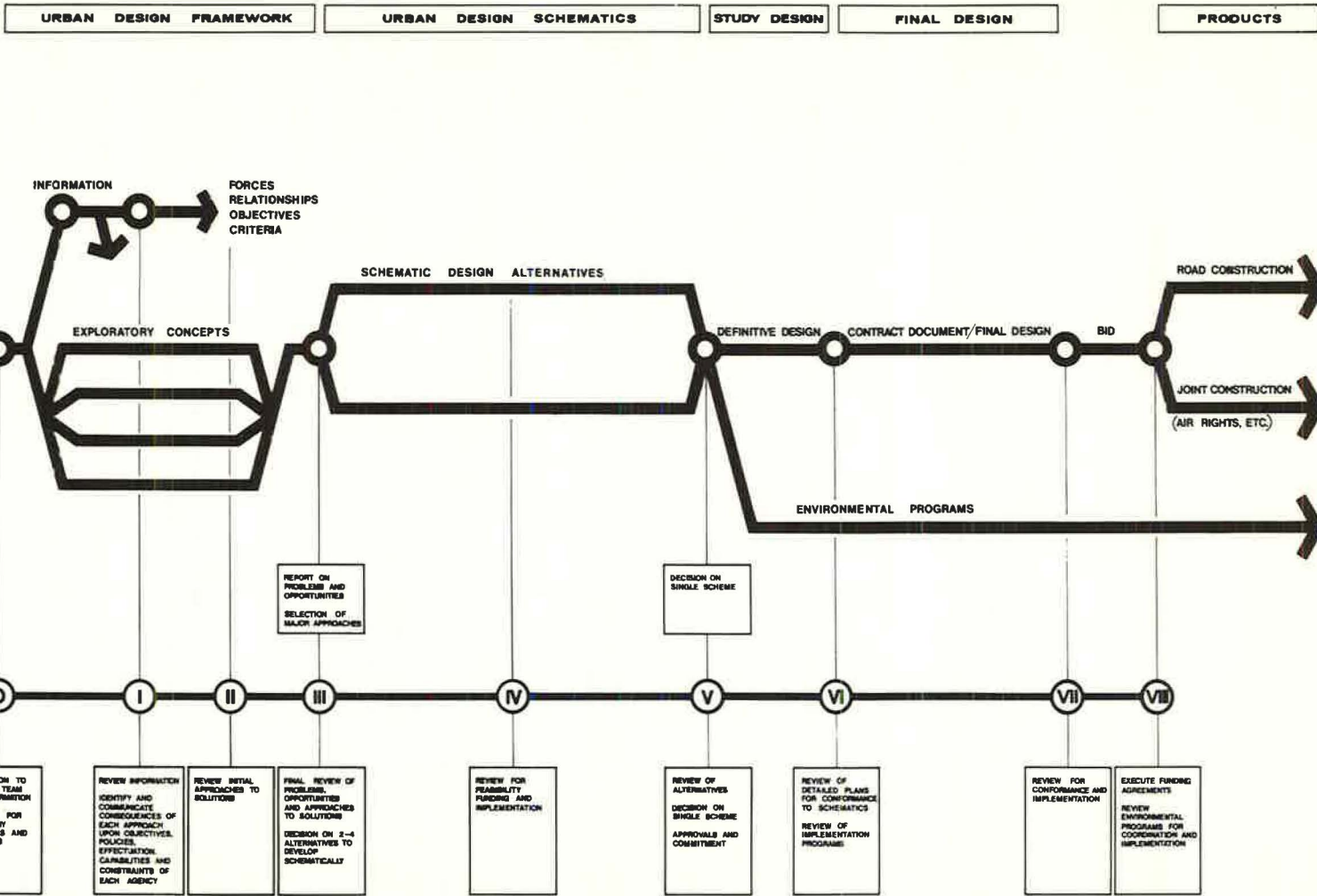


Figure 1. The Baltimore Urban Design Concept Team process, showing the parallel actions by the government and by the Design Team. The final work product has three components: road construction (integrated with an overall transportation system); joint construction (in air-rights and contiguous areas); and environmental programs (education, housing, recreation, employment, etc.).

otherwise desirable. In Baltimore we are defining the specific problems and beginning to recommend specific action.

