

Urban Renewal as Violence:
Documenting the Erasure of Wooster Square

by

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

In American urban development, a defining period known as the urban renewal era took place in the decades after the Second World War. Many cities in the United States experienced a new interest in addressing urban decay; laws such as the 1949 Housing Act facilitated the movement. Municipalities had the capability to demolish areas that they labelled as ‘slums’ or ‘blighted’ in order to build new, attractive urban fabric and infrastructure. Although perhaps rooted in an optimistic and utopian vision of the future city, urban renewal projects had significant flaws—namely that the areas targeted for demolition disproportionately belonged to marginalized communities.

In New Haven, Connecticut, the historic neighbourhood of Wooster Square was subject to an urban renewal scheme that included both rehabilitation of existing buildings, and complete redevelopment. Further, a new Interstate highway was situated through the centre of the neighbourhood, designed to sever Wooster Square into two distinct areas. This thesis explores the motivations and impact of Wooster Square’s renewal, both on the urban fabric itself, as well as on the neighbourhood’s Italian, immigrant and working class community. Through a series of ten illustrations that draw knowledge from archival sources such as photographs and oral histories, the thesis visualizes Wooster Square before and after renewal. In doing so, the thesis documents the destructive nature of the urban renewal approach and the violence that it inflicted on one of New Haven’s most marginalized groups.

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01

INTRODUCTION

In 1955, Jane Jacobs took a trip to Philadelphia. Employed at *Architectural Forum*, she was tasked with writing a story about the extensive redevelopment project undertaken by the municipality.¹ Upon arriving in the city, Jacobs met with a prominent character in Philadelphia at the time—planning commission director Edmund Bacon.

Bacon had quickly accumulated attention and acclaim for his urban renewal schemes in the city. Trained as an architect, he had aggressively pursued the redevelopment of Philadelphia with the determination to “... clear away the debris of the city’s industrial past and create gleaming new modernist vistas.”² Bacon’s final renewal plans spanned 10,000 acres across the city.³

Eager to impress Jacobs, Bacon gave her a full tour of a redeveloping Philadelphia—where Jacobs could truly understand the ‘before and after’ of Bacon’s triumphant transformation of the city.⁴ They first visited a ‘slum’ neighbourhood, occupied by primarily African Americans and yet to be modernized through renewal.⁵ Here, Jacobs saw a place busy with sidewalk activity; people actively moved through the neighbourhood, going about their day and giving life to the streets.⁶ But Bacon was blind to this vitality—he knew what was best for this decaying slum, and what was needed was total redevelopment.

Next, Bacon took Jacobs to see a completed renewal project area. Here, the former urban fabric had been razed to the ground, and in its place stood new, attractive, modern buildings. But there was something critically different about this place—a supposedly shining example of a proper city neighbourhood. Jacobs commented to Bacon: “Ed...nobody’s here. Now, why is that? Where are the people? Why is no one here?”⁷ Without an

1 Robert Kanigel, “For Jane Jacobs, an early exercise in disillusionment,” *The Toronto Star*, September 23, 2016, <https://www.thestar.com/news/insight/2016/09/23/for-jane-jacobs-an-early-exercise-in-disillusionment.html>.

2 Kanigel, “For Jane Jacobs.”

3 Kanigel, “For Jane Jacobs.”

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5 Howard Husack, “An Uncredentialed Woman,” *City Journal*, October 19, 2016, <https://www.city-journal.org/html/uncredentialed-woman-14809.html>.

6 Kanigel, “For Jane Jacobs.”

7 Husack, “An Uncredentialed Woman.”

adequate response, Jacobs was left questioning why someone like Bacon could not recognize this seemingly clear and critical flaw inherent in the city's renewed neighbourhoods.⁸

Jane Jacobs would leave the city and go on to write her article about Bacon's new Philadelphia. Diverting from the anticipated endorsement of the scheme, she expressed concern over the direction of postwar, modernist ideals of city planning that seemed to ignore the needs of the people themselves who live in cities, in favour of mass demolition.⁹

In the years following the trip to Philadelphia, Jacobs went on to fight an epic battle against these same ideals that presented themselves in her own neighbourhood. Jacobs' famous adversary Robert Moses, who singlehandedly attempted to reshape the fabric of New York City, would meet his match in Jacobs when he proposed a new freeway across lower Manhattan—cutting directly through Greenwich Village and its beloved public gathering place, Washington Square Park.¹⁰ After years of community organizing and even an arrest, Jacobs' efforts to stop the construction of the freeway were successful, and the project was cancelled in 1969.¹¹

Jacobs' trip to Philadelphia would in part also inspire her to write a book, published only a few years later in 1961.¹² The book eloquently and intelligently challenged the popular urban planning beliefs of the era, and proposed a new way to look at city planning—a perspective that centred the human scale, and prioritized the fostering of city vitality through diversity and walkability. *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* has not only become one of the most respected and influential written works on cities, but it also solidified Jacobs as a leading voice in the fields of urban planning and architecture.

While Bacon and his urban renewal plans inspired what would become one of the most public and hard-fought battles against urban renewal in

8 Husack, "An Uncredentialed Woman."

9 Kanigel, "For Jane Jacobs."

10 Anthony Paletta, "Story of cities #32: Jane Jacobs v Robert Moses, battle of New York's urban titans," *The Guardian*, April 28, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2016/apr/28/story-cities-32-new-york-jane-jacobs-robert-moses>.

11 Paletta, "Story of cities."

12 Paletta, "Story of cities."

the United States, it also motivated further destruction in cities beyond Philadelphia. Another woman left the city after witnessing Bacon's work, around the same time as Jane Jacobs. Instead of questioning Bacon's approach to cities, however, she parted Philadelphia having adopted his positive perspective on urban renewal. Mary Hommann, who was employed at Philadelphia's planning department, moved away from the city after receiving a job offer in New Haven, Connecticut. The new position was Project Director for one of the city's urban renewal projects in a neighbourhood called Wooster Square. In this role, Hommann would emulate Bacon and lead a project that would cause great destruction in the neighbourhood.

Introduction to New Haven

In order to decipher the motivations, actions, and consequences associated with the phenomenon of postwar urban renewal across the United States, this thesis has chosen a singular urban renewal project, that of Wooster Square in New Haven, Connecticut, to deeply analyze, document and evaluate. In doing so, the thesis will reveal fundamental failings in the urban renewal approach—those which resulted in significant and severe ramifications for some of the most vulnerable factions of city populations.

In the mid-twentieth century, New Haven was seen to be suffering ills defined as characteristic of the American postwar city: economic hardship never previously encountered in the city's centuries-long lifespan, as well as parasitic urban blight threatening New Haven's future prosperity. Manufacturing industries that had previously sustained the local economy, such as the production of firearms, ammunition, locks, and toys, experienced decline—while much of the white upper-class population moved out of the city and into nearby suburbs.¹³ By the 1950s, the municipality was left with a weakened tax base and a need for economic revival. Further, the perception of ethnic enclaves in the city as growing sources of urban blight amplified fears of the city's imminent ruin.

In response, an ambitious new vision for New Haven was conceived—the city was designated to become a national epicentre of high calibre,

13 Robert A. Dahl, *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 4.

innovative modern buildings. These iconic structures and their surrounding urban area would be well-connected by efficient new transportation infrastructure.¹⁴ The transformation was to secure New Haven’s postwar future as one of prosperity, security and prestige.

Throughout the urban renewal era, the city would see an outbreak of new monumental buildings constructed by some of the most respected architects of the era, leading to postwar New Haven being named the “Model City.”¹⁵ Starting with the commissioning of Louis Kahn for the new Yale University Art Gallery completed in 1953, other prominent projects included the 1961 Temple Street Garage by Paul Rudolph, Yale University’s 1963 Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library by Gordon Bunschaft of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, and the David S. Ingalls Hockey Rink completed by Eero Saarinen in 1958.¹⁶ In the wake of the city’s modernism boom, New Haven was heralded as a national architectural leader; it was claimed to have become “...one of the pilgrimage centres of modern architecture” as the city had attracted “...some of the greatest architects and undoubtedly some of the finest buildings of [the] era.”^{17,18}

In the ensuing decades, academics, planners, residents and others began to seriously question the utopian vision promised in the Model City, as with most urban renewal projects across the country. The top-down, overbearing approach to city planning inherent in urban renewal failed to generate a well-functioning city made up of idyllic neighbourhoods. In the meantime, thousands of households and businesses—particularly those belonging to marginalized groups—were grievously displaced.

Focus Area of Wooster Square

Wooster Square is a historic neighbourhood in eastern New Haven.

14 Elizabeth Mills Brown, *New Haven A Guide to Architecture and Urban Design* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 10-11.

15 Brown, *New Haven*, 10.

16 “New Haven Modern Architecture,” New Haven Preservation Trust, accessed January 7, 2023, <http://newhavenmodern.org>.

17 Brown, *New Haven*, 10.

18 Don Metz and Yuji Noga, *New Architecture in New Haven* (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1966), Introduction.

Originally founded by wealthy merchants, an influx of industrial factories shifted the demographics of the neighbourhood. By the early twentieth century, Wooster Square was made up of predominantly immigrant Italian residents, who were recruited from Italy to work in the neighbourhood's factories. Wooster Square is a unique case amongst the neighbourhoods that were part of New Haven's urban renewal plans. Unlike in the rest of the city, planners for the Wooster Square Renewal Project identified a significant portion of the neighbourhood's urban fabric that was of historic and aesthetic value. Therefore, the renewal design called for a combination of rehabilitation, for the structures being saved, and demolition, for the rest of the neighbourhood. In the years following renewal as criticism grew, in part due to renewal's mass displacement of marginalized communities, Wooster Square was singled out as a 'success story' for its rehabilitation approach. However, this thesis refutes the misconceptions that Wooster Square's renewal was successful, or that it involved only minimal demolition and displacement; in fact, this thesis will illustrate the immense damage that renewal brought upon both the neighbourhood's urban fabric and its vibrant working-class community.

Thesis Structure

Following this introductory chapter, the thesis is divided into five body chapters that examine the urban renewal of Wooster Square:

In **Chapter 2**, the social and legal framework through which urban renewal arose on a national and local level is explored. This includes an analysis of the state of cities—and New Haven in particular—following the Second World War, and the common perception that cities were decaying due to the presence of growing slums. An introduction is also presented to the Housing Act of 1949, which provided federal funding to the City of New Haven to pursue urban renewal, as well as to eminent domain, which was the legal apparatus used to seize property from residents throughout the era.

Chapter 3 details the approach for renewal in New Haven, and in particular the pursuit of a Model City vision, where the demolition of blighted urban fabric would make way for modern, landmark buildings designed by reputable architects of the era. New highways would bring economic stimulus back to the downtown core and connect suburbs to the city. The strategies used by New Haven's mayor are explored—in

particular an intensive public relations campaign that secured federal funding and national attention for the city.

In **Chapter 4**, the plan for urban renewal in the Wooster Square neighbourhood is introduced. The renewal of Wooster Square was proposed in order to remedy two characteristics of the neighbourhood seen to be of blighting quality: a lack of adequate housing, and the presence of mixed uses. Further, the City found Wooster Square to have the potential to contribute to the city's economic revival due to its close proximity to the downtown. The final plans are presented, which included the construction of a new Interstate highway through the centre of the neighbourhood, creating a 'residential rehabilitation' area in the west, and a completely redeveloped 'Industrial Park' area in the east.

Chapter 5 consists of an illustration series, which represents the main body of the thesis. A visual tour of Wooster Square is presented through a series of five drawing pairs, with extended captions that detail the contents of each illustration. The role of the illustration series is to visualize the urban and cultural character of Wooster Square prior to its renewal, in comparison to its current state after renewal. Therefore, each pair of images consists of one 'before' and one 'after' illustration from the same vantage point in the neighbourhood. The series makes use of oral histories from former and current residents of Wooster Square to reveal the truly destructive nature that renewal had on the urban vitality of the neighbourhood.

Chapter 6 expands on the previous chapter by investigating the impact of urban renewal on the community of Wooster Square. It details the manipulative strategies implemented by the City to gain the trust of residents, as well as the lack of planning in the relocation of displaced residents spurred by the traumatic practice of eminent domain. The chapter continues by detailing the repercussions of renewal on the individuals displaced, including the psychological impact of being forcibly removed from the neighbourhood. Finally, the renewal of Wooster Square is understood in the context of New Haven's municipal politics, where ethnic tensions and divisions led to the fragmentation of the lively Italian immigrant community residing in the neighbourhood.

02

THE RISE OF RENEWAL

Blighted Postwar Cities

The reinvention of New Haven, both in built form and in image, owed itself to a greater political force at play during the time period. Following the Second World War, many municipalities across the United States sought new means for transforming the image of their postwar cities. Motivated by idealistic and utopian conceptualizations of the city of the future, they “...envisioned a complete break with the past, wanting to remake everyday city life by uprooting and carrying away the nineteenth-century cityscape.”¹ Namely, these cities saw the rise of slums as an imminent threat to achieving this vision.

Cities Had ‘Slums’

The negative perception of neighbourhoods belonging to New Haven’s minorities did not originate during the urban renewal era, as the geographic segregation of minorities within the fabric of the city can be linked to longstanding historic discrimination. In New Haven and many other American cities, maps were used to delineate the safety of mortgage lending and were ‘redlined’ by marking neighbourhoods with high concentrations of minority groups—and African Americans in particular—as high-risk regions for mortgages, versus white neighbourhoods which were deemed low risk.² The Home Owners’ Loan Corporation (HOLC) issued New Haven’s redlined map in 1937 (Figure 2.1). The map demonstrates the various grades of residential security in relation to mortgage lending in New Haven. Green, blue, yellow and red denote the four grades of security present within the city. In total, only 7% of New Haven received the grade of A “Best”, and 18% the grade of B “Still Desirable”. Conversely, 55% of the city was graded at C “Definitely Declining”, and 20% received the lowest grade of D “Hazardous”.³

1 Samuel Zipp, “The Roots and Routes of Urban Renewal,” *Journal of Urban History* 39, no. 3 (2012): 367, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0096144212467306>.

2 “Mapping Inequality Redlining in New Deal America: Introduction,” University of Richmond, accessed March 29, 2023, <https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/#loc=5/39.1/-94.58&text=intro>.

3 “Mapping Inequality Redlining in New Deal America: New Haven, CT,” University of Richmond, accessed March 29, 2023, <https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/#loc=12/41.303/-73.004&city=new-haven-ct>.

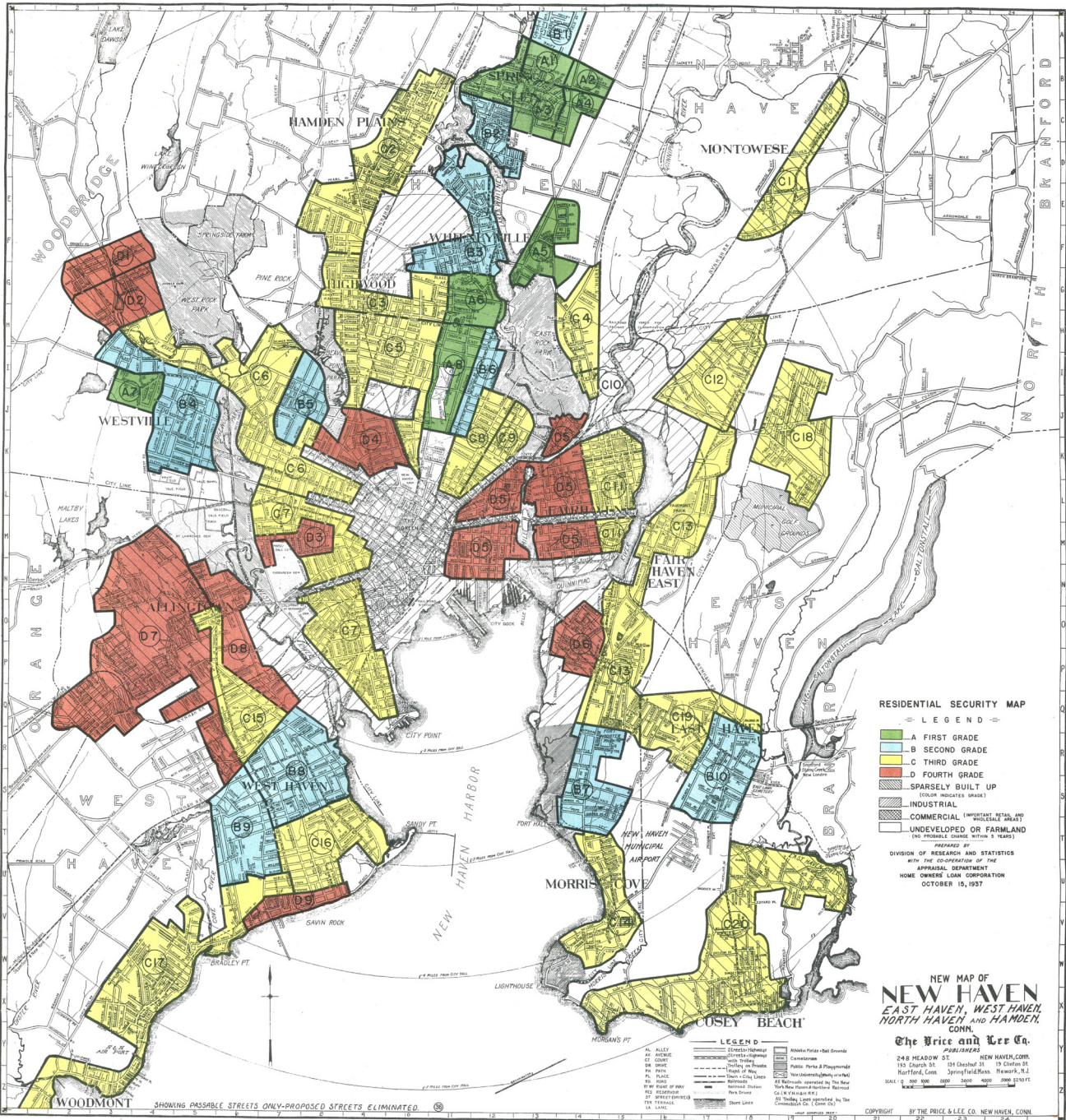


Fig. 2.1 HOLC map of New Haven.

In addition to the city map, individual reports were made to accompany each neighbourhood rating. In these reports, it is clear that the perception of certain neighbourhoods in New Haven as slums was inherently tied to race. Areas were evaluated, among other categories, by the type of inhabitant—with fields to indicate the percent of foreign-born residents, the presence of African Americans or families receiving government relief funds, as well as an indication of what (non-white) ethnicity was infiltrating the neighbourhood. For example, Wooster Square was given a D rating—the lowest possible—because of the “character of neighborhood and occupant” and the “infiltration of mixed foreign [inhabitants]” (Figure 2.2).⁴ These negative characterizations of minority-occupied neighbourhoods in New Haven prevailed into the postwar period, prompting the call for urban renewal to rid the city of these perceived slums.

Cities Had ‘Undesirable’ Residents

By the mid-twentieth century, New Haven was made up of a diverse set of demographic groups, including European immigrant communities of Irish, Italian, German, Russian, Polish, and Jewish descent, as well as African Americans from the South and Puerto Ricans—most of whom belonged to the city’s sizeable industrial workforce.^{5,6} These groups were geographically divided into ethnic enclaves throughout the city, which cumulatively accounted for a significant central area of New Haven.⁷

While wealthy white residents were quickly leaving the city for the suburbs, these marginalized groups occupied the established older fabric of the city—the neighbourhoods directly targeted by the HOLC ratings. Unfortunately, the ratings created a tangible measurement for situating white, wealthy neighbourhoods hierarchically above non-white, immigrant or working-class neighbourhoods. As a result, neighbourhoods belonging primarily to these minorities and newcomers could be targeted and erased under the guise of eliminating slums.

4 “Mapping Inequality Redlining in New Deal America: New Haven, CT.”

5 David Huyssen, “Race, Space and a Right to the City in New Haven: A Four-Century View,” *Revue française d’études américaines* 148, no.3 (2016): 14, <https://doi.org/10.3917/rfea.148.0008>.

