



**MAKING PARKS IN THE CENTRAL  
CITY: ENVISIONING THE GATEWAY  
MALL, 1907-2010**

*by Michael R. Allen*

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Few St. Louisans could readily identify the visual characteristics that define the Gateway Mall, other than the handful of destination blocks. First envisioned by the Public Buildings Commission in 1904 as a civic center with central plaza, the Gateway Mall developed piecemeal through various plans that embodied more the ideas of landscape architecture of their times than any strong unitary vision for the mall itself. The mall's original purpose was complex, merging the desire to add green space to supposedly crowded areas, City Beautiful ideals for a city civic center with wide vistas and a more pragmatic operation to clear downtown of blocks of undesirable uses. Over time, the purposes, the boundaries and the styles of landscaping changed to the point where the mall's blocks form no easily identifiable single park space. Landscape historian Tom Turner writes: "If the space has no boundary, it should not be called a park. And if it has a boundary, the boundary should have a defined purpose." The Gateway Mall's boundary is visually murky and somewhat purposeless, so its status as a park remains doubtful although some blocks have strong individual character.

Descriptions of the mall typically revert to geography, such as stating the street names that form boundaries. The mall's identity lies in what surrounds it, and not in inherent qualities that the user of Forest or Tower Grove parks can offer to someone unfamiliar with those spaces. To enumerate what the mall contains hardly portrays an attractive green space. We have a jumble of mismatched blocks, from the passive formal parks across the street from City Hall to the postmodern ruins of Kiener Plaza to the sunken garden between the Old Courthouse and the Arch. We have monumental blocks like Aloe Plaza and the Richard Serra sculpture block that lose all of the drama of monumentality by being placed alongside intervening dull blocks of dead park space. We have interruptions like the Civil Courts and the Old Courthouse, a fairly pleasant juxtaposition if only there were not a

poorly-wrought 1980s office tower standing between the two. Some blocks are wide, some are narrow. Some are standard length and others form smaller superblocks. The whole mall is almost hinged around the Civil Courts building, where Market Street bends slightly southwest. That bend precludes true symmetry.

The Gateway Mall has no historic boundary since its boundaries have shifted under various plans. Originally, it would have extended between Grand and 12th (now Tucker). Later plans had it extending east to meet the Arch. Nowadays, it does start at the western edge of the Arch grounds but ends rather haphazardly past 21st Street. The terminus is a chain link fence separating an irregularly shaped block from a highway ramp. The boundaries have changed since first conception in 1907 and construction at the start of 1920s, but we finally have set the boundary. What is the purpose of this boundary? Ostensibly, the purpose is to create an open mall through the heart of downtown St. Louis that is a visual focal point as well as a verdant relief from the dense environment. That purpose itself is malleable, as the history of the mall idea shows. One would not be too cynical to imagine that the purpose of the boundary of the Gateway Mall is to be the boundary of the Gateway Mall. For a park boundary to be significant, it must enclose a green or recreational space that has discernible character.



*Site of the Gateway Mall about 1930, looking west from the Civil Courts Building, with Market Street and the Municipal Courts Building on the left and Chestnut Street and the distant twin towers of St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church on the right*

Historically, examples of European and American park malls like the sober, elegant Commonwealth Mall in Boston or the Paseo in Kansas City share a linear geometry.

Malls like these follow straight lines. A uniformity in landscaping is enforced through symmetrical rows of trees and centered paths, roads or lawns. The park mall typically runs through densely-built areas, where it is a clear visual break from the pattern of the city. Malls enhance urban environments by creating wide, open views not found on commercial thoroughfares. In turn, the density of the surrounding built environment provides a mall with both definition and architectural variety to alleviate the monotonous landscape. Clearly, the Gateway Mall lacks the characteristics of a park mall well established by landscape architecture across history.

From the earliest concept, our Gateway Mall was obviously supposed to be both a park and a mall. The early plans show a mall that would undoubtedly have met Turner's criterion for boundaries and would have created a unique, beautiful American landscape. The challenge set by our city leaders 100 years ago was to introduce park space into the central city. Downtown in 1907 was a densely-built environment where uses frequently collided – modern office buildings, small factories, narrow storefront buildings with tenements above, grand government buildings, seedy hotels, fraternal club houses, churches and schools all stood in the Central Business District. There were almost no open spaces downtown. The real estate market did not allow for open space. The city still was a walking city, and density was the key to economic livelihood. Businesses needed workers to live nearby; those workers needed housing, markets, schools, taverns and churches. Downtown at the turn of the century was “mixed use” without much urban planning. This was spontaneous order, to borrow a phrase from economist Friedrich von Hayek. The market put all land to use in this economy. Yet city leaders wanted to start planning the downtown area – a tall order that entailed altering fundamental patterns of economy and settlement.