Urban programs consist of environmental programs such as relocation, employment, education, housing, and neighborhood improvement, which must be accomplished in the highway environs. Today it is not sufficient merely to replace functions dislocated. Rather, cities must aim for a far higher level of development potential. Historic, architectural, natural, and visual qualities must be identified, respected, and made a living part of the environment.

In this we work not as a concept team alone, obviously. We work closely with the City Government, the City Planning Department, the Urban Renewal Agency, the Greater Baltimore Development Corp., and the State of Maryland. This cannot just happen in a vacuum, and when concept teams, which really are consultants, leave, the work must be carried on by the community itself. Therefore, throughout its process, the city, the state, and the federal government must be vitally linked partners.

As the process begins to be applied to a real city, Baltimore, the Concept Team has to deal with the problem of mobility and place—each in a state of change. It must back-track as well as go forward. The team must of necessity look at, adjust to, and correct that which has been happening before it arrived, as well as design for difficult-to-predict future developments.

In Baltimore, the proposed corridor would represent a 24-mile slice of life of an average American city—going through park, ghetto, waterfront, historical areas, center city, and industrial areas. The Maryland State Roads Commission contract with the Team explicitly identifies its objectives as follows: "It is the objective of the Commission and the City to assure that the Interstate system within the city will provide for the social, economic, and aesthetic needs of the city's environment, as well as provide an efficient transportation facility." It requires the best development of the highway facilities on established rights-of-way, development of joint use potentials for highway rights-of-way for other than highway purposes, and the best use and development of land adjacent to the highway for development and redevelopment of the urban area according to established or proposed land uses.

The general process itself is very complex. To oversimplify, I would say that the 2-year project is divided into three equal phases. The first phase, approximately 7 to 9 months, consists of analyzing and researching the social needs, the neighborhood needs, transportation problems, architectural, historic and visual problems and opportunities, economic resources and limitations, and the governmental actions in implementing the project. At the end of the first phase, a statement of major problems and approaches to the solution will be the product.

The second phase, which is called urban design schematics, will consist of a more detailed development of alternative options for the road itself, whether it be below-grade, on-grade or above-grade, and will include economic feasibility studies. The cost and benefits will be analyzed over a full range of factors, including social costs, impact on the city's future tax base, and long-range development opportunities, as well as acquisition and construction costs. Evaluation of alternatives will take into account both the driver and people in the highway environs. The product of the second phase will be to display options for community choice. It will display options of the road integrated with its surroundings, delineate the benefits and costs, and itemize which government agency and which private agency would be likely to commit funds for the joint city and highway development. A crucial decision will be made at this point. The determination must be made as to what joint development, road alignment alternatives, and environmental options are fundable, and which may be postponed or deleted. An intensive feasibility study will have preceded this commitment point.

The last phase will be the execution of the chosen alternative. Preliminary engineering design will be developed for the road itself. Detailed design will also be undertaken for coordinated joint development projects within the rights-of-way, and public and private agencies will begin to implement the environmental programs during this phase of "Study Design."

I have given a very simple view of the steps dividing the project into three parts. You will see, however, that life is not that simple. Some things have got to go faster.