6 Dahl, *Who Governs*, 32.

7 Huyssen, “Race, Space,” 14.

The Rise of Renewal

NE FORM-B
B-20-37

AREA DESCRIPTION

1. NAME OF CITY NEW HAVEN, CONN. SECURITY GRADE FOURTH AREA NO. D-5

2. DESCRIPTION OF TERRAIN. Generally flat and low land.

3. FAVORABLE INFLUENCES. Convenient to places of employment.

4. DETRIMENTAL INFLUENCES. Age and obsolescence of development, encroachment of industry as well as character of neighborhood and occupant.

5. INHABITANTS:
 a. Type Factory workers & laborers; b. Estimated annual family income \$ 1,000
 c. Foreign-born Mixed 90 %; d. Negro Yes (Scattered) 5 %;
 (Nationality) (Yes or No)
 e. Infiltration of Mixed foreign; f. Relief families Many
 g. Population is increasing; ~~xx~~decreasing _____; static.

6. BUILDINGS:
 a. Type or types 1 to 6 family; b. Type of construction Frame
 c. Average age Up to 100 years; d. Repair Poor

7. HISTORY:

YEAR	SALE VALUES		RENTAL VALUES	
	RANGE	PREDOM- INATING %	RANGE	PREDOM- INATING %
1929 level	<u>\$4M - \$25M</u>	<u>\$12M 100%</u>	<u>\$20 - \$40</u>	<u>\$30 100%</u>
1935 low	<u>2M - 12M</u>	<u>6M 50%</u>	<u>14 - 27½</u>	<u>20 70%</u>
1937 current	<u>2M - 12M</u>	<u>6M 50%</u>	<u>15 - 30</u>	<u>22½ 75%</u>

Peak sale values occurred in 1929 and were 100 % of the 1929 level.
 Peak rental values occurred in 1929 and were 100 % of the 1929 level.

8. OCCUPANCY: a. Land 95 %; b. Dwelling units 95 %; c. Home owners 40 %

9. SALES DEMAND: a. None; b. _____; c. Activity is None

10. RENTAL DEMAND: a. Fair; b. Units \$15 - \$25; c. Activity is Fair

11. NEW CONSTRUCTION: a. Types _____; b. Amount last year None

12. AVAILABILITY OF MORTGAGE FUNDS: a. Home purchase None; b. Home building None

13. TREND OF DESIRABILITY NEXT 10-15 YEARS Downward

14. CLARIFYING REMARKS:
This is a very old section of the city given over to the working classes. Dwellings include everything from singles to multi-family. There is a scattering of manufacturing plants. Homes are built very closely together and a large portion of this area is highly congested. Pride of ownership is entirely lacking. Absence of market plus vandalism has resulted in some demolition.

15. Information for this form was obtained from See Explanations

Date October 15th 1937

Fig. 2.2 HOLC report on the rating for Wooster Square.

Cities Had Economic Hardship

A key aspect of urban renewal was its use as a means for the revitalization of downtown centres, and municipal economies overall. As white flight created suburban booms and drained city centres of upper class residents, leaders and property owners of the time such as those in New Haven were concerned that blighted areas would bring an end to the city as they knew it (Figure 2.3).⁸ They feared that if "...the loss of tax revenues from spreading blight and slums continued...it would threaten the economic survival of American cities."⁹ Through urban renewal, the City of New Haven could reallocate central land to middle-income families and commercial uses, while forcing lower-income communities to the periphery.¹⁰ In doing so, the City could also improve its tax base and generate higher property tax revenue.

Housing Act of 1949

In response to the desire for the reinvention of cities, the Truman administration passed a new piece of legislation named the *Housing Act of 1949*; the Act was monumental in that it offered federal funding to individual municipalities to pursue urban renewal programs. In his statement upon signing the Act into law, President Truman elaborated on the purpose of the Act:

This far-reaching measure is of great significance to the welfare of the American people. It opens up the prospect of decent homes in wholesome surroundings for low-income families now living in the squalor of the slums. It equips the Federal Government, for the first time, with effective means for aiding cities in the vital task of clearing slums and

8 Alexander von Hoffman, "A study in contradictions: The origins and legacy of the housing act of 1949," *Housing Policy Debate* 11, no. 2 (2000): 303, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10511482.2000.9521370>.

9 von Hoffman, "A study," 303.

10 Zipp, "The Roots and Routes," 371.

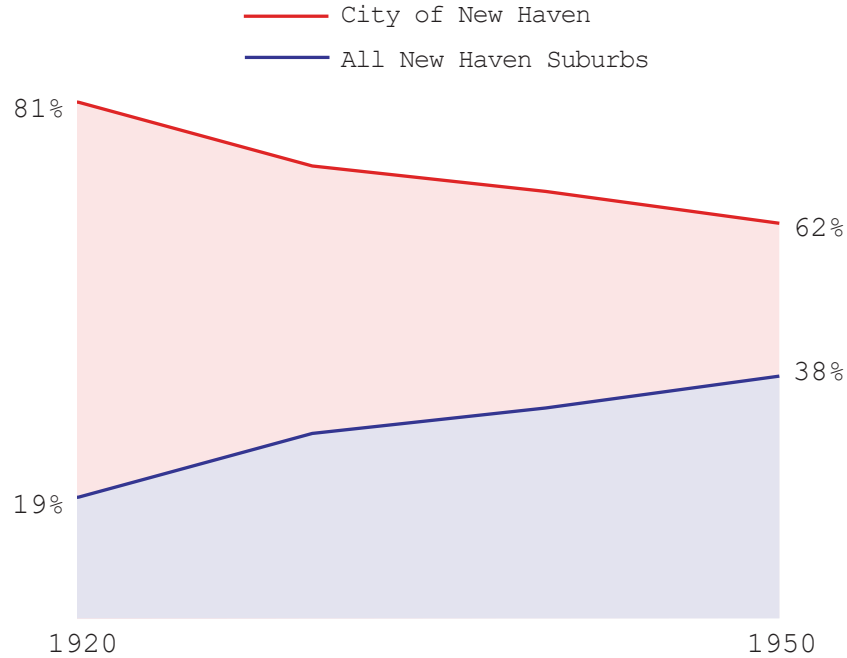


Fig. 2.3 New Haven versus suburbs population change, 1920 to 1950.

rebuilding blighted areas.¹¹

Title I of the Act called for municipalities to demolish slummed neighbourhoods in order to make way for modern built fabric, improved infrastructure, and new downtown development.¹² In total, the Act committed \$1 billion in loans and \$500 million in grants for the acquisition of blighted land (by the late 1960s, Congress would pass a further \$7 billion in grants).^{13,14} Additionally, Title III of the Act required 810,000 new units of public housing to be constructed nationally within 6 years, to account for the poorest of displaced residents—this quantity met only one tenth of nation-wide housing needs of the time.¹⁵ Specified in Title

11 Harry Truman, “Statement by the President Upon Signing the Housing Act of 1949,” Harry S. Truman Library & Museum, National Archives, July 15, 1949, <https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/library/public-papers/157/statement-president-upon-signing-housing-act-1949>.

12 von Hoffman, “A study,” 303.

13 von Hoffman, “A study,” 310.

14 von Hoffman, “A study,” 317.

15 von Hoffman, “A study,” 310.

III was the condition that for each new public housing unit constructed, municipalities were required by law to demolish at least one slum dwelling.¹⁶

Defining Blight

A vital component of urban renewal laid in the understanding that demolition of a specific neighbourhood could occur if it was considered a blighted area. However, no clear definitions were set out by federal legislators as to what urban conditions determined the validity of a certain place being labelled a “slum” or “blighted”—the laws were deliberately vague. Therefore, the designation of blight could be imparted to virtually any neighbourhood; municipal governments were able to interpret the law in their favour and argue for the legality of their proposed urban renewal project.¹⁷ As a result of this ambiguity, urban renewal was often used as a means for the erasure of neighbourhoods inhabited by marginalized communities, regardless of whether the area was truly in disrepair. The designation of a neighbourhood as blighted became a political maneuver for justifying discriminatory, targeted demolition of cities rather than an impartial descriptor of the state of the urban fabric. Moreover, through this select erasure of neighbourhoods, existing racial and class hierarchies were further reinforced.

Eminent Domain

In practice, urban renewal was made possible by longstanding eminent domain laws. As outlined in the United States Constitution, governments are granted the power to acquire private property from an individual owner in order to make public use of the property.¹⁸ As a condition, the Fifth Amendment clarifies that in doing so, governments must compensate the previous owner of the property with the approximate market-rate

16 von Hoffman, “A study,” 310.

17 Colin Gordon, “Blighting the Way: Urban Renewal, Economic Development, and the Elusive Definition of Blight,” *Fordham Urban Law Journal* 31, no. 2 (January 2004): 307.

18 “Eminent Domain,” Cornell Law School Legal Information Institute, accessed January 27, 2023, https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/eminent_domain.

value of the property at the time of its acquisition.¹⁹ Due to eminent domain, the City of New Haven and other municipalities pursuing urban renewal had legal grounds to seize properties within the scope of their renewal program, since it was seen as a government endeavour which was to benefit cities overall.

Militarization of Highways

Simultaneous to housing policies, the outbreak of the Cold War led to fears of a domestic attack in the United States. In response, the desire for a well-connected interstate highway to facilitate faster and more efficient vehicular movement across the country came to the fore. Thus, a series of Federal Aid Highway Acts passed in 1952 and 1954, and in particular the National Interstate and Defence Highways Act of 1956, funded a new network of transportation infrastructure.²⁰

The construction of highways had significant impacts on the existing built fabric of cities, as many municipalities chose to situate highways through the central core in order to connect suburbs to the downtown.²¹ As a result, this highway construction was often incorporated into cities' urban renewal plans and used as a vehicle for slum clearance.²² In New Haven, a series of new highways would become critical components of its renewal approach; these highways would be situated in place of some of the cities 'worst slums,' and were to act as a means for suburban residents to easily access business activities in the downtown area.

19 "Eminent domain still under fire," National Constitution Center, June 23, 2017, <https://constitutioncenter.org/blog/ten-years-later-eminent-domain-still-under-fire>.

20 Richard Weingroff, "Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956: Creating The Interstate System," U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration, 1996, <https://highways.dot.gov/public-roads/summer-1996/federal-aid-highway-act-1956-creating-interstate-system>.

21 Deborah N. Archer, "Transportation Policy and the Underdevelopment of Black Communities," *Iowa Law Review* 106, no. 2125 (July 2021): 2133, <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3797364>.

22 Walter Johnson, *The Broken Heart of America St. Louis and the Violent History of the United States* (New York: Basic Books, 2020), 298.

03

NEW HAVEN AS THE
MODEL CITY

Model City Vision

At the local scale of New Haven, urban renewal was understood by municipal leadership as their saving grace from the perceived existential threat of blight to the urban and social fabric of the city. Funds provided by the federal government could spur a complete reinvention of New Haven—erasing slums and ensuring economic prosperity for ensuing decades. Municipal records from the era describe that although “New Haven has more than its share of slums and blight...it has more than its share of determination to conquer slums and blight before they conquer this old city.”¹ New Haven’s mayor touted that through the City’s pursuit of urban renewal, “[they were] building a city for the twenty-first century.”² In order to achieve this result, a massive administrative and physical undertaking of renewal began.

Together with slum clearance, urban renewal presented an opportunity for the city’s architecture to modernize. The City envisioned a self-described “New New Haven” where monumental buildings, designed by leading international architects, would be scattered throughout the city and the Yale University campus.³ New highways and parking garages would accommodate the rise of mass automobile ownership and create efficient connections between the downtown core and suburbs. This bold vision of a renewed New Haven was touted as a “...‘mythical future’ in which ‘Highways, parking garages, convention centers, and luxury hotels would eradicate slums, eliminate poverty, and save the city from the rise of the suburb.’”⁴ Even further still, the Model City would garner architectural acclaim and act as a leading example for subsequent renewal

1 “The New Haven Development Program,” 5 December 1956, p. 1, box 65, folder 516, MS 959, Edward J. Logue Papers, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

2 Richard C. Lee and Melvin J. Adams, “1966 Annual Report New Haven Redevelopment Agency,” 1966, p. 4, box 13, folder 10, MS 1814, New Haven Redevelopment Agency Records, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

3 Mandi Isaacs Jackson, *Model City Blues: Urban Space and Organized Resistance in New Haven* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008), 5.

4 Huyssen, “Race, Space,” 15.

programs in other American cities.⁵

Highways as an Economic Force

Highway construction became a critical component of the Model City vision, as highways could act as a mechanism for both economic stimulation and slum clearance. Leaders sought a means to create a new, revitalized central business district, as highways connecting it to growing suburbs could incentivize former residents to return to the city for retail shopping and business activities.⁶ In addition, the construction of several parking garages in the downtown core would accommodate an increased automobile presence. Yet the construction of transportation infrastructure presented another advantage, due to its prerequisite for cleared land; City officials could strategically situate highways in areas where they desired to erase the urban fabric. In this way, highways could act as "...the solution to urban decline—the remedy for the 'slum cancer' that ate away at the city's center."⁷ In New Haven's urban renewal plans, therefore, new transportation networks became as prominent as iconic architecture.

Pursuit of Renewal

The successful pursuit of urban renewal programs in New Haven has been largely attributed to mayor Richard Lee, the most influential political leader during the city's postwar period. A local of New Haven and of humble upbringing in the city's Irish community, Lee was "...gifted with a memory for people, and radiating a natural warmth that would carry him a long way in city politics..."⁸ He managed to climb the ranks of New Haven society—despite having not attended Yale University or any other post-secondary institution—first by serving as director of Yale's

5 "Summary of New Haven Development Program," 29 November 1956, p.8, box 65, folder 516, MS 959, Edward J. Logue Papers, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

6 Jackson, *Model City Blues*, 7.

7 Jackson, *Model City Blues*, 7.

8 Douglas W. Rae, *City: Urbanism and Its End* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 283.

public relations office for a decade.⁹ Lee was elected as an alderman for New Haven's 17th Ward in 1939, until finally, after conducting two failed mayoral campaigns, he was successfully elected Mayor in 1953 at the age of only 37.^{10,11}

Lee deeply believed that a significant change needed to occur in New Haven in order to address the pressing challenges of the city and ran his campaign as a fierce proponent of urban renewal—he recognized that the policy of slum clearance could act as a “master trope” around which to gain support.¹² He further used his unconventional political background to his advantage, deliberately promoting himself as “...a local boy in the mayor's office, a home-grown Irishman, a family man, a devoted Catholic, a hard-working mayor and a friend to everyone in the city.”¹³ In assuming office, Lee was ready and willing to shoulder the risk inherent in taking on a project of such a large scale as urban renewal, all for the sake of the long-term prosperity of New Haven.¹⁴

Gaining Local Support

In order to successfully execute what would undoubtedly be a long-term, costly and controversial urban renewal program in New Haven, Mayor Lee required a strategy to maintain widespread endorsement of the initiative both from his peers in the City, as well as from the general public of New Haven; this came in the creation of the Citizens Action Commission (CAC). The CAC's stated purpose was to bring together community leaders into the Mayor's office as a non-partisan body that could provide valuable insight into critical decisions in the city.¹⁵ Members of the CAC included “the ‘big muscles’ of the city” such as the President of Yale University and the Dean of Yale Law School, the President of The New Haven Railroad, the Senior Vice President of First New

9 Dahl, *Who Governs*, 119.

10 Dahl, *Who Governs*, 118.

11 Rae, *City*, 283.

12 Rae, *City*, 303-304.

13 Dahl, *Who Governs*, 119.

14 Dahl, *Who Governs*, 119.

15 *New Haven Citizens Action Commission Annual Report and Development Guide*, 1959, p. 8, box 92, folder 885, MS 959, Edward J. Logue Papers, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

Haven National Bank, and various leaders of major local companies.^{16,17} The benefits of renewal were attractive to CAC members, particularly during the economic hardships of the time.¹⁸ Consequently, this body of New Haven's top businessmen (no women belonged to the Commission) legitimized and justified Lee's pursuit of renewal in the public arena, helping him to overcome any opposition.^{19,20}

Beyond rallying municipal officials behind renewal, the Citizens Action Commission contributed to the public narrative of renewal through their *Annual Report and Development Guide*. This document, among other City outreach strategies such as newspaper advertisements, framed urban renewal as a visionary and bold endeavour to New Haven readers. The 1959 issue makes clear the Commission's position that ongoing urban renewal programs in the city were a holistic success. Of particular interest is the spread titled "Relocation: The Human Side of Urban Renewal," in which photographs are used to depict a home interior before and after renewal (Figure 3.1). The 'before' photograph of a kitchen sink and adjoining bathroom is captioned: "Before—Depressing? Almost impossible to keep clean."²¹ The 'after' photograph, of a happy mother and children sitting in a comfortable living room, reads: "After—The family relocation officer and staff found a clean and pleasant flat for this housewife and her family."²² As Mandi Isaacs Jackson notes in *Model City Blues*, the photograph was framed to include "...a shiny floor, television, new lamp, and curtains, a picture of domestic normalcy..." and the caption assures readers that the woman pictured is not a single mother, a working mother or on welfare assistance.²³ This 'before and after' photographic strategy portrayed not only a reductive understanding of the city's quality of life before renewal, but also conveyed a narrow and exclusionary conception of what a successful or acceptable lifestyle would be in a renewed New Haven.

16 Rae, *City*, 327.

17 *New Haven CAC Annual Report*, 1959, p. 2, Edward J. Logue Papers.

18 Rae, *City*, 327.

19 Rae, *City*, 325.

20 Rae, *City*, 330.

21 *New Haven CAC Annual Report*, 1959, p. 47, Edward J. Logue Papers.

22 *New Haven CAC Annual Report*, 1959, p. 47, Edward J. Logue Papers.

23 Jackson, *Model City Blues*, 37.

Gaining National Support

To initiate his vision of urban renewal, Mayor Lee secured both funding and national attention through a skillful, yet manipulative, marketing strategy. Before renewal could begin, Lee and his administration were tasked with proving the existence of New Haven's slums to the federal agencies in charge of administering renewal funding.²⁴ In this endeavour, Lee saw not only the opportunity to successfully kickstart his renewal plans for the city, but also to propel his image as a masterful politician into the national spotlight.²⁵ Firstly, to receive federal funding for renewal, the City was required to submit photographic evidence of blight in New Haven. To guarantee a successful application, Lee and his administration misleadingly orchestrated photographs, with tactics such as placing extra trash in the scene or writing misleading captions—in one example photograph, a man seen sitting on a building stoop is described as “obviously out of work and waiting for the bar to open.”²⁶ In another case, the application places two photographs side by side: the first depicts unhappy residents in a decaying home, emphasizing the negative living conditions of a New Haven before renewal, while the second photograph captures the same residents, happy in their modern and clean renewed home.²⁷ Again employing a ‘before and after’ composition, the city made use of the “persuasive powers of photography” to create a strong narrative of a city desperately in need of slum clearance.²⁸

Beyond securing funding, Mayor Lee successfully brought national media attention to New Haven's renewal plans through an intense PR campaign focused on communicating the necessity of renewal in his city.²⁹ Lee's background in public relations became his greatest asset: he promoted a renewed New Haven through appearances in national magazines, including

24 Dahl, *Who Governs*, 129-130.

25 Francesca Russello Ammon, “Armies of Bulldozers Smashing Down Acres of Slums,” in *Bulldozer: Demolition and Clearance of the Postwar Landscape* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 143.

26 William Holt and Donald Celmer, “Urban Renewal in the Model City,” *Contexts* 2, no. 4 (2003): 52.

27 Holt and Celmer, “Urban Renewal,” 53.

28 Jackson, *Model City Blues*, 38.

29 Dahl, *Who Governs*, 119.



Before—Depressing? Almost impossible to keep clean.



After—The family relocation officer and staff found a clean and pleasant flat for this housewife and her family.

Fig. 3.1 Photographs from the 1959 Citizens Action Commission Annual Report.