By 1907, the relationship between the movements for urban planning and park creation were conjoined. Early park advocates in America embraced a romantic vision in which the virtues of recreation and time spent in nature were seen as counterbalance to the supposedly degenerative moral and physical effects of urban living. These advocates favored creation of large open spaces in cities that would imitate natural wildness within planned confines. They argued that romantic landscaped parks promoted public health, economic prosperity and social coherence. Proponents of early parks in St. Louis were in this romantic tradition. In 1836, a city ordinance set aside nearly 30 acres of the Common Fields south of downtown for use as a park. This land would become Lafayette Park in 1851. Just five years before, Mt. Auburn Cemetery in Watertown, Massachusetts near Boston was completed as America's first significant designed landscape open to the public. Mt. Auburn was designed by Henry Alexander Scammell Dearborn with Dr. Jacob

Bigelow and Alexander Wadsworth.

St. Louis created its first city parks in the 1840s: Carr Square and St. Louis Place on the near north side and Washington Park downtown. In the 1870s, as we all know, the city embarked upon its most ambitious park project when it created Forest Park, O'Fallon Park and Carondelet Park. These parks are all large landscaped parks in the romantic tradition. Their creation initially seemed radical because the three parks were located in still-rural parts of the city. However, within thirty years all three parks were beginning to be surrounded by neighborhoods and widely used. These three parks represent the intersection of progressive planning and romantic ideals. They served to benefit the minds and bodies of all citizens by setting aside landscaped green space to create transformative beauty. Yet they also fulfill the need for public amenities to further private development of the city.

In the 1880s, park advocacy moved to a rationalistic line of thought. The ideals of controlled wilderness, egalitarian social reform, and public health were displaced by more scientifically-tinged ideals of social order, prescribed recreation, and aesthetic formalism. Rationalists warned of the ills of unbridled nature, and certainly did not see nature as a cure for social ills. To the rationalists, wild nature was as much a problem as crowded urban living. The cure for both lay in social and physical engineering – the triumph of the human mind over undesired circumstances. The park movement's change was mirroring that of urban politicians, and both were assuming a reactionary posture. Urban overcrowding, disease, child labor, and poverty had become problems for American cities such as St. Louis, and their defeat was urgent. Reformers still viewed parks as an important curative measure, but not just any old parks. The park space must be as disciplined as society needed to be, and rather than gently leading people to social betterment, it must impose order upon them.

## **THE CITY PLAN, 1907**

Landscape architect George Kessler was one of the chief theorists of rationalist urban planning. Kessler designed the 1904 World's Fair landscape, which was a masterpiece of orderly expansive views. Kessler had little use for formal gardens or wildness; he favored large neat orderly lawns defined by imposing trees or dramatized by the placement of ornate buildings. Rather than emphasizing the delights of natural flora, Kessler underscored the beauty of a total landscape. At the World's Fair, this landscape included ornate Beaux Arts buildings. Here was a mirror of the early ideal of the Gateway Mall – orderly formal landscape contained by monumental public buildings. Mayor Rolla Wells was an admirer of Kessler

and put him to work on several urban planning projects, including a plan for Kingshighway that envisioned the road as a true parkway.



*The site of the future Gateway Mall circa 1928, looking east from about 21<sup>st</sup> Street, with Union Station and Market Street on the right*

In the absence of an official city government planning apparatus, the reform-minded Civic League created a City Plan Committees to undertake the first comprehensive city plan in 1905. The Plan Committees included numerous prominent businessmen, political leaders, architects and engineers. The Committee published the city's first Comprehensive Plan in 1907. The Committee reported that there was one acre of park for every 96 people living west of Grand and one acre for every 1,871 between Grand and the river. The Committee found this density undesirable and recommended creating additional park space through clearance. One hundred years later, after decades of demolition in the central core of our city have destroyed entire neighborhoods and rendered others dysfunctional, the Committee's plan seems short-sighted. The difference recorded in the number of park acres east and west of Grand did not necessarily indicate any real difference in quality of life. It simply recorded a greater building density east of Grand in the oldest walking neighborhoods of the city. Later city planners would begin to appreciate the boost high building density gives to fostering strong community ties, creating safe streets, creating vital commercial districts, and raising property values.

The rational age of city planning was hitting its stride in 1907, however. The rationalist national movement known as "City Beautiful" was highly influential in St. Louis due to Kessler's advocacy of its principles and the impact of the fair. Kessler served on the Inner and Outer Park Committee of the Civic League, and his associate Henry Wright served on the Civic Centers Committee. Together they worked to ensure their philosophy was ar-

ticulated in the city's first comprehensive plan. The Comprehensive Plan included an entire chapter on "A Public Buildings Group" that quoted in full the earlier recommendation of the Public Buildings Commission of 1904 for a similar plan. That commission consisted of architects John Mauran (chairman), William S. Eames (secretary) and Albert Groves, all staunch believers in City Beautiful ideals but not as forcefully visionary as Kessler.

Still, Kessler and the Civic League resurrected the words offered quite recently along with carefully-selected illustrations of the Place Vendome, Trafalgar Square and the Zwingerhoff to seduce elected officials into accepting the City Beautiful vision and contrast with the reality of a crowded western downtown. The Civic League recommended alleviating downtown's overcrowding by clearing several blocks of buildings between 13th and 14th streets from Clark north to Olive streets for a new park mall. Surrounding the mall would be grand public buildings, rendered in splendid Beaux Arts formalism in the illustrations accompanying the plan. City Hall, which had been completed in 1896 on most of Washington Park, would be joined with new courthouses and a new central public library. "Under no circumstances should this opportunity of establishing a focal center for public edifices be permitted to pass," concluded the plan – and its words would be heeded.