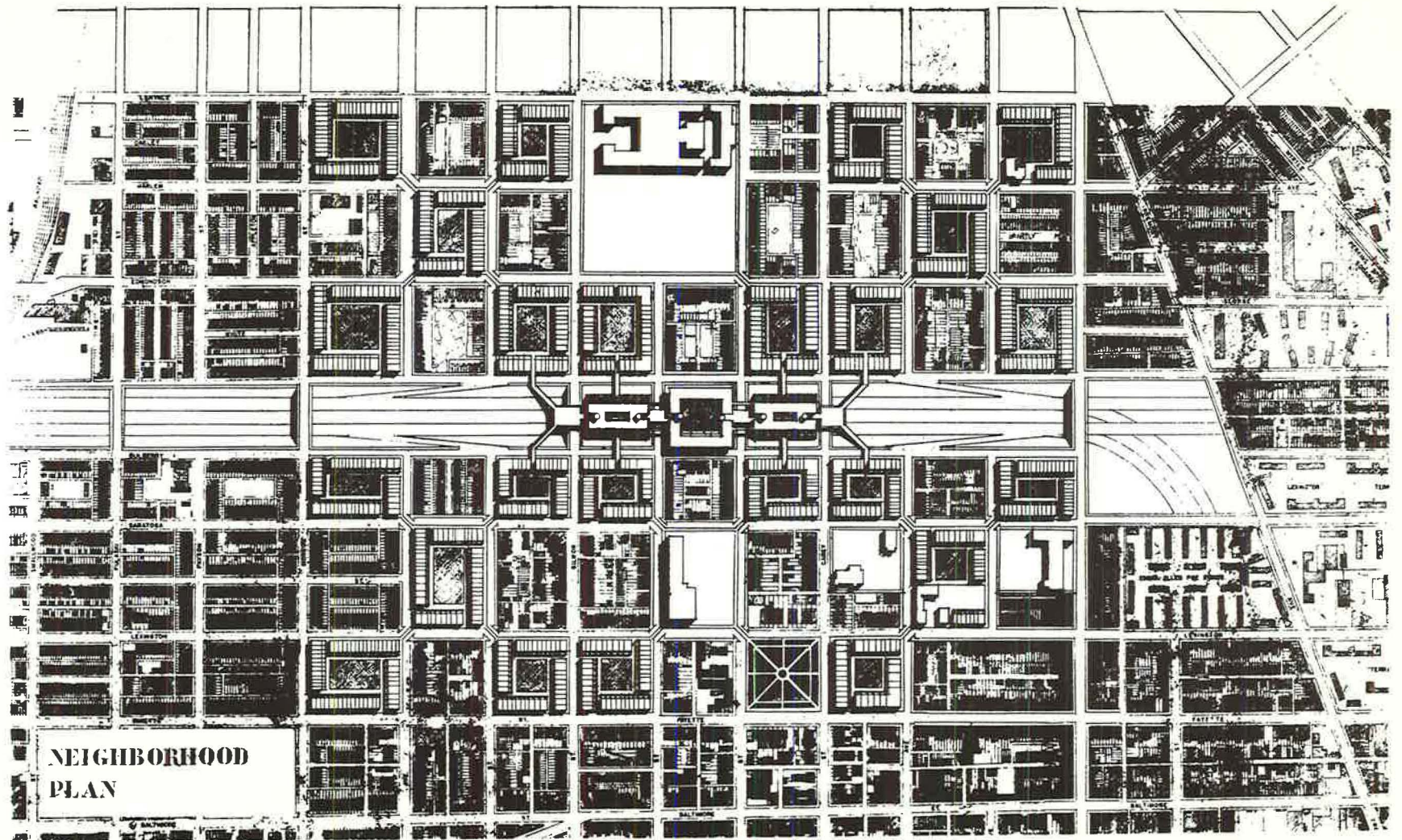


Figure 2. Neighborhood plan exploratory concept—Franklin-Mulberry corridor, showing a multi-service community center together with housing and shops above a portion of a depressed highway. Pedestrian movement is at a level above the present streets tying together the new facilities with the existing neighborhood.