LIFE, *Harper's* and the *Saturday Evening Post*.^{30,31,32} Perhaps the mayor's greatest publicity came in the form of staged demolitions: Lee would arrange for journalists to be present for viewing on days when a building was to be demolished.³³ To prepare, he would order demolition crews to clear the building of non-structural elements such as plumbing fixtures and electrical wires—that way, the demolition could take place in a swift and picture-perfect manner.³⁴ Lee even commented on the demolition photo-ops, saying: “Some mayors give out keys to the city. We knock down buildings for our guests.”³⁵ In photographs published in *LIFE Magazine*, Lee himself was seen posing inside of a demolition crane, and in front of a building mid-demolition. As a result of this practice, vacant, semi-demolished properties would remain standing in New Haven for quite some time ahead of demolition day. Critics of Lee accused this drawn out demolition practice as a propaganda tool to further reinforce in the public domain the supposed need for slum clearance in the city.³⁶

In the end, the mayor's efforts to gain support and exposure for the renewal of New Haven were a success. New Haven was one of the first cities to make use of federal urban renewal funding; per capita, the municipality received more federal funding for renewal than any other city in the country, which totalled \$130 million.³⁷ By this time, Lee was recognized nationwide as an innovative leader in the advent of large-scale renewal. His elaborate plan, consisting of multiple renewal projects, was begun in New Haven; an outburst of new, modern buildings and imposing transportation infrastructure was to be built in the ensuing decades.

30 Ammon, “Armies of Bulldozers,” 141.

31 Dahl, *Who Governs*, 119.

32 Dahl, *Who Governs*, 121.

33 Ammon, “Armies of Bulldozers,” 141.

34 Ammon, “Armies of Bulldozers,” 143.

35 Ammon, “Armies of Bulldozers,” 143.

36 Ammon, “Armies of Bulldozers,” 143.

37 Lizabeth Cohen, “Ed Logue and Urban Renewal in New Haven,” *Connecticut Explored*, 2021, [https:// www.ctexplored.org/ed-logue-and-urban-renewal-in-new-haven/](https://www.ctexplored.org/ed-logue-and-urban-renewal-in-new-haven/)

Official Plan for New Haven's Renewal Program

In light of the influx of funds from the federal government, New Haven's urban renewal plans transformed into legitimate urban planning projects, overseen by City staff. Tasked with managing the significant workload of renewal, the City's Redevelopment Agency was created in 1950. Mayor Lee chose Yale graduate Edward Logue to lead the Agency; as Douglas Rae describes, over the course of the renewal decades, Logue would go on to "...earn a reputation second only to Robert Moses' as a practitioner of urban transformation in New Haven, Boston, and New York."³⁸ Answering only to Lee, Logue oversaw the execution of New Haven's renewal as Development Administrator.³⁹

Renewal Areas

Due to the sheer scale of the city, the Redevelopment Agency's scope of renewal (officially named the New Haven Development Program) was divided into ten 'Renewal Areas': Oak Street, Church Street, Wooster Square, Long Wharf, Dixwell, State Street, The Hill, Dwight, Newhallville, and Fair Haven (Figure 3.2).^{40,41} The renewal of each Area was also staggered to maintain city functioning during the many years that renewal would take to complete. In municipal records, the goal of the Renewal Areas within the Development Program is described as "...the complete elimination of slums and blight from the city and the development in their place of a healthy, thriving central business district, modern industrial areas and pleasant, attractive residential neighborhoods."⁴²

Beyond the basic premise of the Redevelopment Program to rid the ten Renewal Areas of slums, four further initiatives were set forth to compliment redevelopment and ensure the overall success of renewal:

38 Rae, *City*, 316.

39 Rae, *City*, 316-317.

40 *New Haven CAC Annual Report*, 1959, p. 26, Edward J. Logue Papers.

41 "The New Haven Development Program," 5 December 1956, p. 1, Edward J. Logue Papers.

42 "The New Haven Development Program," 5 December 1956, p. 1, Edward J. Logue Papers.

1. Code Enforcement: the City would enforce the building code more strictly, especially for residential properties, as it was seen to be “the most important single tool in the fight against blight.”⁴³
2. Zoning: the City would reduce or eliminate the “indiscriminate” mixing of land uses and isolate certain uses together in one area, such as industrial, commercial and residential land uses.⁴⁴
3. Capital Budget: the City would provide funding for the rehabilitation, replacement, or new construction of community facilities, in order to incentivize families away from suburbs.⁴⁵
4. Traffic and Parking: the City would upgrade automobile infrastructure including streets and parking to better accommodate traffic volume.⁴⁶

Complimentary to the renewal of New Haven’s urban fabric, the construction of new highways would play a critical role in the Model City vision. Firstly, a new elevated Interstate highway would be constructed from I-95 through the Wooster Square neighbourhood, and would extend north all the way to the Canadian border.⁴⁷ Another sunken highway, the Oak Street Connector, would extend west through the Oak Street neighbourhood, connecting the Interstate highway network to the downtown core (Figure 3.3).⁴⁸

43 “The New Haven Development Program,” 5 December 1956, p. 1, Edward J. Logue Papers.

44 “The New Haven Development Program,” 5 December 1956, p. 1, Edward J. Logue Papers.

45 “The New Haven Development Program,” 5 December 1956, p. 2, Edward J. Logue Papers.

46 “The New Haven Development Program,” 5 December 1956, p. 3, Edward J. Logue Papers.

47 “When the Road Came Through: How Construction of I-91 Changed Western MA,” Forbes Library, accessed January 21, 2023, <http://www.libraryaware.com/1229/Posts/View/c932a9b2-023e-4a7b-b57e-23b0cb9764a9?SID=2fd4f404-1d87-4102-bb1f-202efc3723f1>.

48 *New Haven CAC Annual Report*, 1959, p. 31, Edward J. Logue Papers.

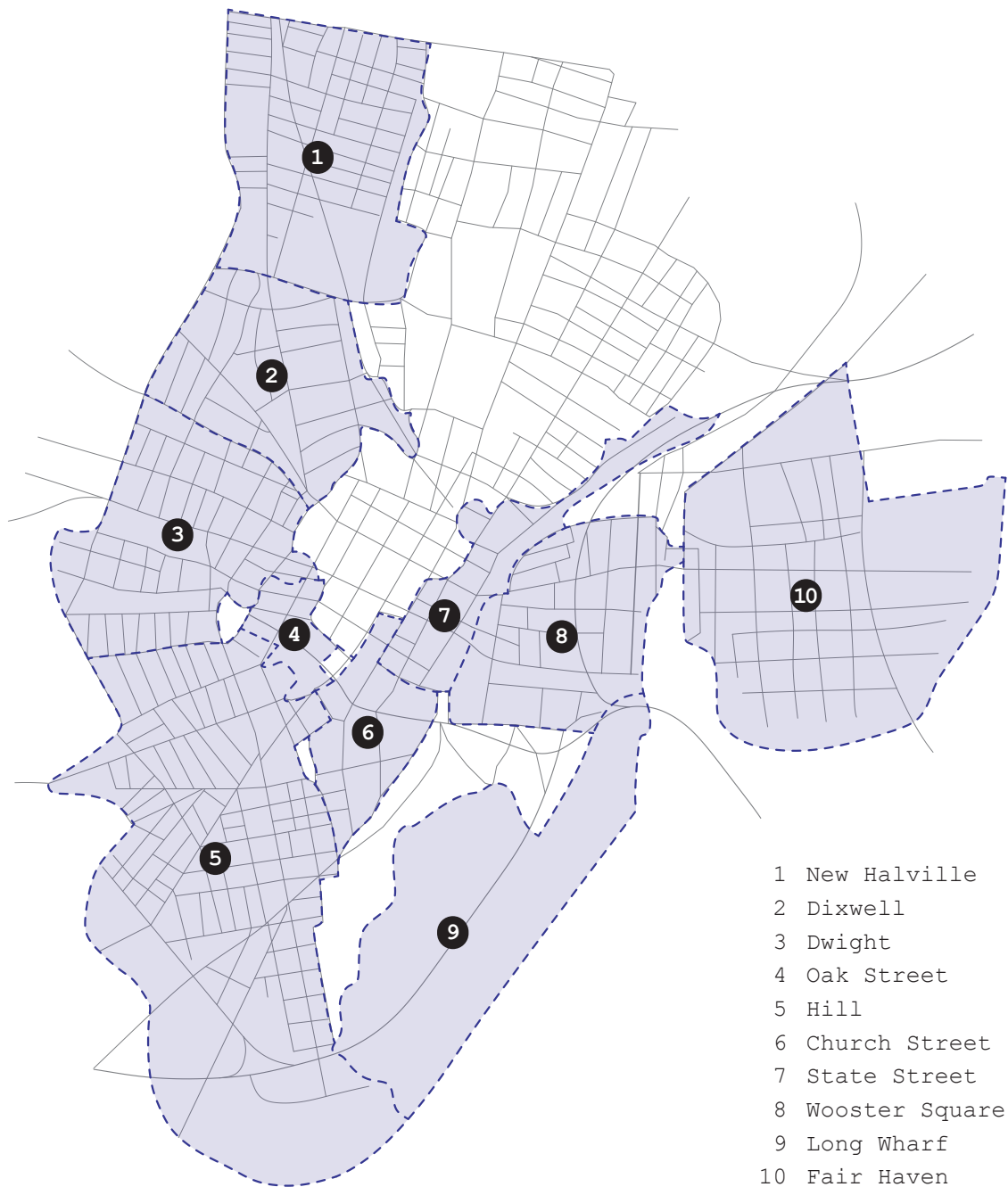


Fig. 3.2 Redevelopment Agency's ten 'Renewal Areas.'

Modernism and the Model City

Over the course of the 1950s and 1960s, New Haven demolished one out of every 6 buildings. In total, this equated to over 3,500 buildings, which were replaced by both new built fabric and highways.⁴⁹ In accordance with the Model City vision, many new construction projects were designed by established architects in the modern style (Figure 3.4). The New Haven Preservation Trust's "New Haven Modern" archive, in which buildings constructed in New Haven between 1931 and 1980 are surveyed and documented, consists of approximately 150 buildings that they believe to be notable historical architecture.

While modern buildings appeared all over the city of New Haven during the urban renewal era, they were particularly concentrated in the downtown core of the city and on Yale University's campus. By 1969, nearly \$50 million had been spent on new construction in the downtown alone.⁵⁰ Due to this outpouring of new modern buildings, New Haven quickly became seen as "...one of the most interesting cities in America, architecturally speaking."⁵¹

49 Ammon, "Armies of Bulldozers," 145.

50 Richard C. Lee, Advertisement in the New Haven Register, 15 October 1967, p. 18, box 13, folder 12, MS 1814, New Haven Redevelopment Agency Records, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

51 Lee and Adams, 1966, p. 3, New Haven Redevelopment Agency Records.

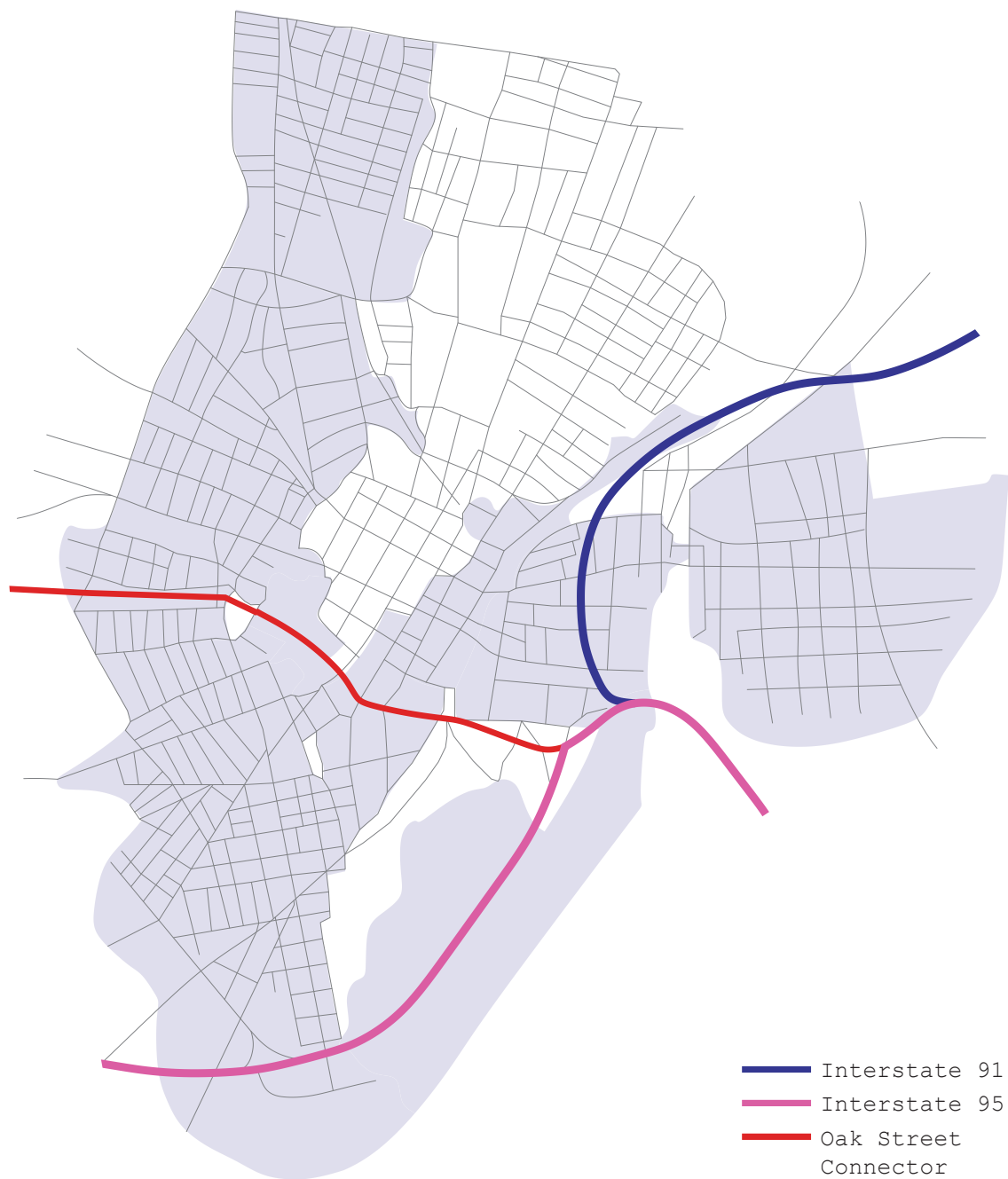


Fig. 3.3 Map of municipal highway plan. New highways were situated within urban renewal areas, where the urban fabric was seen as blighted.

Urban Renewal as Violence

EARL P. CARLIN, PETER MILLARD

- 1 New Haven Fire Headquarters
- 2 Columbus Mall Houses

EERO SAARINEN

- 3 Morse and Ezra Stiles College
- 4 Yale Co-op
- 5 Ingalls Hockey Rink

FRANCISCO & JACOBUS

- 6 Yale University Press

JOHN JOHANSEN

- 7 Dixwell Avenue Congregational Church
- 8 Florence Virtue Homes
- 9 Helene W. Grant School

KEVIN ROCHE, JOHN DINKELOO AND ASSOCIATES

- 10 Knights of Columbus Building

LOUIS KAHN

- 11 Yale Center for British Art
- 12 Yale University Art Gallery

MARCEL BREUER

- 13 Becton Engineering and Applied Science Center
- 14 Armstrong Rubber Company

OFFICE OF DOUGLAS ORR

- 15 First New Haven National Bank

ORR, DECOSSEY, WINDER AND ASSOCIATES

- 16 Community Services Building

PAUL RUDOLPH

- 17 Crawford Manor
- 18 Yale Married Student Housing
- 19 Temple Street Garage
- 20 Art and Architecture Building

PHILIP JOHNSON

- 21 Kline Science Building
- 22 Yale Laboratory of Epidemiology and Public Health

SKIDMORE, OWINGS & MERRILL

- 23 Conte School
- 24 Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library

VENTURI AND RAUCH

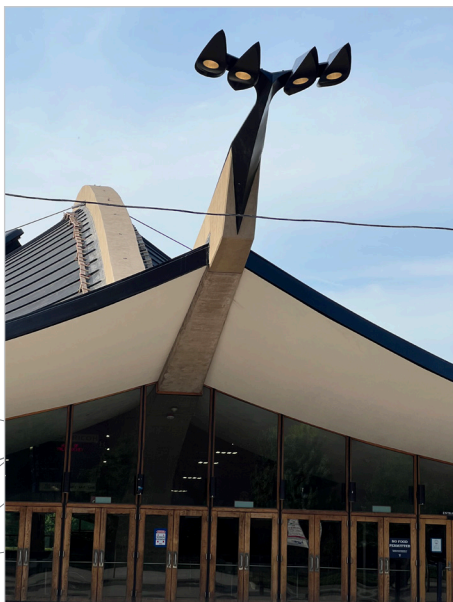
- 25 Goffe Street Fire House

WILLIAM MILETO

- 26 Town Houses on the Park



Fig. 3.4 Map and photos of select Model City projects.



5. Ingalls Hockey Rink



10. Knights of Columbus Building



19. Temple Street Garage



20. Art and Architecture Building



21. Kline Science Building



24. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library

04

RENEWAL IN WOOSTER
SQUARE

The Founding of Wooster Square

The neighbourhood of Wooster Square has a long and rich history as a desirable residential area in New Haven. Originally named Newtownship, it was first inhabited in the early 1800s when New Haven began expanding beyond its original 9-square plan.^{1,2} Stately homes for wealthy New Haven elites were constructed in the neighbourhood, which became the city's "fashionable residential section."³ In the 1820s, a park at the centre of Newtownship was created, reminiscent of the New Haven Green to its west; the park was named Wooster Square after the General David Wooster of the Revolutionary War.⁴ The most elegant homes, owned by "prosperous merchants and sea captains," surrounded the Square (Figure 4.1).⁵

By the late 1800s, the urban and demographic make-up of Wooster Square began to shift in response to industrialization.⁶ New construction of factories, and tenement houses for the influx of labourers, grew the neighbourhood; City officials would later describe this evolution of Wooster Square as "...[threatening] human dignity, rendering a once beautiful village ugly."⁷ Originally attracting Irish immigrants, industries soon hired an outpouring of Italian workers—between 1885 and 1900, ten thousand Italians moved to Wooster Square.⁸ Emigrating almost exclusively from the southern Italian region of Campania, and in particular from the island of Capri, this new labour class found employment at what would become some of Wooster Square's most longstanding factories, including Sargent Manufacturing Company and The New Haven Clock

1 Mary Hommann, *Wooster Square Design: A Report on the Background, Experience, and Design Procedures in Redevelopment and Rehabilitation in an Urban Renewal Project* (New Haven: New Haven Redevelopment Agency, 1965), 13.

2 Hommann, *Wooster Square Design*, 13.

3 "Wooster Square Neighborhood," 1955, p.2, box 37, folder 120, MS 959, Edward J. Logue Papers, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

4 Hommann, *Wooster Square Design*, 13-14.

5 Hommann, *Wooster Square Design*, 14.

6 Hommann, *Wooster Square Design*, 14.

7 Hommann, *Wooster Square Design*, 14.

8 Hommann, *Wooster Square Design*, 14-17.

Renewal in Wooster Square



Fig. 4.1 Historic homes surrounding Wooster Square Park.

Company.⁹

Alarmed by the influx of labourer families, most of the historic residents left Wooster Square; the neighbourhood became primarily Italian by 1900.¹⁰ Affluent families fled from the “noisy, smokey, smelly factories” of which was often their source of wealth, and subsequently their palatial homes also became occupied by Italians (often by multiple families to a single home).^{11,12} Wooster Square quickly became “...a source of joy for the new residents as it had been for the original settlers of the area.”¹³ English was a second language, and the Catholic Church was the centre of the community and a hub for Italian activities.^{14,15} A small minority of other ethnicities, such as Jewish Americans and African Americans from the South, moved into the neighbourhood in ensuing decades.