*Market at 18<sup>th</sup> Street; the scene from Union Station*

The area of downtown recommended for clearance was widely known as a notorious red-light district and African-American slum. According to historian James Wunsch, prostitutes began settling on Chestnut, Market and Pine streets between 12th and 15th street as early as the mid-1880s. The area also had been included in a zone that police had tried to clear of prostitution between December 1894 and March 1895. That sweep was unsuccessful, although it pushed some brothels west on Market Street. These streets were at a unique confluence between the rail yards and surrounding industrial and low-rent residential areas of Mill Creek Valley to the south and the fading elegance of Lucas Place to the north. Because of the new City Hall's location at 12th and Market, the area was especially



problematic to the city's image. By 1907, the north side of Market Street was a blemish seen by anyone who emerged from Union Station or City Hall, the two most important downtown public buildings. The 1907 plan addressed the immediate need to both create a civic center and eradicate the blight around City Hall. The problems to the west would be the subject of subsequent plans.

The contrast between the existing environment and the proposed replacement was equally obvious. Gone would be the patchwork of old brick buildings with the mix of tenement apartments, shops, corner storefronts, and warehouses. Instead, the blocks would be a sweeping green space with minimal disruption. Surrounding the park would be a controlled monolithic use. The plan called for nothing short of complete conquest and control of these city blocks; park space was the antidote to both social and architectural ills. The 1908 plan did not result in a rush to implementation, but the idea of a civic plaza gradually snowballed as it rolled through subsequent city planning documents.

## THE CENTRAL TRAFFIC PARKWAY PLAN, 1912

The Comprehensive Plan's call for a civic plaza blossomed after the establishment in 1909 of a permanent City Plan Commission. In July 1912, the City Plan Commission recommended to the Board of Alderman a plan called the "Central Traffic-Parkway." Described as the initial step in building a greater city, the plan called for the clearance of every block between Market and Chestnut streets from 12<sup>th</sup> Street west to Jefferson, which would be 26<sup>th</sup> by number. On these blocks would be built a modern parkway, with divided lanes in each direction and ribbons of green space planted with uniform rows of trees and lawns. The parkway plan called for eventual extension to Grand Avenue. No mention was made of eastward extension.



*The 1912 plan for the Central Traffic Parkway*

Although more of a traffic way for automobiles than a true park system, the 1912 design and description were fully rooted in the City Beautiful notion of park function. The

theory behind the plan was that the blight of the central city – blight of overcrowded buildings and congested small streets -- needed to be supplanted by an orderly place of defined purpose. Here would be a modern space for both vehicular traffic and human recreation. In turn, the parkway would foster stronger property values in adjacent sections and lead to the construction of new tall buildings. This would be the spine of the renewed city, and it would transmit improvement in economy and morality.

The plan is rife with statements hostile to the conditions of the central city, such as this gem: "[e]very public spirited citizen of St. Louis has regretted the depressing influence of surroundings upon the stranger stepping out of Union Station." Sure, the buildings were old and the restaurants less than five-star but the view from Union Station in 1912 showed a robust city with lots of economic activity. The plan bemoans the lack of park space: "There is not in all this central section a spot out of doors which offers rest." Never mind that the commercial heart of the city might need to be a bit more restless than other parts, and that there might be people who liked it that way and many more who needed it that way.

The plan stated that there were 101,540 people within easy walking distance of the parkway who would benefit from the recreational opportunities on the parkway. To the north of downtown was the most densely populated part of St. Louis, with a density of 26,218 people per square mile. The city average was 11,193 people. To people living in the crowded central city, "Forest, O'Fallon and Carondelet parks are almost unknown countries" according to the plan.

These premises had a key flaw in that the path of the parkway would eradicate much of the residential population any parkway would have served, through direct demolition and the resulting fraying of community through construction of new buildings. The parkway itself was more of a barrier than a park for human leisure. The narrow park strips served more as medians for the large roadway than as accessible and usable green space. Besides, people living in the central city were dependent on the availability of goods, services and employment within a few blocks of home. They were unlikely to travel a dozen blocks to walk down a parkway.

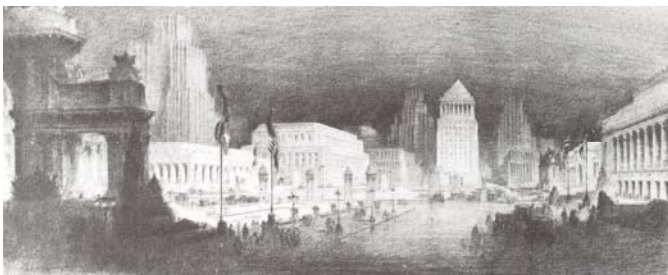
After the city passed a new charter in 1914, the City Plan Commission endeavored to persuade voters to approve a referendum for the central traffic parkway. Predictably, the referendum had the strong support of business leaders, Mayor Henry Kiel, downtown property owners eager for higher land values, and Central West End residents anticipating an easy commute out of downtown and the dirty central city. Less predictable was the larger coali-

tion of opponents. North and south side residents saw dubious value in the central parkway, while the largely poor and African-American residents of downtown and Mill Creek Valley saw the parkway as the elite's means of eradicating their enclave. Few saw the linear parkway as true recreational space, or even as the civic center the city lacked. Instead, it seemed more like a roadway designed for the private benefit of adjacent property owners and West End residents. The rational planning agenda could not overcome deep opposition, and the referendum failed on the June 1915 ballot.