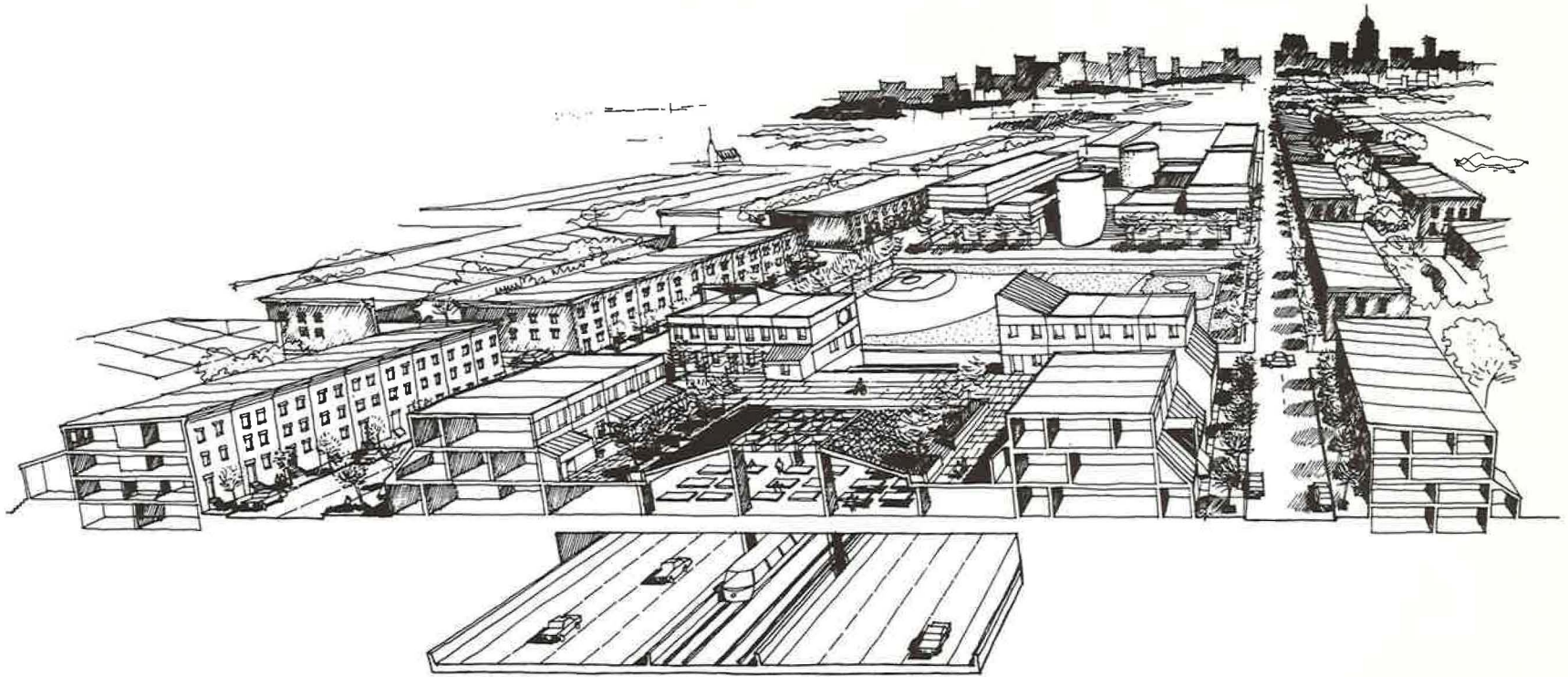


Figure 3. Exploratory concept of the Franklin-Mulberry corridor looking toward downtown, showing a total redevelopment of a street-level surface of the highway corridor for community use—housing, employment, recreation, education. On this scheme the highway and rapid transit would be in a tunnel.

Some segments of the road are needed early to accommodate early traffic pressures and other pressures. This full schedule will, however, apply to the major critical areas of Baltimore.

It is obvious from the start that throughout the short range of this 24-month project, the potential public agencies and private investors who must commit funds and program to the joining together of the highway and the city must be included as participants in the process. I would like to stress, having worked in urban renewal projects and knowing how long they take, historically, in this country, that to think of 24 miles of a free-way in 24 months will take an absolutely new kind of an accelerated, coordinated decision-making team. Basic to the achievement of the goals stated are the following critical points:

1. **People**—Individual participation in the decision-making by the people in the affected communities. How do we do this?
2. **Flexibility**—Opportunity for flexibility in design exploration. It is well known that in Baltimore condemnation laws have been passed delineating the route of the free-way. The question of flexibility is one of vital importance.
3. **Timing**—Accelerated process of coordinated public and private participation in advance of the commitment point.
4. **Funding**—A program and funding commitment for all programs identified, not the road alone. The private-sector commitment together with that of other public agencies will, in all probability, be two or three times the \$300 million allocated for the road by the Department of Transportation. I would like to stress that you cannot just talk about fitting a road into a city without paying for it. Right now funds are there for the road only; but if this project is to succeed, the commitment of funds to all the other things I have been talking about—the relocation, the housing, development of the surroundings—must be concurrent. The problem is great.

We are grateful to the State of Maryland, the City of Baltimore, and the U. S. Department of Transportation for establishing this important experiment, and hope that its outcome will bring value to general planning and research, more by successful techniques than by some inevitable mistakes, and that it will help give Baltimore a better highway and a better city. The key to this effort is the working together of architects, engineers, planners, urban designers, economists, sociologists, and government experts in a framework which permits them to pull in the same direction, at least most of the time.