Wooster Square faced decline in the early to mid twentieth century, due to the Great Depression and the rise of suburbs. In 1929, a number of factories that previously sustained employment in the neighbourhood closed, leaving many residents unemployed.¹⁶ However, as home prices declined to record lows during this time, some Italian residents were able to purchase homes for cash—this distinguished Wooster Square from many other immigrant neighbourhoods in the city, where residents almost exclusively rented from more wealthy landlords.¹⁷ In the subsequent twenty years, the population of Wooster Square shrunk as some residents moved elsewhere for alternative employment, or to nearby suburbs.¹⁸ By the postwar period, approximately 6400 people still resided in the neighbourhood.¹⁹

9 Anthony Riccio, *The Italian American Experience in New Haven: images and oral histories* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 349.

10 Hommann, *Wooster Square Design*, 14-17.

11 “Wooster Square Neighborhood,” 1955, p.2, Edward J. Logue Papers.

12 Hommann, *Wooster Square Design*, 14.

13 “Wooster Square Neighborhood,” 1955, p.3, Edward J. Logue Papers.

14 “Wooster Square Neighborhood,” 1955, p.3, Edward J. Logue Papers.

15 Riccio, *The Italian American Experience*, 349.

16 Hommann, *Wooster Square Design*, 17.

17 Hommann, *Wooster Square Design*, 17.

18 “Wooster Square Area,” 1955, p. 4, Edward J. Logue Papers.

19 “Wooster Square Area,” 1955, p. 4, Edward J. Logue Papers.

Wooster Square's Urban Composition

Postwar Wooster Square's urban fabric contained a diverse mixture of uses and styles. Historic stately homes surrounding Wooster Square Park were built "...in the style of mid-18th century Italian architecture: two-story square frame, and a heavy, flat cantilevered roof," while tenement houses and multi-story, multi-family homes with ground floor commercial enterprises were scattered throughout the neighbourhood.^{20,21} Factories, churches and schools mixed closely with other uses. Grand Avenue, a major street connecting central New Haven through Wooster Square to Fair Haven, housed much of the retail activities, while Wooster Street was home to many of the Italian restaurants, bakeries and grocery stores.²² Commercial and other uses were not limited to only these arterial roads, however—streets with only residential use were rare.²³ With this concentration of shopping, services and employment, residents had no reason to leave Wooster Square and could effectively "...live their entire lives within the neighborhood."²⁴

Geographically, Wooster Square of the postwar era was clearly defined by natural and man-made boundaries. To the north and west, a railway cut separated Wooster Square from the downtown core and the State Street neighbourhood. To the east, another rail line sat adjacent to the shoreline of the Mill River. To the south, Water Street separated Wooster Square from port activity and the Tomlinson Bridge to East Haven (Figure 4.2).

The Pursuit of Renewal

Following Wooster Square's shift from the neighbourhood of the elite to that of the working class, discussions began amid academic and political spheres of its potential to be restored as a 'successful' part of New Haven's urban fabric. As previously described in Chapter 2, Wooster Square was graded poorly by the HOLC and leading up to the urban renewal era,

20 "Wooster Square Area," 1955, p. 1, box 37, folder 120, MS 959, Edward J. Logue Papers, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

21 Riccio, *The Italian American Experience*, 349.

22 Hommann, *Wooster Square Design*, 17.

23 Hommann, *Wooster Square Design*, 17.

24 Hommann, *Wooster Square Design*, 17.

it was seen as a once-elegant neighbourhood that had deteriorated and needed saving.²⁵ At Yale University's Planning Department, possibilities for a future new Wooster Square were studied by graduate students (one student was so enamoured with the potential for the revitalization of the neighbourhood that he was hired by the City's Planning Department upon his graduation, and acted as chief planner during much of the Wooster Square Renewal Project).²⁶ When it came time to lay out the Renewal Areas in New Haven, Wooster Square was a natural and obvious inclusion.

As the City finalized renewal plans of Wooster Square, three primary arguments emerged as to why the neighbourhood demanded renewal:

1. Lack of Adequate Housing: Although the Italian community in Wooster Square was said to have "...kept their modest homes and cold water apartments meticulously clean," City officials in New Haven deemed that due to physical inadequacies of the homes, such as aged plumbing and exterior finishes, Wooster Square was succumbing to the blight of substandard housing.²⁷
2. Presence of Mixed Uses: The City of New Haven believed that the significant diversity of uses present in Wooster Square was a primary contributor to blight in the neighbourhood. Of particular nuisance were the storefronts that had been attached in front of residential addresses across the neighbourhood; these could be removed while upgrading the housing stock.²⁸ Industry was also to be separated entirely from any residential use.
3. Potential for Economic Gains: The City acknowledged that the renewal of Wooster Square would have significant benefits in "long range economics" for the entire city, namely that it would increase the property values in the neighbourhood and

25 Hommann, *Wooster Square Design*, 17.

26 Hommann, *Wooster Square Design*, 19.

27 Riccio, *The Italian American Experience*, 406.

28 Hommann, *Wooster Square Design*, 17.

Renewal in Wooster Square

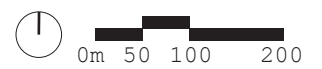


Fig. 4.2 Urban boundaries of Wooster Square.

in turn grow the tax base.^{29,30,31} Further, it would incentivize residents to stay in New Haven: a renewed Wooster Square would “...provide attractive homes—not in the suburbs—but immediately adjacent to the downtown, thus contributing to the revitalization of the very core of New Haven.”^{32,33}

Renewal Plan for Wooster Square

The final design for the 235-acre renewal of Wooster Square consisted of the creation of two distinct areas, one of residential use and the other for industry, separated in the centre by a new highway.³⁴ As previously described in the Introduction, Mary Hommann was selected to lead the renewal as Project Director.³⁵ In her 1965 report entitled *Wooster Square Design: A Report on the Background, Experience, and Design Procedures in Redevelopment and Rehabilitation in an Urban Renewal Project*, a thorough description of the design scheme is provided (Figure 4.3).

Two Distinct Areas

For the western side of Wooster Square—in which the grand houses of ‘historic and aesthetic value’ were situated—a primarily rehabilitation approach would upgrade the residential fabric of over 400 structures to new zoning standards, and equip them with acceptable modern-day amenities and finishes. This strategy would re-establish Wooster Square as “...an attractive urban neighborhood.”^{36,37} Exceptions to rehabilitation would include the demolition of several buildings: a school adjacent to Wooster Square Park, to be replaced with new townhomes, a factory due-east of the Park, to be replaced with a modern school and community centre (designed by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill), and an

29 “Wooster Square Area,” 1955, p. 3, Edward J. Logue Papers.

30 “Wooster Square Area,” 1955, p. 2, Edward J. Logue Papers.

31 Rae, *City*, 373.

32 “Wooster Square Area,” 1955, p. 2, Edward J. Logue Papers.

33 Hommann, *Wooster Square Design*, 29.

34 Hommann, *Wooster Square Design*, 24.

35 Hommann, *Wooster Square Design*, 29.

36 *New Haven CAC Annual Report*, 1959, p. 39, Edward J. Logue Papers.

37 Hommann, *Wooster Square Design*, 26.

Renewal in Wooster Square

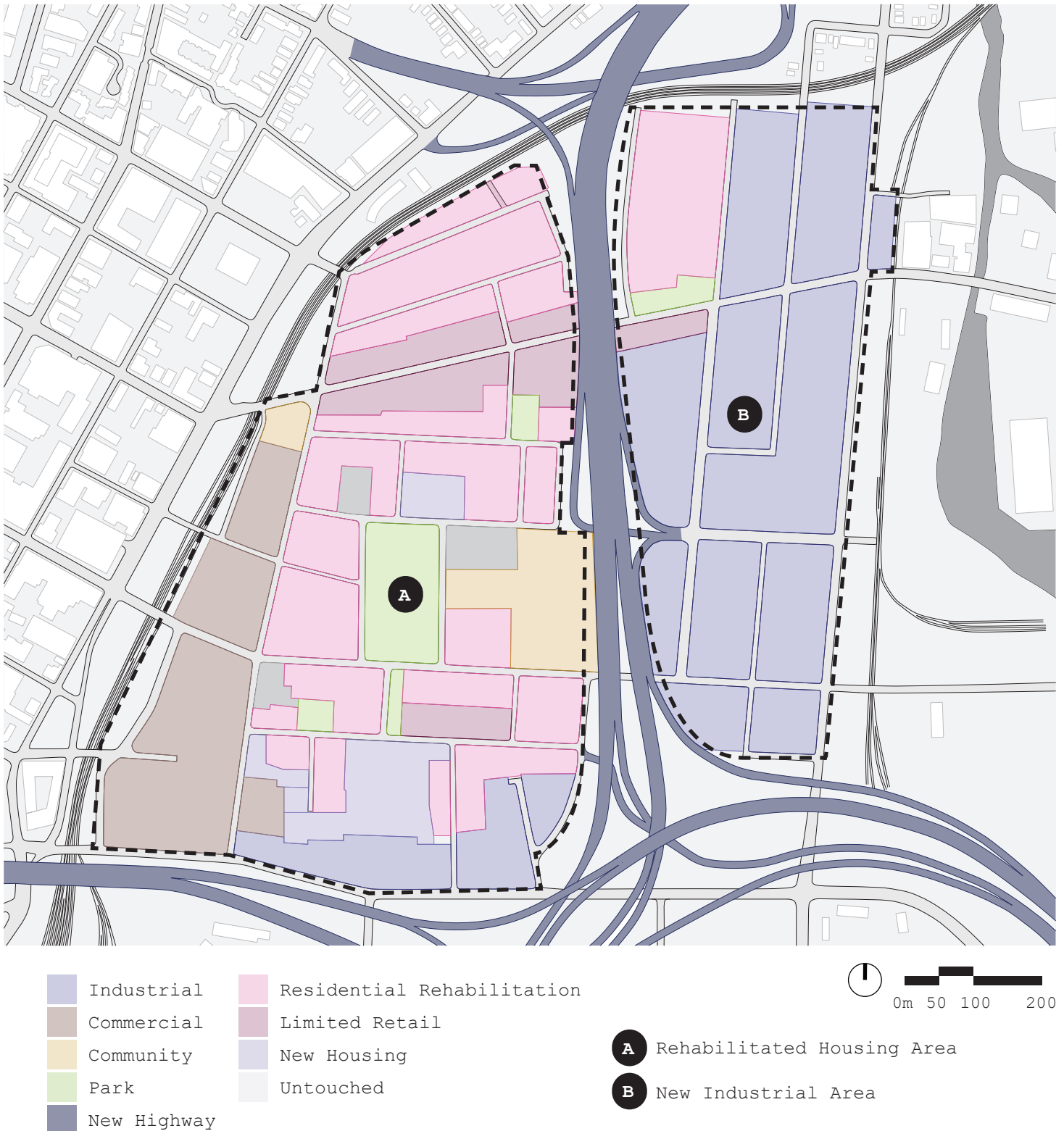


Fig. 4.3 Urban renewal zoning plan for a renewed Wooster Square; the plan consisted of primarily residential rehabilitation on the Western side of the neighbourhood, new industrial fabric on the Eastern side, with a new highway separating the two.

area of residential homes south of Wooster Street, to be replaced with new private housing (Figure 4.4).³⁸ One other Model City icon was to be located in this half of Wooster Square: a central fire station for the New Haven Fire Department (Figure 4.5).³⁹

The second area on the eastern side of Wooster Square was to house existing and new industrial companies. In order to achieve this isolation of use, all residential properties in this section of the neighbourhood were to be demolished.⁴⁰ The one exception to this strategy would be at the northwestern portion of the area, where an existing public housing complex would remain intact.⁴¹ Through design guidelines such as 20-foot setbacks and obscured off-street parking, the new 'Wooster Square Industrial Park' would appear as "...the antithesis of the type of industrial area it would replace."⁴²

A Highway Barrier

As part of the Interstate Highway System, the beginning of the new I-91 highway was to originate at the bottom of Wooster Square intersecting I-95, run north through the neighbourhood and the rest of Northern New Haven, then pass through New England until it reached the Canadian border.⁴³ Prior to the detailed design of the Wooster Square Renewal Project, the Connecticut State Highway Department made an original plan for the location of I-91 in Wooster Square. As seen in Figure 4.6, the highway was to be situated west of Wooster Square Park, eventually aligning with the rail cut along the Northern border of the neighbourhood. This plan—although undoubtedly requiring significant clearing of the neighbourhood and increasing the barrier between Wooster Square and the downtown—would have kept the neighbourhood intact as a single entity.

38 *New Haven CAC Annual Report*, 1959, p. 39, Edward J. Logue Papers.

39 "New Haven Fire Headquarters (Central Station), Engine 4, Hook & Ladder 1, Car 32," New Haven Preservation Trust, accessed January 20, 2023, <http://newhavenmodern.org/new-haven-fire-headquarters-central-station-engine-4-hook-ladder-1-car-32>.

40 Hommann, *Wooster Square Design*, 29.

41 Hommann, *Wooster Square Design*, 29.

42 Hommann, *Wooster Square Design*, 30.

43 "When the Road Came Through."

Renewal in Wooster Square



Fig. 4.4 Community centre, part of the Harry A. Conte Elementary School and Community Center, 15 Wooster Place.



Fig. 4.5 New Haven Fire Department fire station, 952 Grand Avenue.

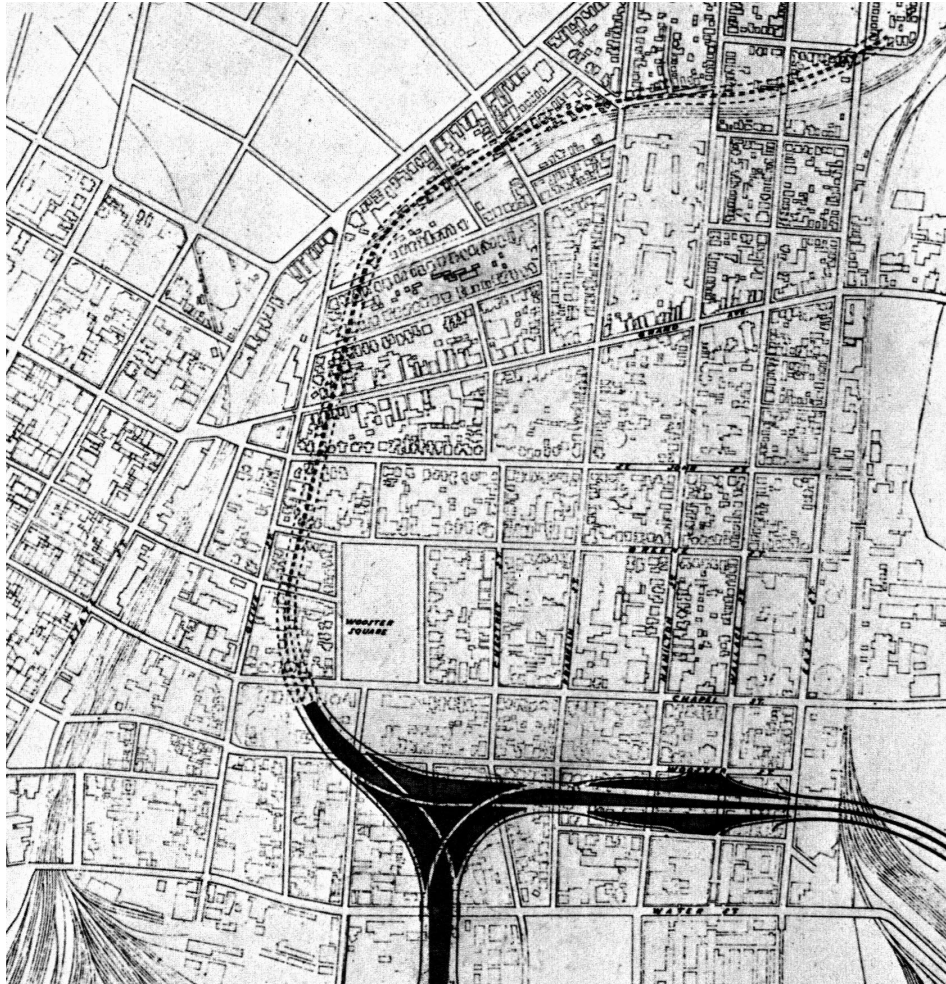


Fig. 4.6 Map of the original planned location of I-91 by the Connecticut State Highway Department. The highway was planned to be situated between Olive Street to the West and Wooster Square Park to the East.

When the Wooster Square renewal was undertaken, however, the design diverted from the State’s map of I-91, shifting the highway’s location further east to the centre of the neighbourhood (Figure 4.7). This decision was made to achieve two outcomes: firstly, by constructing the highway along existing Franklin Street, it would require the clearing of what was described as “the worst slums of the city.”⁴⁴ Secondly, by placing the highway in between the two newly-established areas of the

⁴⁴ Hommann, *Wooster Square Design*, 21.

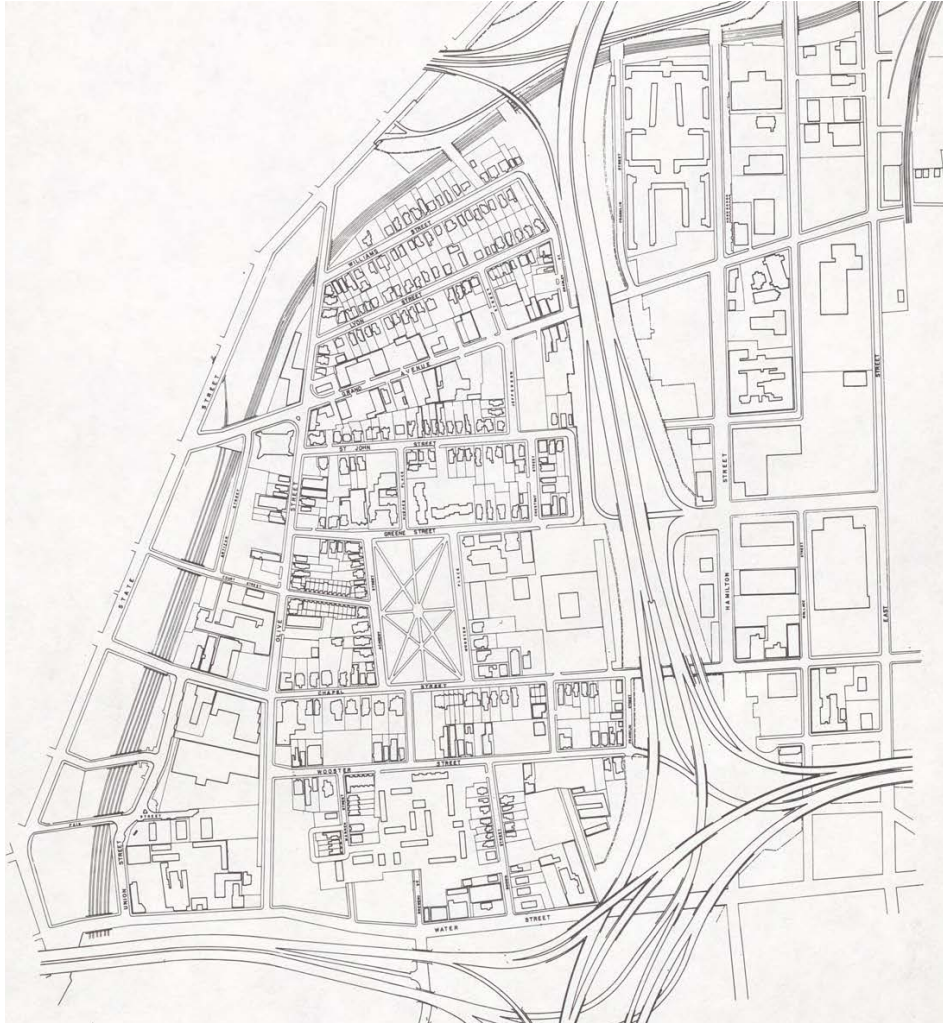


Fig. 4.7 Map of the final planned location of I-91 determined by the City of New Haven. The highway was situated at the centre of Wooster Square, breaking the neighbourhood into two distinct areas.