That might have been the end of the notion had it not been for Harland Bartholomew. In 1916, the City Plan Commission hired the young planner as its first staffer with the title of Engineer. Bartholomew was a dedicated proponent of City Beautiful. He considered central St. Louis congested, confusing, and lacking any grand open spaces. Bartholomew pointed out that a pedestrian could not approach City Hall but merely pass by the building. To this planner, the density around City Hall was not a hallmark of a metropolitan city but rather a symptom of a lack of the grandeur important cities should have. He aimed to revive the general idea of the civic plaza outlined in the 1907 Comprehensive Plan. Instead of a large roadway, he proposed the Public Buildings Plan with park space on existing blocks in the area immediately around City Hall and the new Central Library.

### **PUBLIC BUILDING GROUP PLAN, 1919**

In 1919 the City Plan Commission published a *Public Building Group Plan*. The plan called for creation of green space on blocks between 12<sup>th</sup>, Market, 14<sup>th</sup> and Chestnut streets, with two blocks extending north to the Central Library on Olive between 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> Streets. The plan called the center spine between the library and the Municipal Courts building “the mall.” All around this park space would be new civic buildings, including a massive auditorium, a court house and others. To the west, a new plaza would be built across from Union Station. The plazas would be further adorned with fountains, an obelisk, and statues for a park environment devoid of nature and full of design.



*The Plaza Commission was appointed to carry out the 1923 bond issue. Their proposals for the Memorial Plaza were rendered by Hugh Ferriss, from Southern Architect and Building News, May 1928.*

In 1923, voters approved the largest bond issue in the city's history – an \$87 million program of public improvements. Money for the Civic Center and all of its grand new buildings was included. Major clearance and construction led to the grand transformation of western downtown anticipated for 16 years. The park blocks, named Memorial Plaza, offered exquisite views of impressive new civic buildings, like the Art Deco Civil Courts with its bizarre roof, the elegant City Hall and the somber Soldiers Memorial. Aloe Plaza was completed across from Union Station, offering a stunning view of the terminal but little to do except gaze. The parks were ordered to reinforce the importance of the public buildings on users. There were few plantings, save short young trees. The parks were subservient to the total vision of the public buildings grouping – pretty but static.



*Memorial Plaza shortly after construction of the Court of Honor by Eugene Mackey Jr, 1948. Find the trees.*

In 1939, as part of the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, an unrelated park was built between Market, 3<sup>rd</sup>, Chestnut and 4<sup>th</sup> streets. The Jefferson National Expansion Memorial itself consisted of huge park on the downtown riverfront, and should have been a warning of the future redundancy of more downtown green space. However, perhaps that redundancy was a small price to pay for the easy solution of land clearance. Downtown was aging and losing its businesses not just to other cities but to new suburbs. Parks – and parking for automobiles – were relatively easy and quick solutions for blocks of decaying buildings.

In 1940, the city added an amenity to the new park space by constructing Carl Milles' fountain *The Meeting of the Waters* on Aloe Plaza. Soon after World War II, civic leaders began talking about the supposed need to connect Aloe and Memorial plazas with green space to “complete” the vision of the Civic Center. Passage of a bond issue in 1953 allowed the city's Land Clearance for Redevelopment Authority to successfully complete the blocks between 15<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> streets by 1960. These blocks were wider than the earlier blocks and visually



plain save stylized screen walls that remain. Yet they opened views of the civic buildings and allowed for more clearance of the run-down shops of Market Street. Memorial and Aloe plazas consequently lost some of their visual impact as they were subsumed into the larger mall. Some new construction came to the mall edges, but most was federally subsidized.



*Aloe Plaza before construction of the Milles Fountain*

One of the best attempts to connect the mall to adjacent uses came in 1961 with the completion of Plaza Square Apartments, which added 1,090 residential apartments on four blocks north of the mall. The City Plan Commission's prophecies of tall new buildings floundered, however, as St. Louis struggled to maintain development interest in downtown.



Plaza Square by HOK and Harris Armstrong, an early promotional rendering, showing the surviving St. John and Centenary churches with the six new 13-story towers

## THE IDEA FOR AN EASTERN "PARKWAY"

Meanwhile, selection of Eero Saarinen and Dan Kiley's plan for the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial design in the 1948 design competition drew attention to

eastern downtown. In 1954, the architectural firm Russell, Mullgardt, Schwartz & Van Hoefen published a rendering of an eastern extension of the Gateway Mall terminating at the new Memorial. The block between 3<sup>rd</sup> (now Memorial Drive) and 4<sup>th</sup> Streets would be landscaped by the National Park Service as part of the Memorial and named Luther Ely Smith Square. The firm's rendering was the first time that the idea of extending the downtown park mall to the east had been considered.