neighbourhood, it would adequately contain the Industrial Park and prevent future industry from spreading into the rehabilitated residential area of Wooster Square. Unlike other new highways in New Haven such as the Oak Street Connector, I-91 was elevated instead of sunken to further enforce the visual barrier between the residential and industrial areas (Figure 4.8).⁴⁵

45 Hommann, *Wooster Square Design*, 26.

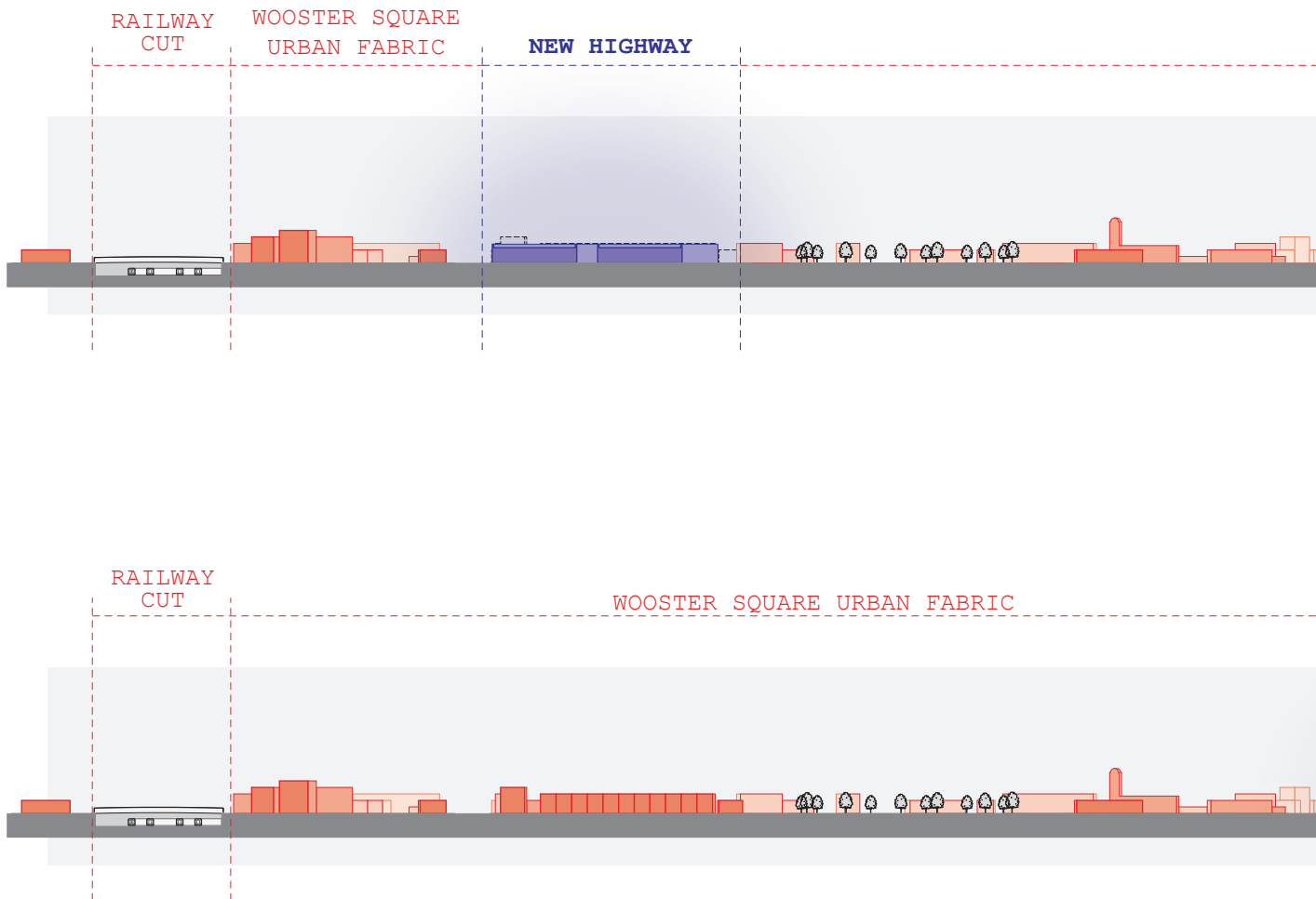
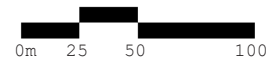
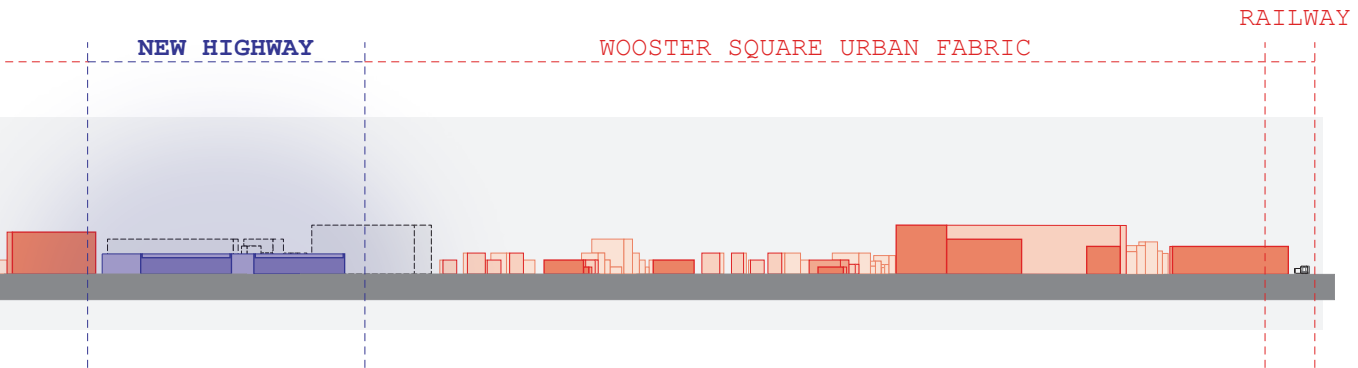
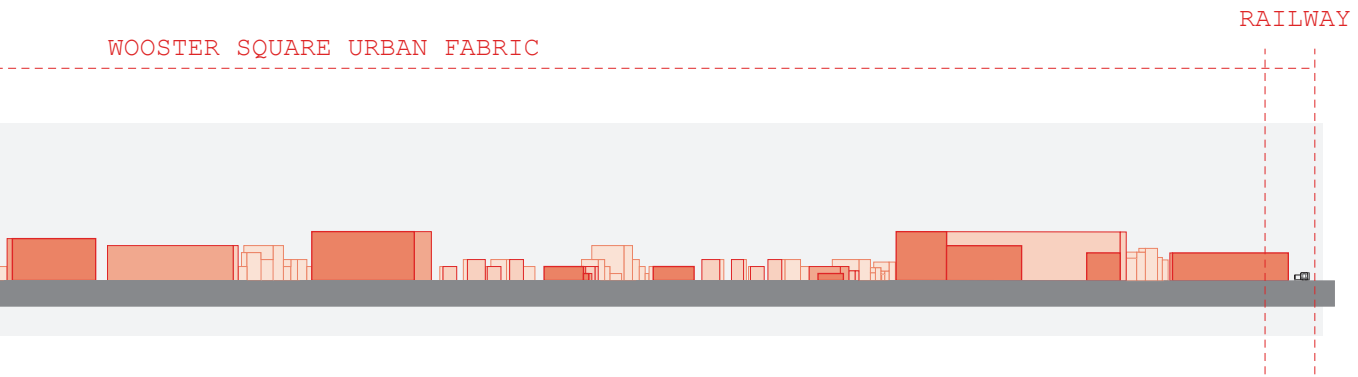


Fig. 4.8 Section comparison of I-91's original planned location per the Connecticut State Highway Department versus the final location determined by the City of New Haven. By moving the highway into the centre of the neighbourhood, the final plan would more severely fracture Wooster Square into two smaller sections.

Renewal in Wooster Square



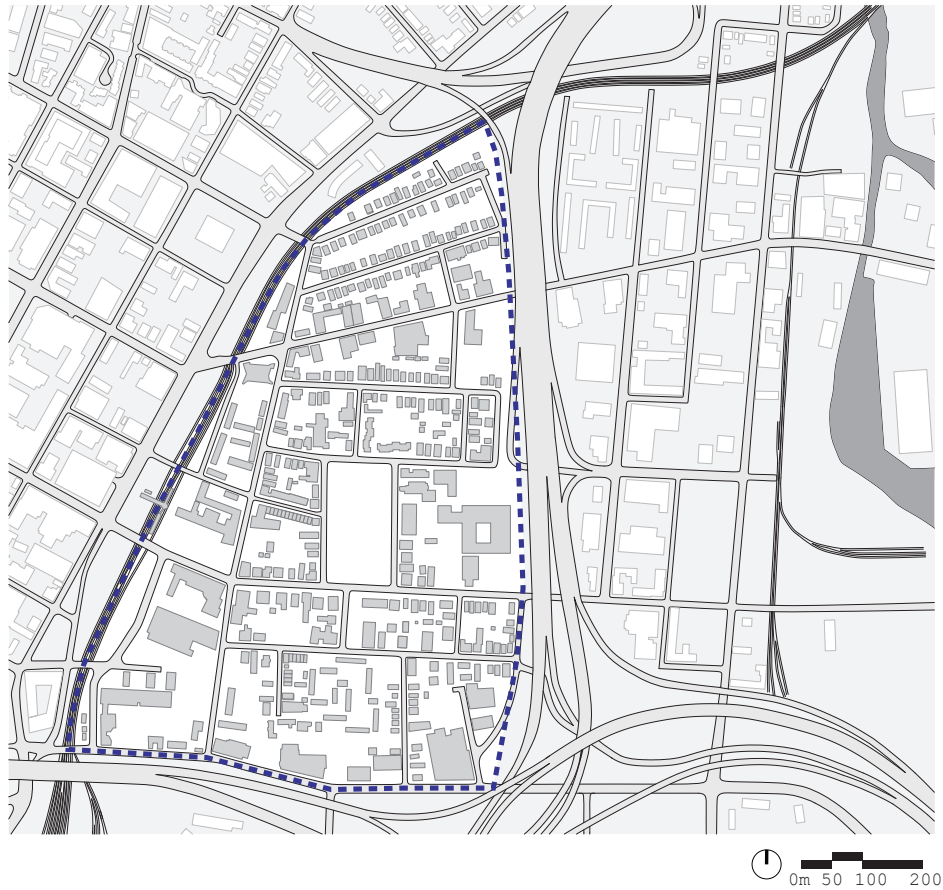


Fig. 4.9 Boundary of the Wooster Square renewal project scope, depicted as consisting of only the area West of I-91.

Mapping Wooster Square

The map of a renewed Wooster Square—and the associated boundaries of the official renewal project—were adapted over time to serve the political goals of the municipality. In early instances, the proposed renewal consisted of only residential rehabilitation in the west; such a case is described in a 1955 letter written by the Chairman of the New Haven City Plan Commission Angus Fraser (Figure 4.9).⁴⁶ By 1959, maps of the Wooster Square renewal illustrated that the project had doubled

⁴⁶ Angus Fraser, Chairman of New Haven City Plan Commission, letter to Dr. Clement Batelli, New Haven Director of Public Health, 6 June 1955, p. 1, box 37, folder 120, MS 959, Edward J. Logue Papers, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

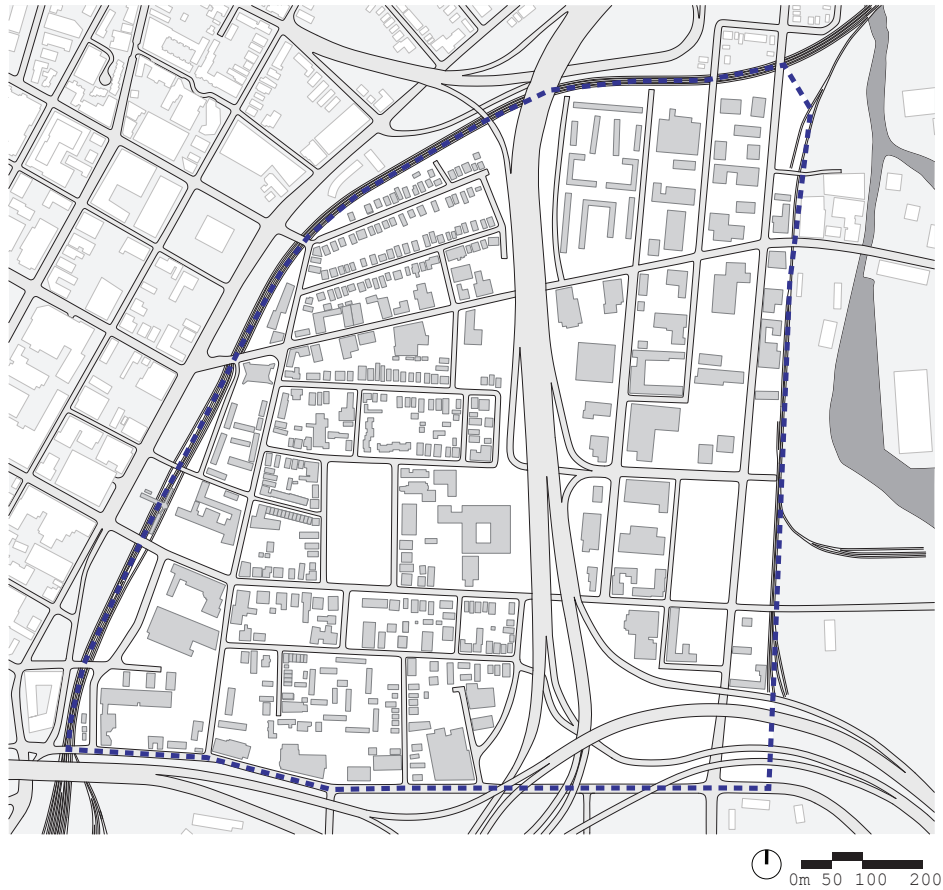


Fig. 4.10 Boundary of the Wooster Square renewal project scope, depicted as consisting of both areas East and West of I-91.

in size, demonstrating the final, full scope of renewal that occurred on both sides of I-91 (Figure 4.10). In the decades following the completion of Wooster Square’s renewal, however, the municipality was eager to reframe the project as an entirely rehabilitation endeavour; this would exclude Wooster Square from the growing national criticism of the destructive nature of the urban renewal era. Therefore, maps of the neighbourhood would revert back to illustrating the Wooster Square project as consisting of only the area west of I-91, as seen in Figure 4.9. This thesis, in contrast, intentionally honours the true boundaries of Wooster Square’s renewal, including regions on both sides of the new highway (as illustrated in Figure 4.10), in order to understand the actual impact of a renewal project that included both rehabilitation and complete redevelopment.

05

WHAT WAS LOST, AND
WHAT REMAINS

The Erasure of a Neighbourhood

Wooster Square prior to urban renewal was a vibrant, bustling neighbourhood with a hardworking Italian and immigrant community. A diverse and dense urban fabric created a walkable neighbourhood where strong neighbourly ties and Mediterranean culture fostered a welcoming and tight-knit society. The urban renewal era would fundamentally harm Wooster Square, as a new highway constructed through its centre harshly split the neighbourhood in two—displacing thousands of residents and hundreds of businesses, and severely diminishing Wooster Square’s vivid Italian immigrant spirit. Beyond this, the ‘rehabilitation’ strategies in the remaining residential half of Wooster Square would further contribute to the negative consequences of renewal.

This chapter attempts to convey a detailed understanding of the changes brought upon Wooster Square by urban renewal through a graphic tour of the neighbourhood over time. Strategically placed at five key locations throughout the neighbourhood, a series of illustrations are arranged to follow the path of a pedestrian’s journey through Wooster Square (Figure 5.1).

As previously explored in Chapter 3, the City of New Haven repeatedly used a ‘before and after’ graphic strategy to not only secure urban renewal funding, but also to misleadingly portray the city’s neighbourhoods as slums. Using the same ‘before and after’ approach, each key location on the graphic tour of Wooster Square will contain two illustrations—one that conveys the location before renewal, and the other that represents the present-day condition of the location, after renewal. In doing so, this graphic series reveals the true urban conditions that existed in the neighbourhood prior to renewal, as well as the enduring consequences of renewal, decades after it was first executed.

Representation of Wooster Square

The series of illustrations to follow in this chapter are presented using a deliberate artistic strategy. The intention behind the illustrations is not to simply recreate a photo-realistic image of a location; photography of Wooster Square both pre- and post-renewal already exists. Rather, the following illustrations draw information from various sources, including photography, written and recorded oral histories, and archival material, and combine this data into drawings that embody the essence of the place—capturing the physical, social and cultural nuances as understood

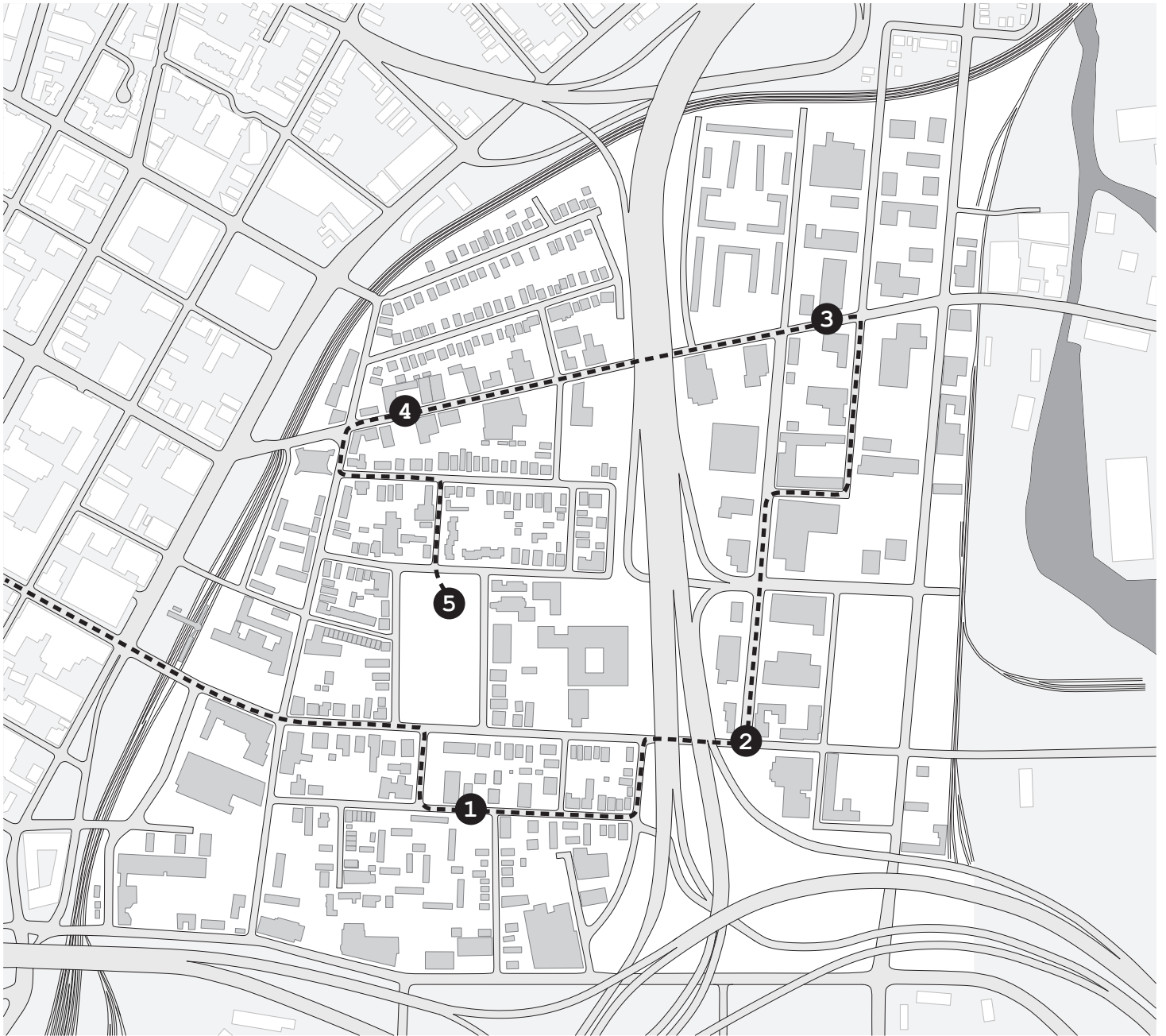
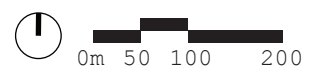


Fig. 5.1 Key map of drawing locations.



by the community who occupied the location, past and present. Specifically, the 'before' series of illustrations relies heavily on various oral histories of current and former residents of Wooster Square, who vividly recall the spirit of the neighbourhood, and the ways in which renewal forever altered their community. The 'after' series of illustrations partly reflects my own experience of Wooster Square, as I visited the neighbourhood in June of 2022; this site visit gave me further insight into the present condition of Wooster Square. Finally, all illustrations are also accompanied by an extended caption, in which Jane Jacobs' *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* is also referenced for further architectural insight into the location presented.

Location 1

**WOOSTER
STREET**

The first location on the graphic tour of Wooster Square is the Wooster Street area. Figure 5.2 illustrates the location before renewal. Wooster Street was the hub of Italian activities in the neighbourhood, where bakeries, restaurants, markets and pastry shops abounded. The area was bustling with foot traffic throughout the day, as the diversity of uses allowed residents to access all daily necessities within walking distance. Frequent contact between residents, on the streets and in other public settings, fostered a respectful and trustworthy community. In contrast, Figure 5.3 illustrates present-day Wooster Street, where a significant number of businesses were forced to close due to eminent domain, and the density of local patrons was reduced. The street now acts as a popular tourist attraction and has been branded through municipal efforts as New Haven's Little Italy.

Urban Renewal as Violence



Fig. 5.2 Wooster Street Before Renewal key map and perspective drawing.

What was Lost, and What Remains



Fig. 5.3 *Wooster Street After Renewal key map and perspective drawing.*

Wooster Street Before Renewal

Wooster Street, as illustrated in Figure 5.4, was the centre of Italian commercial enterprises in the neighbourhood—and consequently, the centre of a lively and diverse Italian community. The street could have been considered what Jane Jacobs describes in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* as a “street neighbourhood,” since it undoubtedly had “... sufficient frequency of commerce, general liveliness, use and interest, to cultivate continuities of public street life.”¹ Wooster Street was home to “...its own macaroni factory, five bakeries, pastry shops, and speciality meat markets,” among other businesses; they were frequented by all types of customers, from local labourers on their lunch breaks, to homemakers purchasing the family’s dinner ingredients, to residents from other parts of the city in search of an authentic Italian meal.²

Figure 5.4 captures the north side of Wooster Street from its intersection at Brown Street. Pictured at the farthest left is Canestri’s Pastry Shop, established by Cesare Canestri, and run by his wife Luisa upon his early death.³ To its right is a family home with a restaurant operated out of a secondary building at the rear of the property—followed next door by a mixed use residential-commercial building containing a general store, barber shop and bakery.⁴ Finally, on the furthest right in Figure 5.4, Frank Pepe Pizzeria Napoletana is pictured; the pizzeria was one of the oldest in the United States, and was run by the Pepe family who lived above the restaurant.⁵

1 Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1961), 121.

2 Riccio, *The Italian American Experience*, 349–350.

3 “Walk New Haven: Canestri’s Pastry Shop,” The Ethnic Heritage Center, accessed November 14, 2022, <https://walknewhaven.org/canestris-pastry-shop>.

4 “Pepe’s at 157 Wooster St. and Brasile’s at 159 Wooster St.,” series 1, item 40-DSCF0013, PColl 1, New Haven Redevelopment Agency (NHRA) Photography Collection, New Haven Museum.

5 “Walk New Haven: Pepe’s Pizzeria Napoletana,” The Ethnic Heritage Center, accessed November 14, 2022, <https://walknewhaven.org/pepes-pizzeria-napoletana>.

If you walked down the street, everybody had the same Italian station on. You didn't miss a word to the song and everybody, especially in the summer time, everybody had their windows open and the smell of the sauce, tomato sauce.⁶ - Theresa Argento

Due to proximity and frequency of patronage, the commerce on Wooster Street fostered a rich sidewalk culture. Unlike in the suburbs or other less diverse areas, walking was made practical by the diversity of uses present; residents were able to access all they required within walking distance.⁷ This resulted in neighbourhood streets that were busy with foot traffic at all times of the day. Jacobs describes this type of setting, where frequent contact between residents occurs on the sidewalk and in public settings, as a vehicle for the growth of community respect and trust: “[it] grows out of people stopping by at the bar for a beer, getting advice from the grocer and giving advice to the newsstand man, comparing opinions with other customers at the bakery...”⁸ This respect and trust was evidently existent on Wooster Street, as recounted by former residents:

...we knew really everybody in the neighborhood because they all came to shop in my father's store.⁹

Everybody just seemed to be a lot happier, that's basically what it was. You knew your next door neighbor and the one over there and the one over there and everybody knew you... We had more comradery between us then, even though our grandparents came from Italy and couldn't talk English but we got along...¹⁰

...it wasn't just a shop, it was to socialize, too. So after they did their shopping, she'd invite them in the back and they'd have an espresso and it was a happy time of the day for her.

6 Interview of Theresa Argento, New Haven citizen, by Sarah Barca, New Haven Oral History Project staff, 9 March 2004, box 2Ub, RU 1055, Oral Histories Documenting New Haven, Connecticut, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

7 Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, 230.

8 Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, 56.

9 Interview of Theresa Argento, 9 March 2004, Oral Histories Documenting New Haven, Connecticut.

10 Interview with Lou Landino, August 6, 1999; Riccio, *The Italian American Experience*, 352.

She was able to take care of her business and at the same time meet with her friends...¹¹

A further contributor to the sidewalk life of Wooster Street was the presence of what Jacobs describes as “public characters.” These community members are “...in frequent contact with a wide circle of people,” and bolster the social life of the entire circle.¹² Jacobs names storekeepers or barkeepers as recurring examples of public characters; Wooster Street’s public characters consisted of well-known bakers and other business owners who occupied the sidewalks for commerce or socialization. Former residents recount three specific public characters on the street:

There used to be a bakery called Midolo’s. He’s the one who used to sing...he used to sing all the way through the whole [Wooster] Street, up and down the street.¹³

...the Midolo guy used to deliver fresélles and bread; he used to come down the street, the Sicilian, singing Italian songs. Then on a Sunday morning...He used to sell *i lupini* beans... You bring out your dish, everybody, they used to come down with the dish...he used to put in the dish, ten, fifteen cents worth.¹⁴

On Wooster and Franklin, there was the DeFelice brothers. They used to make pastry and they had ice cream and lemonade, they used to make all that. And, the brothers used to come out with the ukelele and they used to sing...sing all night on the corner of Wooster and Franklin...And the Italians, the old men, when they had a time down the block, all Italian music, forget it, that’s all you heard was Italian music.¹⁵

11 Interview of Theresa Argento, 9 March 2004, Oral Histories Documenting New Haven, Connecticut.

12 Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, 68.

13 Interview with Nick and Mary Vitagliano, June 2, 2000; Riccio, *The Italian American Experience*, 350-351.

14 Interview with Nick and Mary Vitagliano, June 2, 2000; Riccio, *The Italian American Experience*, 350-351.

15 Interview with John Nappi, September 15, 1999; Riccio, *The Italian American Experience*, 363.

...there would be so much activity here. People just walking in the streets, just unbelievable. Unbelievable.¹⁶ - Theresa Argento

The residential portion of the area surrounding Wooster Street housed Italian families in high concentration. Although this fact would later be inaccurately described as ‘overcrowding’ by city officials, the high-density residences of greater Wooster Street were not only a source of pride for their owners, but also were a key component to the success of the diverse commerce in the area; as Jacobs clarifies, “...dwelling densities should go as high as they need to go to stimulate the maximum potential diversity in a district.”¹⁷ In other words, without enough people to support the diversity of Wooster Street, it would collapse and become an unpleasant place to live. However, this was not the case—the dense living quarters of Wooster Street residents became a source of domestic pride, in which family life flourished:

We used to live in the same building, the same tenement building. My sisters got married and they lived downstairs. My aunt lived downstairs. My cousins lived downstairs. Sixteen-family house, twelve of them were my relatives. Whole families were my relatives. And I saw them every day.¹⁸

But one thing I know—that those Italians kept those so-called tenement houses spanking clean. You could have eaten off those floors in the hallways...They would bleach those floors, wash the outside stairs and they helped one another those people there.¹⁹

...they were all Italians. They had little homes. But they were proud—they owned the home, they used to wash them, they used to clean them.²⁰

16 Interview of Theresa Argento, 9 March 2004, Oral Histories Documenting New Haven, Connecticut.

17 Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, 212.

18 Interview with Tony Vitolo and Anthony Santacroce, December 21, 1999; Riccio, *The Italian American Experience*, 360.

19 Interview with Theresa Argento, May 23, 1999; Riccio, *The Italian American Experience*, 415.

20 Interview with Pat Barone, May 5, 1999; Riccio, *The Italian American Experience*, 420.



Fig. 5.4 Detailed view, Wooster Street Before Renewal.



Wooster Street After Renewal

Wooster Street was fundamentally altered by the advent of the Wooster Square Renewal Program, as illustrated in Figure 5.7. With the placement of I-91 at the centre of Franklin Street, much of the eastern side of Wooster Street was completely demolished, with a small remaining portion converted entirely to industrial use.²¹ Some businesses that were evicted due to renewal were relocated along the renewed, western stretch of Wooster Street. Although this was a rare occurrence, the City used these few examples in public messaging to convey a deceiving sense of security to other business owners, leading them to believe that they would be taken care of through their (forced) relocations. In two of the Redevelopment Agency's annual reports, which were published in the *New Haven Register* in 1966 and 1967, Libby's Italian Pastry Shop is the sole example given of a business who 'benefited' from relocation on Wooster Street:

Libby's Italian Pastry Shop, formerly cramped in tiny, deteriorated quarters on Wooster Street, opened a striking new store directly across from its old location. The black and white structure contains nearly 11,000 square feet of commercial space with the owner's seven-room residence above. In addition to pastry, Libby's plans to serve espresso and Italian ices, and hopes to provide an outdoor cafe in the warmer months.²²

Although the western portion of Wooster Street was not completely lost in renewal, it was fundamentally altered: physically, through the demolition of a number of individual properties for other uses such as parking, and culturally, through the loss of a significant amount of patrons. In Figure 5.7, it can be seen that half of the properties from Figure 5.4 have been demolished—this area now acts as parking for Frank Pepe Pizzeria. Beyond this selective physical destruction, Italian businesses on the street had to contend with a significant loss of patrons due to the large-scale displacement associated with renewal; the previously-vivid street life would be forever lost.

21 Hommann, *Wooster Square Design*, 24-25.

22 Lee and Adams, 1966, p. 18, New Haven Redevelopment Agency Records.

*Wooster Street is a ghost of the past now; it isn't the thriving hub it used to be. The human mosaic that I knew growing up in New Haven has been shattered. It's painful for me to leave Wooster Square to go in any direction to see the changes wrought...It's like looking at the ruins of Pompeii, you'll have a glimpse of the glory that was the mosaic and the decorations and so forth and so on but of course you see ruin all around you. That's New Haven.*²³ - Ralph Marcarelli

South of Wooster Street, much of the primarily-residential fabric was demolished or altered to create an ideal housing stock. On the eastern side, the fabric was completely razed to make way for I-91 and its connection to I-95.²⁴ Meanwhile, on the western side, a mix of rehabilitation and demolition was to clear this area of "...the worst infection of slum and blight."²⁵ As Jane Jacobs explains, orthodox planning of the era erroneously blamed high-density dwellings such as those in the Wooster Street area for "...every kind of difficulty and failure."²⁶ In reality, the outcome of the agenda to eliminate so-called 'overcrowded slums' was a complete erasure of the immigrant, Italian, working-class community—to be replaced instead with wealthier residents who could afford the exclusivity of a new, un-blighted housing stock.²⁷ As former resident Norine Polio confirms, "You don't find too many of the original Italian families living in Wooster Square—it is not affordable anymore."²⁸

Present-day Wooster Street, as illustrated in Figure 5.7, acts as a tourism attraction for the City of New Haven. The street welcomes visitors from beyond Wooster Square and New Haven who frequent the several long-standing pizzerias that survived renewal. Anthony Riccio describes that in "[walking] down Wooster Street, one can still catch glimpses of the old neighborhood and imagine it in its heyday."²⁹ Upon my own site visit to

23 Interview with Ralph Marcarelli, May 6, 1998; Riccio, *The Italian American Experience*, 410-411.

24 Hommann, *Wooster Square Design*, 24-25.

25 "Wooster Square Area," 1955, p. 6, Edward J. Logue Papers.

26 Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, 202.

27 Rae, *City*, 373.

28 "Wooster Square: A Conversation with Norine Polio," New Haven Museum, accessed January 4, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VcnCVFJWAqo&t=4s>.

29 Riccio, *The Italian American Experience*, 350.



Fig. 5.5 Entrance to Wooster Street's Little Italy.

Wooster Street in June 2022, I observed an obvious infusion of municipal efforts and funds into this street, distinguishing it from all others. At the western end of the street was a monumental arch announcing my arrival into New Haven's 'Little Italy'; at its base I found plaques dedicating the arch to Italian businesses and societies in the neighbourhood, as well as to fallen soldiers of the Second World War and Vietnam War (Figure 5.5). The street also had distinctive lamp posts with well-maintained, colourful signage demarcating the bounds of Little Italy (Figure 5.6). It is clear that the current municipality is keen to support the now-famous Italian



Fig. 5.6 Signage denoting Little Italy along Wooster Street.

businesses occupying the street, and (perhaps for economic gain) celebrate the city's ties to an Italian-American culture that only a few decades prior, was almost entirely deliberately erased at the hands of the City.³⁰

30 Brandon Liu, "Pass the Pie!" *Yale Daily News*, March 1, 2019, <https://yaledailynews.com/blog/2019/03/01/pass-the-pie/>

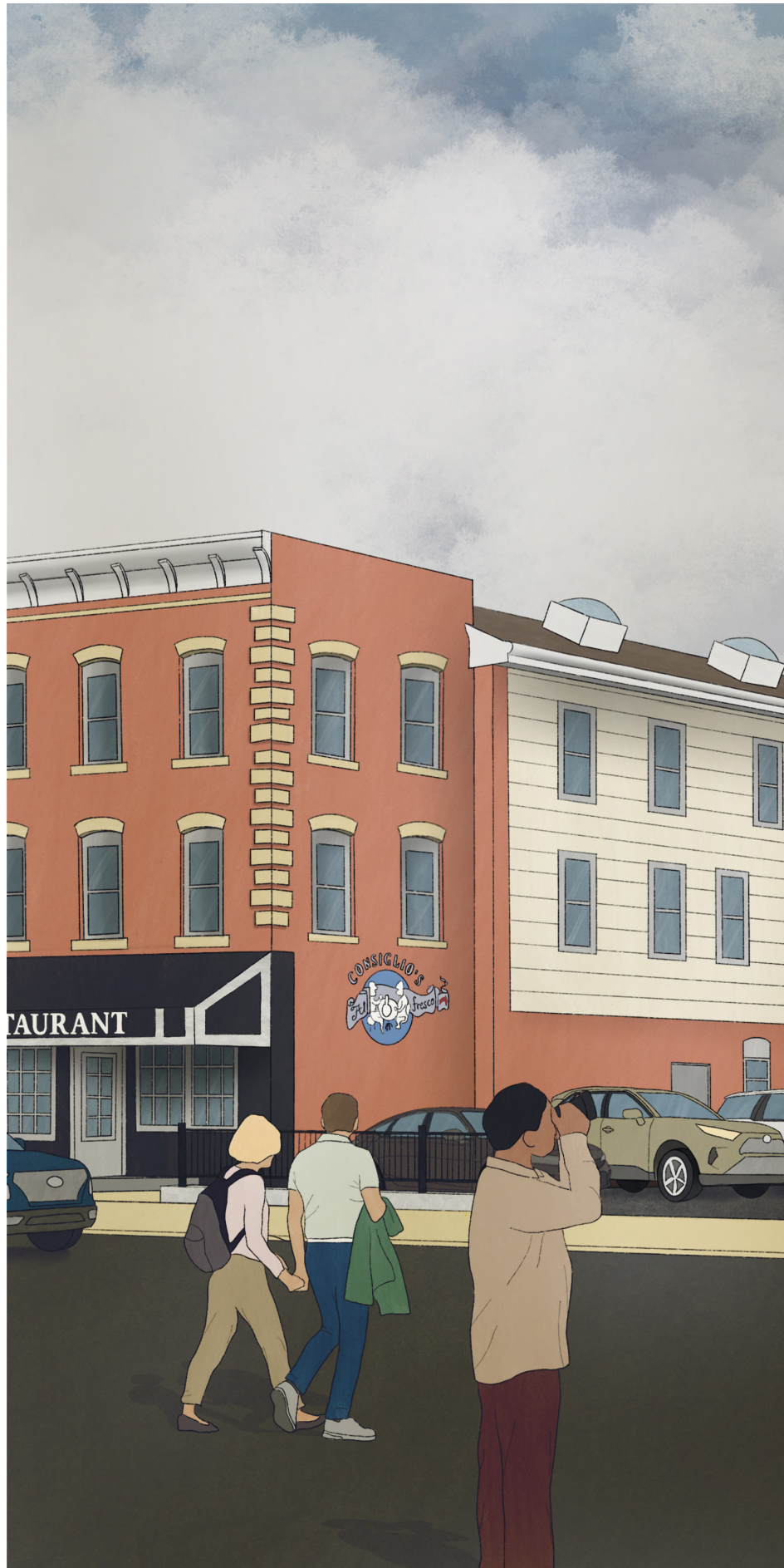


Fig. 5.7 Detailed view, Wooster Street After Renewal.



Location 2

CHAPEL
STREET

The second location on the graphic tour of Wooster Square is Chapel Street at Hamilton Street, in the eastern side of Wooster Square. Before renewal, this region of the neighbourhood owed its success to the close proximity of home, work and business, which facilitated a convenient and tight-knit community (Figure 5.8). A diverse urban fabric provided residents with all necessities of daily life within the bounds of the neighbourhood. In contrast, Figure 5.9 illustrates eastern Chapel Street after renewal, where the demolition of buildings and the displacement of residents made way for the new I-91 highway and Industrial Park. The barrier created by the new highway, as well as the removal of diversity in building use, resulted in a lack of vitality and safety in the area.

Urban Renewal as Violence



Fig. 5.8 Chapel Street Before Renewal key map and perspective drawing.