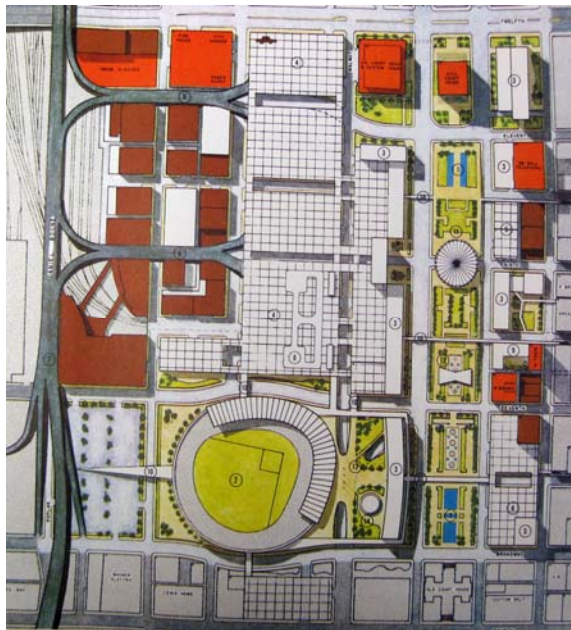


*Kurt Perlee, perspective of proposed eastern extension of the Gateway Mall from top of Civil Courts Building, with bluebirds, from 1960 downtown plan*

The Civil Courts Building and the Old Courthouse, however, were obstacles to a continuous park mall. Still, the rendering of formally symmetrical park space joining the existing Memorial Plaza and park mall at the west to the Memorial at the east was immediately popular. In 1960, the City Plan Commission adopted a plan for the new "Gateway Mall" along the lines of Russell, Mullgardt, Schwartz & Van Hoefen's rendering. In 1960, the City Plan Commission adopted a downtown master plan that included a new "Parkway" – the name "Gateway Mall" would come seven years later – along the lines of Russell, Mullgardt, Schwartz & Van Hoefen's rendering."

The ensuing patchy implementation would not live up to the promise of the 1960 plan. In 1962, voters approved a \$2 million bond issue to build the first part of Kiener Plaza on the block between Broadway and 6<sup>th</sup> streets just west of the Old Courthouse. The block was developed in the next three years with a circular fountain at west with a central path and two curved approaches at the east. Inside of the fountain on a pedestal would be William Zorach's sculpture *The Runner*, placed with the runner figure facing west. However, a

\$6.2 million November 1965 bond issue to fund construction of the rest of the mall – to which city officials expected a substantial match of federal funds – was rejected by voters.



1960 Downtown Plan, showing on left proposed Civic Center Redevelopment, with new Busch Stadium, and on right proposed Gateway Mall

## THE SASAKI PLAN, 1967

In March 1966, an undeterred Mayor Alphonso Cervantes traveled to New York City for the public announcement of a national design competition with a \$15,000 prize for a master design for the entire Gateway Mall. The city and Downtown St. Louis, Inc. sponsored the design competition. Fifty-seven firms or individuals submitted designs before the winner was announced in June 1967.

The boundary of the competition was set with the Old Courthouse at the east and the proposed North-South Distributor (roughly 22<sup>nd</sup> Street) at the west. By this time, downtown had lost so much building stock and street life that the old rationalist rhetoric about alleviating the ills of the central city would have been ludicrous. Instead, Cervantes and civic leaders began to talk up the effect of the Gateway Mall as an instrument that might lead to building up the core. With the Mall extended, they argued, Chestnut and Market streets would become desirable sites for the sorts of large corporate headquarters St. Louis desperately wanted to attract. The rhetorical emphasis shifted from social to economic benefits, but the rationalist framework remained latent.

Just as before, there was a slight problem: every block targeted for the mall contained storefront buildings and

office buildings, most occupied. The only problem with many was a need for repairs typical of old buildings. The winning proposal in the competition by Sasaski and Associates of Boston did not include retention of a single building in the path of the new mall path. Sasaski called for yet another major change to the mall design. Here, the blocks would be landscaped to form a depressed center lawn. Large berms would separate this lawn from four rows of trees on each side. The plan's design program hinged on landscape symmetry that framed views of the Old Courthouse, Arch, and Civil Courts. In the same stroke, the architects' quest for the wide view neglected the importance of human activity to healthy parks. Sasaki tried to avoid the shortcomings of the City Beautiful park planning by including new shops on Chestnut and Market facing the mall in the recessed ground-floor arcades of anticipated new buildings. Sasaki and Associates realized that the park space needed constant day time pedestrian traffic to be active. The firm even included revision of the Memorial Plaza area to include sunken flower gardens on blocks around the Soldier's Memorial.

Oddly, city leaders made little attempt to fund the ambitious large plan. The Land Clearance for Redevelopment Authority finally obtained a federal grant for land acquisition and park construction. After acquiring one block, between 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> streets, and implementing a greatly simplified version of the Sasaki plan there in 1976, civic leaders abandoned the latest design after negative public response. Soon after, the completed block was graded and redesigned as the site of Richard Serra's sculpture *Twain*.

## “PRIDE” AND THE MALL, 1982

Yet city leaders did not let the dream of a “completed” Gateway Mall die. There still were blocks of old buildings to clear and new corporate high-rises to attract. However, developer Donn Lipton seized the opportunity of city inaction and in February 1977 submitted a redevelopment plan for the blocks between 7<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> streets radically different than the Sasaki plan. Lipton's architect Richard Claybour created a plan for attracting more development and creating park space, using the existing conditions of those blocks. The alleys of each block would become lively enclosed parks, surrounded by rehabilitated historic office buildings and a few new buildings. One could still have stood on the steps of the Civil Courts and have gotten an axial view to the Arch, but in the foreground would have been several blocks of integrated green space and vital activities. Here was the chance to take the reasonable idea that downtown needed better green space without using it to tamper with the urban qualities that made downtown what it was. On top of it all, immediate economic development



would accompany the introduction of green space. Downtown business leaders submitted their own plan that month to raise \$6 million in bonds to complete the mall. Proponents claimed that downtown would stagnate without the completion of the Gateway Mall east of Tucker.

Mayor James Conway appointed a task force including Lipton and downtown businesses men to study how best to proceed on the Gateway Mall. The task force hired Sasaski and Associates to prepare a report that was completed in September 1978. Sasaki and Associates' report threw a spanner into the works of the firm's own master plan by recommending Lipton's plan as the most economically sensible plan for downtown. Downtown businessmen went on the offensive, however, and persuaded Mayor Conway to throw the task force report away and to hire Sasaski again with the order to come up with a workable plan for an "active linear mall" between 11<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> streets. Sasaski's new vision retained little from the 1967 proposal, instead relying on activating uses such as a greenhouse between Broadway and 6<sup>th</sup>, an aquarium between 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> and a museum between 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>. The one nod to Lipton was retention of the Western Union Building at the southwest corner of 9<sup>th</sup> and Chestnut Streets. This token preservation plan derived from the expense of relocating the telegram cables rather than any interest in retaining existing buildings. Downtown business leaders next commissioned HOK to plan the specifics of an \$89 million Gateway Mall completion.

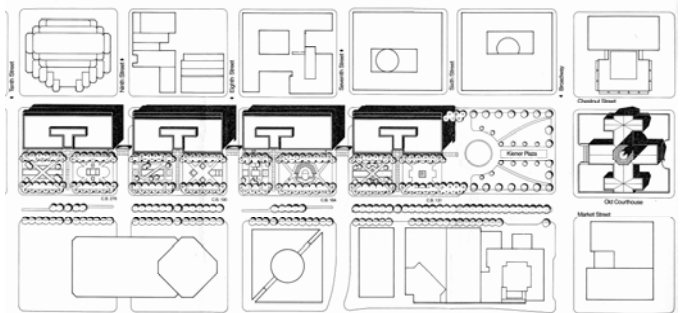


*The Western Union Building, looking west from 9<sup>th</sup> and Chestnut*

Alderman Bruce Sommer (D-6<sup>th</sup>), who represented downtown, opposed the new Sasaki plan and came out in support of Donn Lipton's plan. In 1981, Lipton picked up more support when Vincent Schoemehl, Jr. was elected mayor. Schoemehl favored the Lipton plan, and his first action was to legally blight the blocks between 7<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> streets to open them to a formal "request for proposals" or RFP. Four plans submitted by the April 1982 deadline included one by Lipton similar to his 1977 plan and one by the new Gateway Mall Redevelopment Corporation that introduced the "half mall" concept. Downtown business leaders led by KMOX Chairman Robert Hyland

formed the board of the new corporation and explained the abrupt change of plans; they had considered the options and with declining city revenues had decided that creating park space alone was financially impossible. What was needed to make park space possible was income-generating activity. Instead of whole park blocks, the corporation wanted to build "half-mall" blocks that situated five-story office buildings on their northern ends and park space on the southern end and middle. The buildings would subsidize the park space and create thousands of square feet of desirable Class A office space. Restaurants and shops on the ground floor would direct pedestrians out onto the park blocks where they could frolic and reflect in a rigidly-designed landscape. The Redevelopment Corporation made no bones about its chief purpose: "attracting more development." Critics quickly pointed out that the blocks in question were already developed with buildings on their northern – and southern – halves. Why bother?

The result was predictable: civic leaders derided the Lipton plan as last-minute (even though it had actually been first in this recent round of planning debate) and insufficiently grand. They stood by the rationalist urban planning vision of order through total replacement, but with an almost absurd new twist of replacing urban building stock with new building stock to "complete" a linear open mall. After intense lobbying by labor interests caused Mayor Schoemehl to reverse his position, he helped put together the new Pride Redevelopment Corporation. In October 1982, the Board of Aldermen approved a redevelopment agreement with Pride Redevelopment Corporation by a vote of 26 to 2.