What was Lost, and What Remains

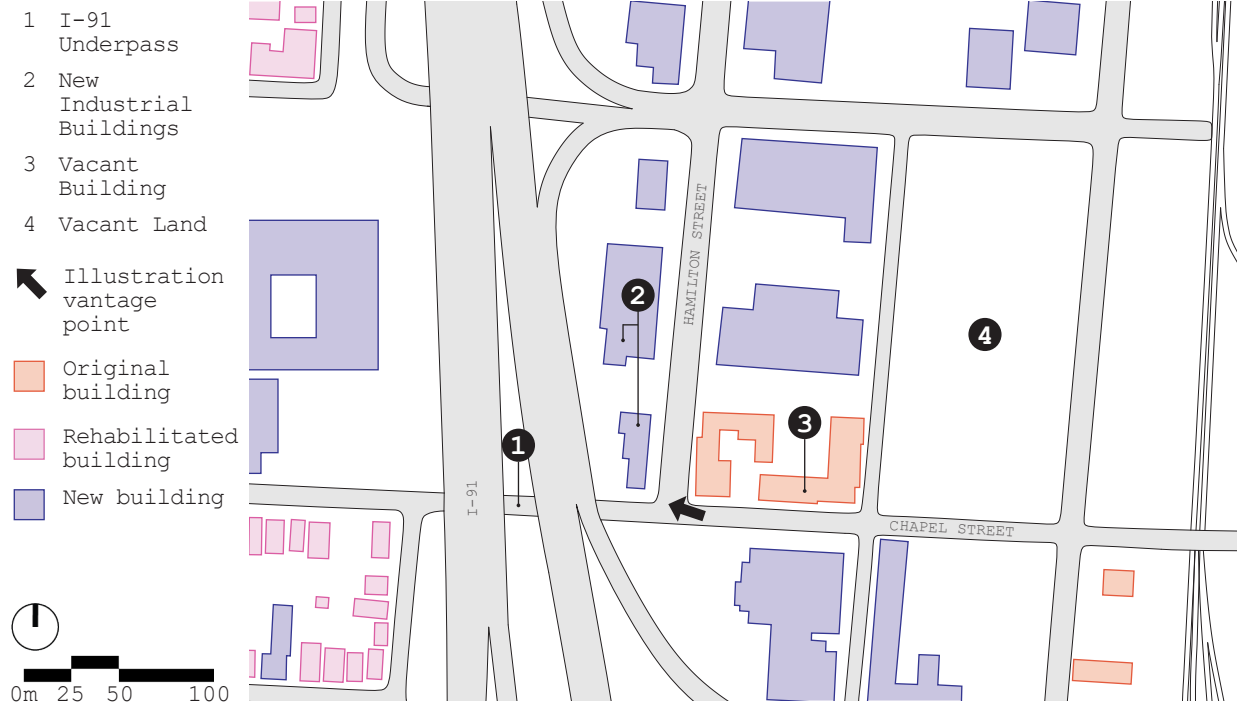


Fig. 5.9 Chapel Street After Renewal key map and perspective drawing.

Chapel Street Before Renewal

The eastern section of Wooster Square—where the urban fabric was originally built for the influx of working class families—housed industry mixed with other uses. The intersection of Chapel Street at Hamilton Street is illustrated in Figure 5.10. On the right can be seen a standard factory, one of many that were scattered throughout the neighbourhood. As in every case, a diverse urban fabric of mixed uses surrounded the factory. On the south side of Chapel Street, and pictured on the left side of Figure 5.10, was Carrano’s Market; other businesses included a pastry shop, a shoe store, and a hardware store, among others.³¹ According to Jane Jacobs, this combination of mixed uses—one that generates “...the presence of people who go outdoors on different schedules and are in the place for different purposes...”—is a key component of successful city streets.

...the vegetables and produce that we sold in our store always had to meet our customers’ high expectations for quality, because fresh, quality ingredients are the hallmarks of the Italian kitchen.³²

- Frank Carrano

Chapel Street owed its success directly to the close proximity of home, work and business that was widespread in the neighbourhood. Jacobs submits that the presence of each component guaranteed the survival of the others—neighbouring residences provided workers for industry and shoppers to small businesses; nearby industrial employers provided a job and short commute for residents and generated more patrons for businesses; businesses provided a variety of essentials to residents and created an attractive neighbourhood for prospective industrial workers to move to.³³ According to former residents, this was certainly the case across Wooster Square, especially along streets such as Chapel Street

31 Ed Stannard, “Documentary to preserve memories of New Haven’s Wooster Square,” *New Haven Register*, December 16, 2017, <https://www.nhregister.com/news/article/Documentary-to-preserve-memories-of-New-Haven-s-12436067.php>.

32 Frank Carrano, “Frank Carrano: The family store was the center of Wooster Square’s world,” *New Haven Register*, March 4, 2018, <https://www.nhregister.com/news/article/Frank-Carrano-The-family-store-was-the-center-of-12727102.php>.

33 Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, 153.

where residential, commercial, and industrial uses were found immediately adjacent to one another:

We had a lot of factories. Lot of lot of factories, but a lot of the business people made their livelihood during lunchtime. There were a lot of little luncheonettes, although a lot of people brought their lunch.³⁴

Women who worked in the factories would come and shop [at Carrano Market] at lunchtime to buy what they were going to have for supper, and we would keep it in the store and when they got out of work they'd pick up the bag and go home and cook it.³⁵

The consistent diversity of uses present in the neighbourhood allowed for residents to perform all activities of daily life within the bounds of Wooster Square. Factory workers could live within walking distance to their employer, and shop for groceries and other necessities within the same few blocks. Beyond the satisfaction of basic needs such as employment, food and lodging, this neighbourhood arrangement facilitated strong community bonds. When one shopped for groceries, for example, their patronage may be supporting a business owned by a family friend or relative.³⁶ Shop owners selling speciality goods of Italian origin brought a welcome sense of familiarity to new immigrants.³⁷ As former residents explain, the urban composition of Wooster Square fostered not only a convenient lifestyle, but also a tight-knit community:

...it was like there were micro-neighborhoods, you might say...You pretty much stayed close to where you lived. The two blocks that I lived on were filled with stores.³⁸

It was truly one big happy family. I'm not going to make it out to be something greater than that. But people really cared for each other, not expecting anything in return.³⁹

34 Interview of Theresa Argento, 9 March 2004, Oral Histories Documenting New Haven, Connecticut.

35 Statement by Frank Carrano; Stannard, "Documentary."

36 Carrano, "Frank Carrano: The family store."

37 Carrano, "Frank Carrano: The family store."

38 Statement by Frank Carrano; Stannard, "Documentary."

39 "Wallace St. New Haven, CT," New Haven Museum, accessed January 20, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VKIrVhqqR6o>.



Fig. 5.10 Detailed view, Chapel Street Before Renewal.



Chapel Street After Renewal

Since the intersection of Chapel Street and Hamilton Street, as illustrated in Figure 5.12, was situated to the east of the new I-91 highway, urban renewal in this area called for complete demolition. Although the property occupied by the factory complied with the mandated use of the new Industrial Park, the building was also demolished and replaced with a smaller scale industrial building with a larger setback. The adjoining diversity of shops, residences and other businesses along the eastern part of Chapel Street were all seized through eminent domain and replaced with industrial buildings and the elevated base of I-91.

...it cost them poor people—didn't have anything—half of them didn't have an education, half of them didn't know what [eminent domain] was all about. So they abide by the law, the law says they're going to take your property, they just let them take it.⁴⁰ - Pat Barone

The creation of an Industrial Park with only one primary function, paired with the removal of industry from the new residential area to the west, drastically reduced the diversity of building use in Wooster Square. As Jane Jacobs explains, this approach of isolating work uses from others, "...under the misapprehension that this is orderly city planning," actually advances decline.⁴¹ In removing the rich diversity of uses formerly present in eastern Wooster Square, urban renewal only created a new problem area—one which deteriorated over the ensuing decades. This is no more evident than on Chapel Street, where entire blocks within the Industrial Park are occupied by abandoned buildings and vacant land.

They said that New Haven was going to be a model city. It was not. We still have parking lots of property that [were] demolished, beautiful homes. Why didn't they think of preserving the beauty of those homes?⁴² - Theresa Argento

40 Interview with Pat Barone, May 5, 1999; Riccio, *The Italian American Experience*, 422.

41 Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, 171.

42 Interview of Theresa Argento, 9 March 2004, Oral Histories Documenting New Haven, Connecticut.



Fig. 5.11 Photo of highway barrier (left) opposite housing on the western residential side of Wooster Square.

The deliberate placement of the I-91 highway as a barrier between the residential side of the neighbourhood and the Industrial Park generated even greater harm to Wooster Square, as it created what Jacobs describes as a border vacuum. This highway border created (as was intended in its conception) a dead end for pedestrians who would have otherwise freely walked the entire neighbourhood; the eastern side of that barrier, as a consequence, is completely lacking of any vitality.⁴³ This dynamic was evident to me when I visited Wooster Square in June 2022; even with a deliberate intention to visit the industrial side of the neighbourhood, the deep, dark and deserted pedestrian walkway below the highway was discouraging. Within the underpass, I found graffiti and garbage strewn across the sidewalk, and once I entered the Industrial Park I saw no other pedestrians—the area felt unsafe, simply because it was desolate. It became clear that in the presence of such a significant physical barrier, no resident or visitor of Wooster Square had any reason to make the same uninviting journey across it (Figure 5.11).

43 Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, 261.



Fig. 5.12 Detailed view, Chapel Street After Renewal.



Location 3

WALLACE
STREET

The third location on the graphic tour of Wooster Square is Wallace Street at Grand Avenue. Before renewal, the Wallace Street area was anchored by St. Patrick's Church, and was surrounded by a diversity of uses including Italian pastry shops, retail stores, schools, and entertainment venues (Figure 5.13). The neighbourhood safety was enhanced by the presence of local businesses and an active streetscape, and children of the area made the streets their playground. Figure 5.14 illustrates the Wallace Street area after renewal, which brought mass demolition to not only the physical buildings present, but also to the area's street life and safety. In its place, the automobile-focused Industrial Park was established, where desolate streets lack pedestrian activity.

Urban Renewal as Violence

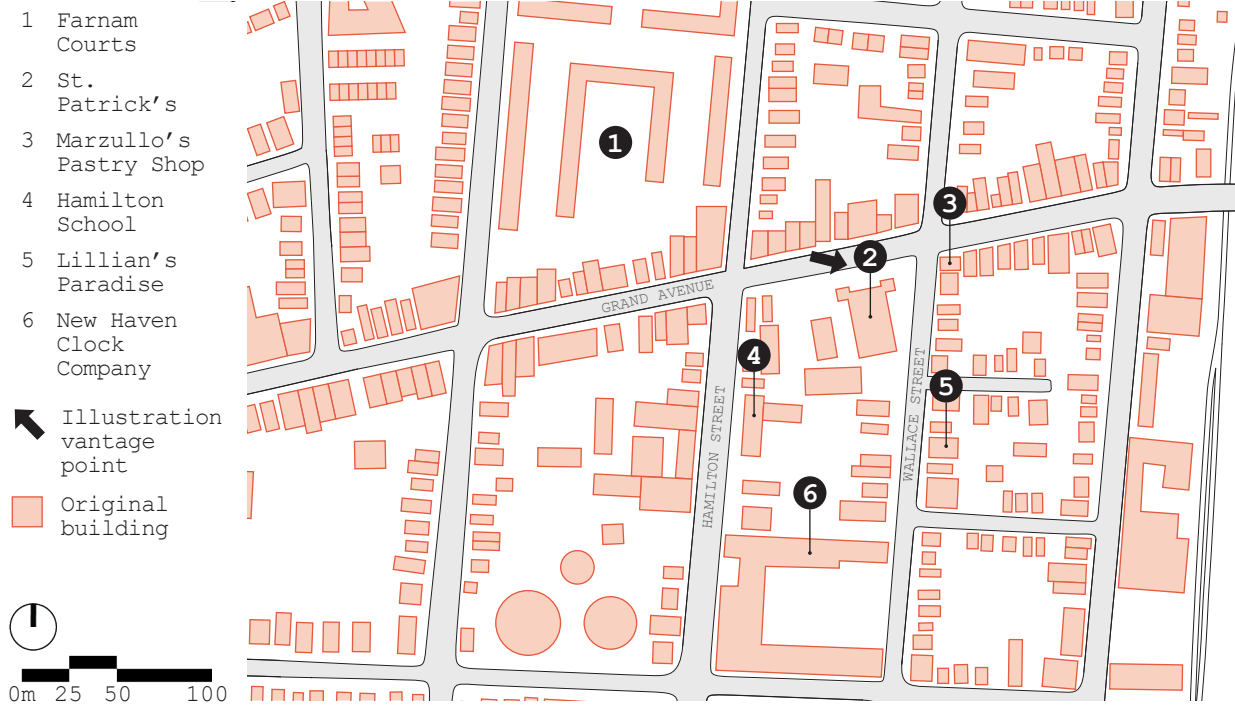


Fig. 5.13 Wallace Street Before Renewal key map and perspective drawing.

What was Lost, and What Remains

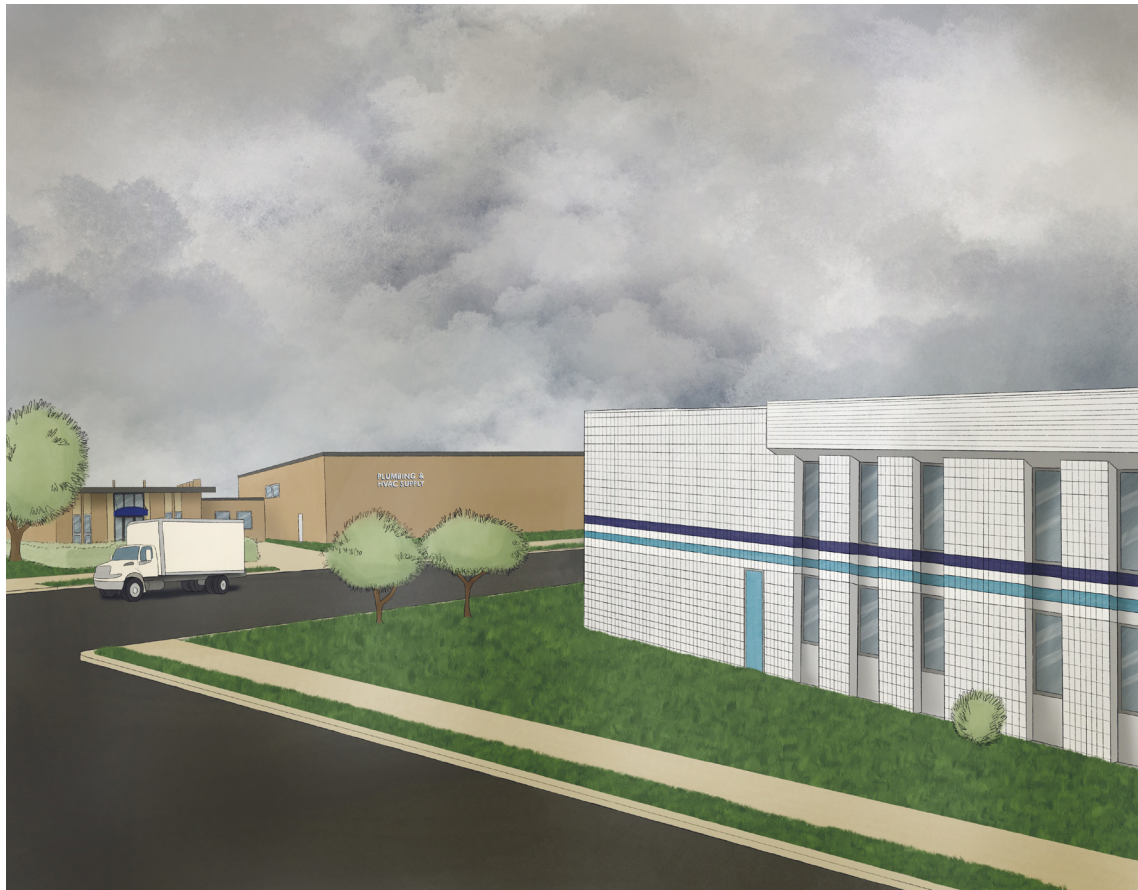
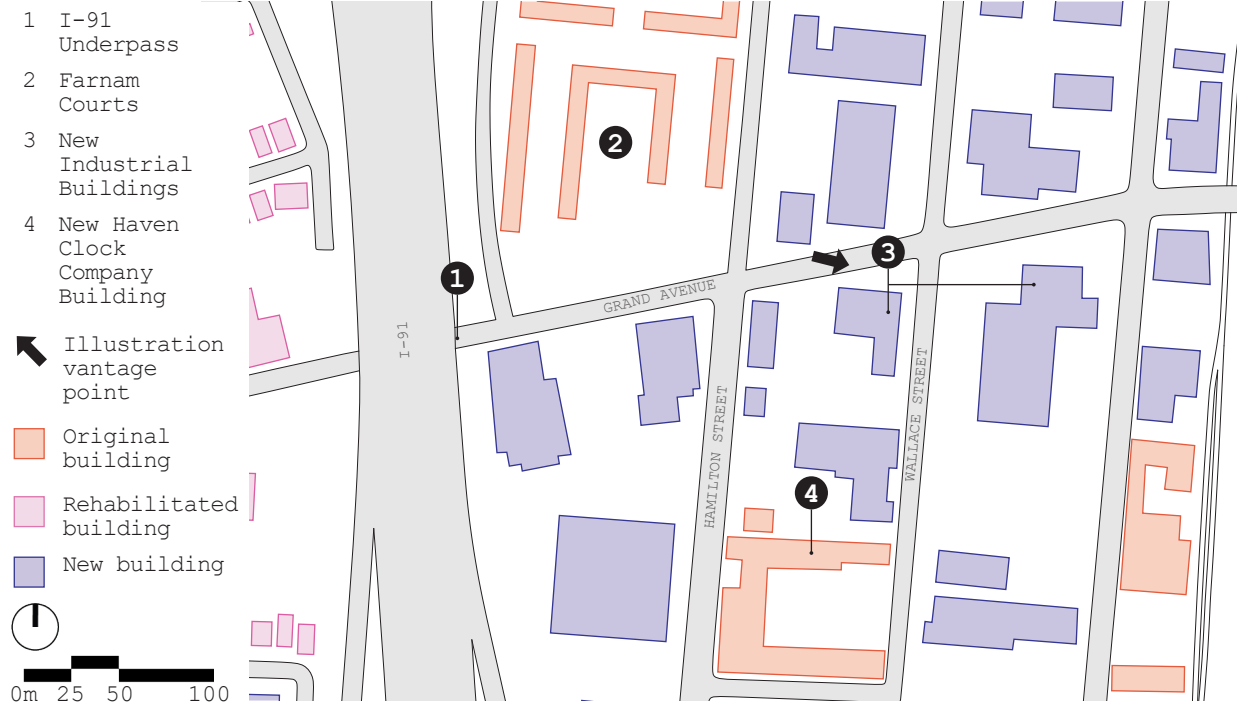


Fig. 5.14 Wallace Street After Renewal key map and perspective drawing.

Wallace Street Before Renewal

The intersection of Grand Avenue and Wallace Street, anchored by St. Patrick's Church and illustrated in Figure 5.15, acted as the central hub for residents of the eastern region of Wooster Square. Originally constructed in 1851 after the first influx of Irish-Catholic immigrants to the neighbourhood, the church survived not only a fire 24 years later, but also a hurricane in 1938.⁴⁴ The building's use grew into the postwar period, as Italian-Catholic immigrants moved to Wooster Square for employment at nearby factories.⁴⁵

St. Patrick's Church could have undoubtedly been considered what Jane Jacobs defines as a landmark; not only did the church add diversity to the surrounding fabric through its unique use (it was "...important because [it was] different,") but it also "...[stated] explicitly and visually that [this] place is important which is in truth functionally important."^{46,47} In other words, the church's prominent location and size signified its importance to all living in the neighbourhood. As former residents describe St. Patrick's, this was certainly the case:

It was a great thing on a Sunday morning to see so many people coming from all over, other towns and other places, and all of us in the neighbourhood—no matter what your nationality was, colour of your skin—everybody came to St. Patrick's.⁴⁸

It was a great church...it was just unbelievable. Of course we were all family.⁴⁹

The centre of [the neighbourhood] was St. Patrick's Church...It was the first love of our life. That was the centre

44 "Walk New Haven: St. Patrick's Church," The Ethnic Heritage Center, accessed January 10, 2023, <https://walknewhaven.org/st-patricks-church>.

45 "Wallace St. New Haven, CT."

46 Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, 384.

47 Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, 386.