*The "half mall" concept proposed by the Gateway Mall Corporation*

An arduous two-year battle followed to preserve the buildings in the mall's path. Three large historic office buildings, the Title Guarantee, Buder, and International buildings, were demolished by the end of 1984. Destruction of several smaller historic buildings, known as Real Estate Row, took place in the next two years. All of these buildings were deemed eligible for the National Register of Historic Places by the National Park



Service. They provided visual context for the landmark Wainwright Building, although Mall proponents somehow declared the loss of context an improvement. Market Preservation, Inc., a new advocacy organization, fought to save the buildings. Market Preservation lost the battle but waged the strongest preservation effort in the city's history, and for good reason. The demolition of historic buildings for the mediocre Gateway One building and its anemic plaza inverted the whole purpose of parks: to provide public beauty. The public beauty of great architecture was destroyed to create a privately-controlled visual offense.

The half-mall block quickly garnered infamy. The office building on the northern side of the block, Gateway One on the Mall (designed by Robert L. Boland, Inc.), was an uninspired mass that ended up being 15 stories tall and dwarfing the Wainwright Building. The park on the southern end was marked with plinths advertising the office building at Market Street, making it seem like an extension of the building's private world. The block seemed like an intrusion into the Gateway Mall, not its logical completion. Plans fizzled for developing the next block west in the same manner, although that block was cleared for use as surface parking lot. Kiener Plaza was extended west, with 6<sup>th</sup> Street closed, in 1986 to include postmodern Roman ruins with a cascade called the Morton D. May Amphitheater (designed by Team Four). How this related to the earlier statue of the runner in the circular fountain remains anyone's guess.



*The implosion of the Buder Building, 1984*

Ending where he started with downtown planning, Mayor Schoemehl announced plans in 1992 to finally "complete" the Mall before he left office. He intended for the city to acquire the two blocks between 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> streets and to demolish remaining buildings, including the landmark Western Union Building. In 1994, the relandscaped blocks opened and only added to the visual confusion. With empty center lawns and flanking rows of trees (asymmetrical here), the plan

seemed a rehash of the Sasaki plan. Seeing the plans, architect Gene Mackey called the mall a "series of unconnected, unrelated blocks." So it was. A brief bright spot occurred in the winters of 1999 and 2000, when the city opened a highly popular temporary ice skating rink on the block east of the Serra sculpture.



*The Gateway One half mall, with its advertising plinth looking like a military emplacement*

## THE GATEWAY MALL MASTER PLAN, 2008

St. Louis Mayor Francis Slay and Planning and Urban Design Director Rollin Stanley announced in 2007 their intention to create a *Gateway Mall Master Plan* in association with landscape architect Thomas Balsley. Their plan would be the first comprehensive plan for every block that had become part of the mall, as well as the rest of Memorial Plaza. Recognizing the design failure of the Gateway Mall, Stanley envisioned a break from the past – a mall friendly to pedestrians and built around uses that attract people. Stanley and Slay went farther than most actors in this drama and admitted that the Mall needed real planning. They didn't want to extend it or glorify it but improve it.

Unfortunately, their plan was too constrained by the old rationalist vision to be a blueprint for major improvement. For one thing, they were committed to preserving every block of the Mall as green space – a questionable proposition in a downtown with as much open space as ours. For another, their plan avoided recommendations for improving the Mall's context. The large-scaled environment around the Mall is as resistant to human action as the park itself; it's a chicken and egg relationship, and the new *Master Plan* acted like an ostrich.

Still, there were good ideas in it. The plan avoided trying to visually unify the mall, except for a southern bike lane and promenade. The plan acknowledged the variation in block width and the curving streets that make symmetry impossible. Instead, the mall plan recommends creating different zones on the mall – a sculpture garden between 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>; recreation areas and a dog park west of 15<sup>th</sup> street; an amphitheater-style space on Memorial Plaza; a gathering space in Kiener Plaza. The

plan tried to match these zones to adjacent uses without looking at the physical connections between. For instance, the sculpture garden introduced a rather romantic vision of human-scaled green space near downtown residences and offices. But it's flanked to the north and south by large, monolithic office buildings set back from the sidewalk and possessing reflective windows and intrusive driveways. A walk from the north side of downtown to the sculpture garden won't provide much delight or instruction – and by the time I'm there I may not be in the best mood for contemplating art.

The master plan recommended more seating, a walking and running path, kinetic art on adjacent buildings, and lighting on the blocks that would make them attractive nighttime spaces. There was some breakdown of barriers, with a small restaurant building in the sculpture garden. But in some ways the restaurant and the dazzling contemporary art are low-key, updated versions of the monuments and buildings of the 1919 Public Building Group Plan.

At the Gateway Mall press conference in 2008, Mayor Slay declared a “new era” for the Gateway Mall. This era was new inasmuch as it is based on planners' admission of the mall's failure. The failure has always been systematic and structural, however, while the solutions outlined in the new Master Plan were topical and aesthetic. Rather than address crucial problems of identity, circulation, and boundaries, the new Master Plan treats those as secondary causes by offering a remedy not to the idea of a Gateway Mall but to its execution.

## CONCLUSION: ANOTHER WAY

Of course, the Gateway Mall master plan provided impetus to the development of the two blocks of the mall between 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> streets as the successful Citygarden. Designed by Nelson Byrd Woltz architects and completed in 2009, Citygarden is an interactive sculpture garden that has garnered favorable criticism from the *New York Times*. Citygarden's two blocks share the “hallway,” a wide formal tree-lined sidewalk along Market Street recommended by the new *Gateway Mall Master Plan*. However, the blocks eschew further strict formalism. Linear paths follow the somewhat irregular lines of long-abandoned alleys, while a gentle arc runs through both blocks. The north sides are raised up, with the eastern block containing a waterfall and minimalist cafe building on its high side and the western block rising up to a whimsical forested hill atop which is placed a sculpture. There is a plaza on the western block alive with fountain jets adjacent to a grid of large metal pedals upon which one can jump to ring bells with different tones. All of the sculptures can be touched. CityGarden has been so successful that the section of 10th Street between

the two blocks remains closed to shield the heavy pedestrian traffic.

Citygarden's design discarded rationalist notions of open space and view in favor of a contemporary landscape design theories of the need for activation, asymmetry, whimsy and native plantings. The small size of the intervention – two blocks – creates clear boundaries and edges of Citygarden that drive pedestrians into its space. The success of Citygarden in part comes from employing long-standing observations about the utility of basic urban design features that encourage circulation and building density.

In his 1938 volume *The Art of Building Cities*, Camillo Sitte discusses the great public spaces of historic European cities. According to Sitte, the plan of a successful urban park must be irregular and enclosed with the size no larger than 465 ft by 190 ft. The park width should be equal to the height of the principal adjacent building, while the length should be no more than twice this dimension. Statues or monuments should be located on the periphery to maximize circulation of people within the park. Sitte stated that the park need not have plants or lawns. Unsurprising, Sitte's ideas of sensitive central city park space germinated slowly in the United States.



*Citygarden from the west, showing the peek-a-boo effect of the half mall block between 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Streets*

In her classic 1961 book, *The Death and Life of Great*



*American Cities*, Jane Jacobs compared four public parks within a roughly equal distance of Philadelphia City Hall in the center city. Jacobs found high usage at only one of the four parks, Rittenhouse Square. The reason for its success, according to Jacobs, lay in its surroundings. Rittenhouse Square is surrounded by mixed uses that generate constant foot traffic. The square is a crossing amid a dense urban environment, and proximate to ground-floor activity in surrounding buildings. In short, Rittenhouse Square has the clear and purposeful boundaries and the surrounding human density to be simultaneously well-defined and well-used. Again, Tom Turner summarizes the situation well with the statement: “Success depends on the exact character of the bounding membrane [of a park].”

After conducting a study of public spaces in New York City in 1980, critic William H. Whyte concluded that “what attracts people most ... is other people.” We can construct dazzling follies and plant beautiful gardens on the Mall, but without circulation it will never amount to a decent public space. And it will not generate circulation if its surroundings remain hostile to pedestrian life. Indeed, people do seek other people – at restaurants, at gallery openings, at night clubs and in residential and office buildings. These things are in short supply on Market and Chestnut streets, beyond the few retail spaces north of Kiener Plaza. Citygarden is such a singular park space that it drives its own demand for use, which in turn has boosted pedestrian traffic around it. A converse positive relationship between park and activity of Citygarden also can be seen in a smaller, earlier downtown park.



*Rittenhouse Square, Center City Philadelphia, one of the five original squares of the 17<sup>th</sup>-century city plan*

Strangely, a downtown park that enjoys much casual use throughout warmer months is one facing the Mall on Market Street in front of one of the office buildings built in the 1980s. The plaza in front of 1010 Market

Street, at the southeast corner of Market and 11<sup>th</sup> streets, was designed by architect Edward Larrabee Barnes as part of the building design. The building itself, with its white grid around window ribbons, is a post-modern reincarnation of International Style minimalism. The plaza uses well-defined design elements: a grid of pathways with trees planted in the squares created by the paths. There are a few benches, a lot of shade and defining enclosure provided by building walls. The glass wall exposes a lobby and restaurant space to this plaza, employing visual continuity between interior and exterior common to Modernist-inspired work. This little park is simple, well-designed, comfortable and placed adjacent to traffic-generating use.

The qualities that make Barnes’ park space functional eluded many of his contemporaries, but they are apparent in the popular Citygarden. Over one hundred years since publication of *A City Plan for St. Louis*, the Gateway Mall reflects a tortuous implementation and constant boundary changes. However, the quality of design found in Citygarden shows that the flaws of the ideas applied to the mall in the past are not permanent impediments. The Gateway Mall will continue to change as the 2007 Master Plan is implemented, and will lose much of its monumental formalism. Within the next decades, the Gateway Mall will become the embodiment of early 21<sup>st</sup> century park planning principles. Today’s architects and planners follow many others’ foot steps in trying to envision the string of city blocks between Chestnut and Market as useful, important urban park space. While contemporary park planning embraces many of the theories that criticized previous ideas from the City Beautiful movement, its practitioners are laboring under contemporary economic and ideological circumstances. In some ways, the Gateway Mall is still being shaped according to current landscape design trends rather than as part of a broader planning strategy for downtown. Whether the mall itself gains an identity in the next decade depends on the quality and scope of interventions to come.



*The park at 1010 Market Street, designed by Edward Larrabee Barnes*



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# News Letter

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