48 Interview with Alphonse Proto, published September 30, 2017; "Wallace St. New Haven, CT."

49 Interview with John Ragozzino, published September 30, 2017; "Wallace St. New Haven, CT."

of our lives.⁵⁰

The area surrounding St. Patrick's contained a diversity of uses that contributed to a vivid community life. Opposite the church, on the southeast corner of Grand Avenue and Wallace Street, was Marzullo's Pastry Shop, as seen in Figure 5.15. The family-run business had an established reputation for Italian pastries and drew customers from the rest of the city and beyond, often leading to long waiting times outside the shop.⁵¹ Along Grand Avenue, retail shops with residential units above brought even more foot traffic to the area. Meanwhile, further South on Wallace Street one could find Hamilton School and the premises of the New Haven Clock Company—the largest employer in Wooster Square.⁵² North of Grand Avenue sat Farnam Courts, a public housing complex that offered 300 units of housing to the neighbourhood's lower-income families.⁵³

None of the younger people ever got into any trouble over here, because Father Joe used to make sure that they didn't get into any trouble.⁵⁴ - Anthony Mastriano

Another important business in this section of the neighbourhood was Lillian's Paradise, a restaurant and jazz nightclub founded by African-American entrepreneur Lillian Benford Lumpkin.⁵⁵ In moving to New Haven from Alabama, Lumpkin had a dream of creating an iconic jazz institution in the North-East. Despite the added challenges for an African-American woman to open such a business, Lillian's Paradise was a success, hosting popular musicians such as Billie Holliday, Dorothy Dandridge, and

50 Interview with Alphonse Proto, published September 30, 2017; "Wallace St. New Haven, CT."

51 "Walk New Haven: Marzullo's Shop," The Ethnic Heritage Center, accessed January 10, 2023, <https://walknewhaven.org/marzullos-pastry-shop>.

52 "Wallace St. New Haven, CT."

53 Hommann, *Wooster Square Design*, 19.

54 Interview with Anthony Mastriano, published September 30, 2017; "Wallace St. New Haven, CT."

55 Speech by Carolyn Baker, Co-President of the Greater New Haven African-American Historical Society, published May 25, 2022; "Site 24 Walk NH Grand Ave Grand Opening CAROLYN BAKER," The Ethnic Heritage Center, accessed January 20, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YCbQgGNkWE&t=311s>.

Lionel Hampton, as well as holding dinner events for local social clubs and Yale student groups.⁵⁶ While the local Italian community undoubtedly enjoyed Lillian’s Paradise—stating that in the evening hours, “[it] kind of brought this street to life,”—the venture also served as a safe space for African Americans in an era of widespread discrimination.⁵⁷ Lillian’s Paradise was named in the ‘Green Book,’ an annual guide published for road-tripping African Americans, which identified establishments across North America that would serve non-white patrons.^{58,59}

The diversity of uses in the Wallace Street region of Wooster Square contributed to its strong sense of neighbourhood safety. The presence of many businesses with local shopkeepers, who as Jacobs explains are “...typically strong proponents of peace and order themselves,” acted as guardians of the sidewalk life in the area; since these businesses were scattered along most streets, an effective network of surveillance was established.⁶⁰ Beyond this, the presence of different types of establishments led to activity in the neighbourhood at various times of the day—for example, the bakeries operated in the morning, the factories created activity at the lunch and dinner hours, while the crowds at St. Patrick’s would form at mass times. This meant that safety in the neighbourhood was further enforced through the continuous use of its streets throughout all hours of the day, every day.⁶¹

In the Wallace Street area, street life was greatly enhanced by the strong presence of neighbourhood children, as seen in Figure 5.15. Safe streets, with natural surveillance by locals and constant activity, meant that children could make the streets their playground; in effect, the sidewalks would “...supervise the incidental play of children and assimilate the children into city society.”⁶² The rich life that existed for children in the streets of the Wallace Street area becomes clear through statements of those who grew up in the area:

56 Speech by Carolyn Baker, published May 25, 2022; “Site 24 Walk NH.”

57 Interview with John Ragozzino, published September 30, 2017; “Wallace St. New Haven, CT.”

58 Speech by Carolyn Baker, published May 25, 2022; “Site 24 Walk NH.”

59 “The Negro motorist Green-book,” Library of Congress, accessed January 10, 2023, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2016298176/>.

60 Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, 36-37.

61 Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, 36-37.

62 Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, 82.

In this neighbourhood, everyone took care of each other... In our day, everyone was watching out for the kids—everybody, constantly. You never had to worry about some of the things of today.⁶³

[The street] was our field of play. We did everything there, from cotton ball to piggy, to playing marbles, buck buck buck.⁶⁴

You could go on any one of these streets, Wallace Street, Hamilton Street, Franklin Street, Walnut Street, you could go anywhere and you'd always see at least 50 to 100 kids playing—on every street!⁶⁵

63 Interview with Alphonse Proto, published September 30, 2017; “Wallace St. New Haven, CT.”

64 Interview with John Ragozzino, published September 30, 2017; “Wallace St. New Haven, CT.”

65 Interview with Alphonse Proto, published September 30, 2017; “Wallace St. New Haven, CT.”



Fig. 5.15 Detailed view, Wallace Street Before Renewal.



Wallace Street After Renewal

Through the Wooster Square Renewal Project, the Wallace Street area was redeveloped into the new Industrial Park, as illustrated in Figure 5.16. All structures that did not conform to the new zoning rules were demolished, and new complying structures were built in their place. St. Patrick’s was originally intended to be an exception to this mandate, and can be seen in the official plans for Wooster Square as being left intact—it was to be surrounded by new industrial fabric, with the only exception of the existing public housing to the north-west.⁶⁶ However, after a majority of the church’s congregation who lived in the east portion of Wooster Square was displaced through renewal, the City no longer saw a need to preserve the building, and St. Patrick’s was also demolished.^{67,68} Figure 5.16 illustrates what was built in its place: a two-story building constructed in 1970, that currently houses the New Haven Parole and Community Services office.⁶⁹ Also seen in Figure 5.16 is an industrial complex constructed in 1986, on the former site of Marzullo’s Pastry Shop—this large office and warehouse for a plumbing and HVAC supply company occupies the entire northern block between Wallace Street and East Street.

In this area of Wooster Square, one of the only buildings left untouched by renewal was the New Haven Clock Company factory—since it already fit the mandate of industrial use, the building was incorporated into the Industrial Park design.⁷⁰ However, although the building itself still stands in Wooster Square today, the Clock Company has since gone out of business and the entire structure is vacant.

66 Hommann, *Wooster Square Design*, 25.

67 Interview with Alphonse Proto, published January 31, 2022; “Overview of the Cultural History of Grand Avenue,” The Ethnic Heritage Center, accessed January 20, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y4r5RAee2LA>.

68 Mary O’Leary, “The old days: It was the 50s, and a church was the neighborhood’s anchor,” *New Haven Register*, September 27, 2009, <https://www.nhregister.com/news/article/The-old-days-It-was-the-50s-and-a-church-was-11621872.php>.

69 “New Haven Property Information Viewer,” City of New Haven, accessed January 19, 2023, <https://newhavenct.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=7d287a1263dd4fc781960069fb94c6b4>.

70 Hommann, *Wooster Square Design*, 25.

Farnam Courts, the public housing complex, was also excluded from renewal plans. In 1955, municipal documents stated that the "...project itself is only an island of decent housing in a sea of substandard and deteriorating housing," and that drastic measures were needed to save Farnam Courts. However, in Wooster Square's final renewal plans, the I-91 highway was situated to the west of Farnam Courts, meaning that the housing complex would be completely isolated from the residential western side of Wooster Square, and instead situated within the Industrial Park—in effect, an island instead surrounded by industrial buildings. Project Director Mary Hommann addressed this 'drawback' to the renewal plans, claiming that "...if the highway had been located east of [Farnam Courts], the size of the industrial park would have been reduced to the point where it would have been useless," and that to reach the western side of the neighbourhood, "...public housing tenants would be able simply to walk under the highway bridge at Grand Avenue." As already established, the highway would have exacerbated the barrier between Farnam Courts and the western side of the neighbourhood—and surely would not have facilitated pleasant pedestrian movement between the two sides of the highway. Clearly, Hommann and the leaders of Wooster Square's renewal failed to prioritize the residents of Farnam Courts and did not adequately incorporate their needs in the renewal planning process.

Our neighbourhood came to an end when redevelopment started. What they did to our neighbourhood, really and truly, was dismantle it. They actually dismantled it. All houses, all businesses, came down.⁷¹ - Alphonse Proto

As a consequence of the Wallace Street area's sweeping redevelopment, its previously vivid and safe street life was entirely destroyed. This area was erroneously categorized as a slum by many in the City's Redevelopment Agency; its leader Ed Logue once wrote that "[the] four block area bounded by East Street, Grand Avenue, Hamilton Street, and the railroad is a substandard area too far gone for rehabilitation. It constitutes a blight on the lives and hopes of the people who live there and a distinct

71 Interview with Alphonse Proto, published September 30, 2017; "Wallace St. New Haven, CT."

menace to the neighborhood...”⁷² In converting this area into industry alone, redevelopment created an automobile-centric Industrial Park; no longer would there be any motivation for visitors to occupy the sidewalks. Consequently, the safety of the area was no longer inherently built into the urban fabric; as Jane Jacobs simply explains, “[a] well-used city street is apt to be a safe street. A deserted city street is apt to be unsafe.”⁷³ This fact was evident to me during my own site visit to Wooster Square in June 2022. Upon entering the Industrial Park by foot, I noticed a lack of street activity with no other pedestrians or visible commercial or retail spaces. Despite no immediate threat to my personal safety, the desolate streets made me feel less secure compared to those only a few blocks away, on the opposite side of I-91.

*...we didn't have any slums in any real sense at all—there were no slums in this city. There were some poor neighborhoods but they were not slums, as we understand them today. And even those poorer neighborhoods were very colorful, very active, very human, just thriving with business and activities.*⁷⁴ - Ralph Marcarelli

72 Ed Logue, Development Administrator, letter to Father McVerry, Saint Patrick's Parish, 30 August 1955, p. 1, box 37, folder 120, MS 959, Edward J. Logue Papers, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

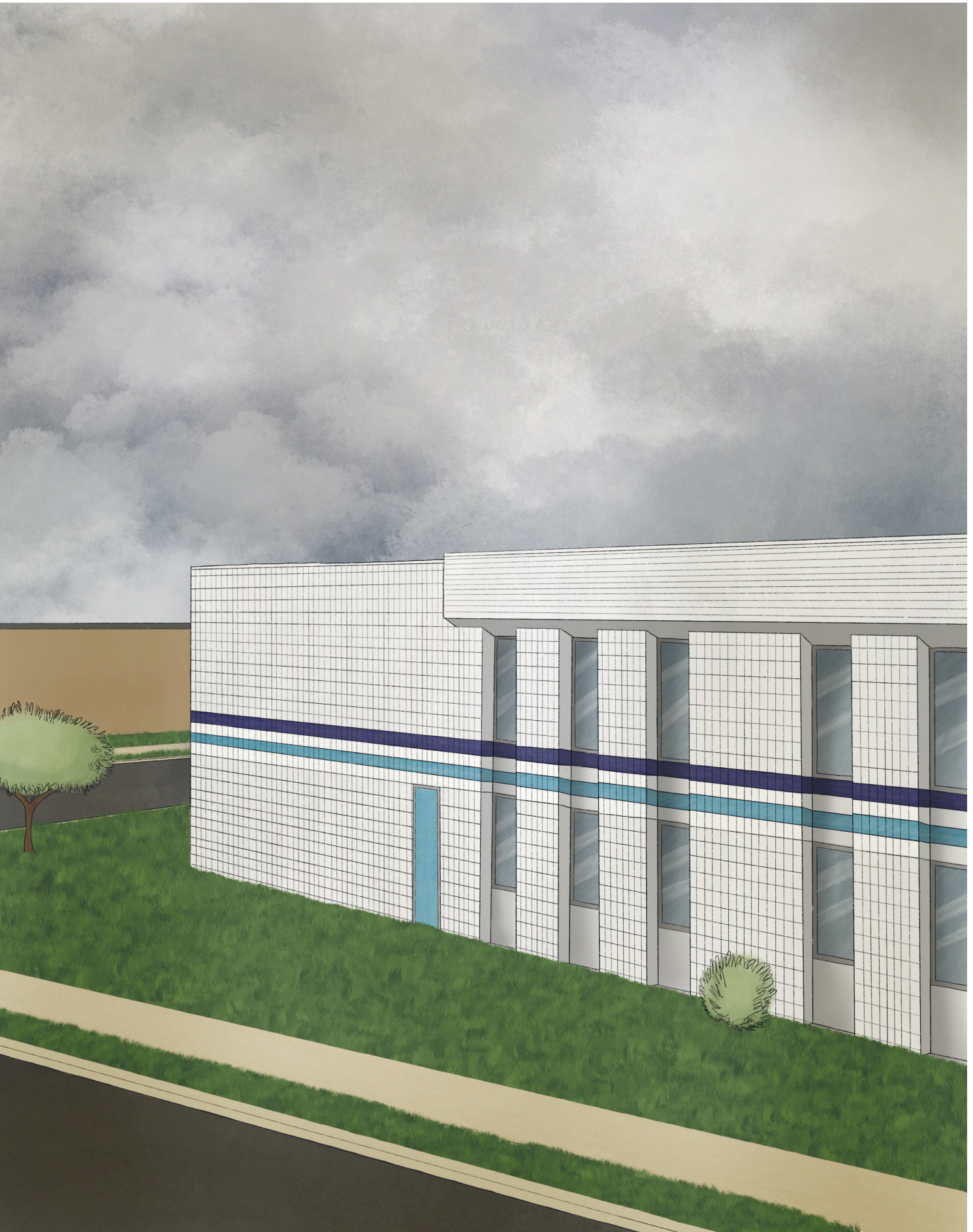
73 Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, 34.

74 Interview with Ralph Marcarelli, May 6, 1998; Riccio, *The Italian American Experience*, 409.

What was Lost, and What Remains



Fig. 5.16 Detailed view, Wooster Street After Renewal.



Location 4

**GRAND
AVENUE**

The fourth location on the graphic tour of Wooster Square is the western end of Grand Avenue. Before renewal, as illustrated in Figure 5.17, Grand Avenue was home to Jewish families who established businesses on the street, selling household goods such as furniture and textiles. In addition to commerce, the area hosted spaces for entertainment and gathering for local families and children. Figure 5.18 illustrates the Grand Avenue area today. Renewal spurred the demolition of many structures along the street and the creation of parking lots, leading to the reduction in business activity and street life. The construction of the new I-91 highway further eroded Grand Avenue's business and residential areas. Although some ventures have survived on the street since the renewal era, the area has largely declined, with many buildings in a state of neglect.

Urban Renewal as Violence



Fig. 5.17 Grand Avenue Before Renewal key map and perspective drawing.

What was Lost, and What Remains

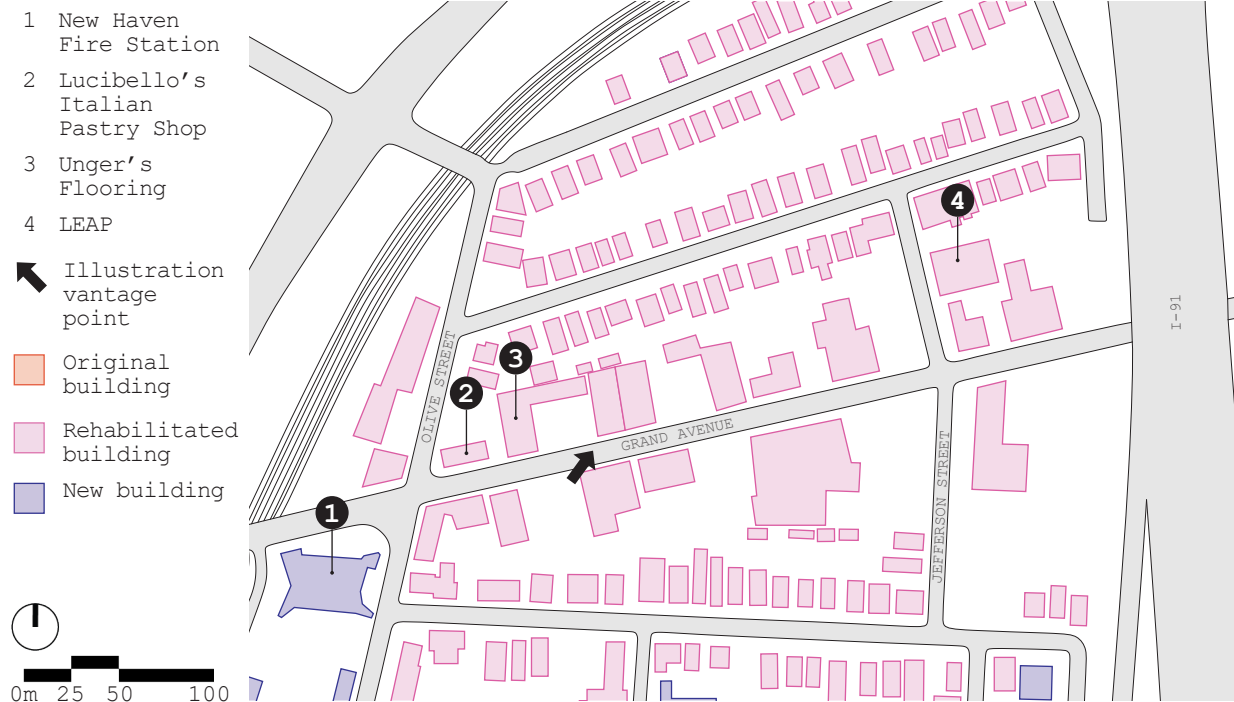


Fig. 5.18 Grand Avenue After Renewal key map and perspective drawing.

Grand Avenue Before Renewal

The western portion of Grand Avenue, as illustrated in Figure 5.19, was a lively commercial area made up of a diversity of local businesses. The success of this area can be partially attributed to the urban fabric, where a variety of building types, sizes and ages were present. As Jane Jacobs explains, the existence of this assortment of buildings, including aged buildings, is critical to supporting prosperous and diverse commerce in neighbourhoods: "...hundreds of ordinary enterprises, necessary to the safety and public life of streets and neighborhoods, and appreciated for their convenience and personal quality, can make out successfully in old buildings, but are inexorably slain by the high overhead of new construction."⁷⁵ Along Grand Avenue, the high density and variety of buildings supported 'ordinary' local businesses—whose proud owners took care in their stores and developed loyal customer bases—resulting in a dynamic shopping district in the north section of Wooster Square.⁷⁶ As with other parts of the neighbourhood, Grand Avenue was easily accessible by foot and therefore contributed to the network of bustling sidewalks.

Grand Avenue is the story of immigrants and dreamers; it's the story of faith and family...It's the story of entrepreneurship, not just in business, but civic, cultural and spiritual entrepreneurship.⁷⁷
- Aaron Goode

Commerce on Grand Avenue included many establishments owned by Jewish families. In the early twentieth century, Jewish immigration to New Haven increased, and many immigrants settled in the Grand Avenue area.⁷⁸ However, the small Jewish community in Wooster Square

75 Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, 188.

76 "Walk New Haven: History of the Grand Avenue Neighborhood," The Ethnic Heritage Center, accessed January 29, 2023, <https://walknewhaven.org/grand-avenue-history>.

77 "Overview Walk NH Grand Ave Grand Opening AARON GOODE," The Ethnic Heritage Center, accessed February 10, 2023. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9vYX7ebvdLE>.

78 "Walk New Haven: Congregation Mogen David," The Ethnic Heritage Center accessed January 29, 2023, <https://walknewhaven.org/congregation-mogen-david>.

faced antisemitism at several of the factories and other employers in the neighbourhood, and therefore many new residents turned instead to entrepreneurship as a source of income.⁷⁹ Businesses selling household goods, including furniture, appliances, and textiles, became popular on Grand Avenue.⁸⁰ Kruger's Furniture and Appliance, one of the most prominent family businesses in the area, can be seen in Figure 5.19. Other Jewish-owned businesses included Unger's Flooring further west on Grand Avenue, and Miller's Clothes at the intersection of Franklin Street.⁸¹ One block north on Lyon Street sat the community synagogue, Congregation Mogen David, which was established in 1903.⁸²

The commerce on Grand Avenue was comprised of a variety of offerings, including clothing, accessories, gifts and food goods. The Terese Furniture Company, as seen at the far-right of Figure 5.19, was a 4-story store offering full size furniture sets, appliances, and gifts.⁸³ This business was unusual for the time as it was one of the few woman-owned and run (along with Lillian's Paradise a few blocks away).⁸⁴ Continuing east along Grand Avenue, one would find Perlmutter's Department Store, an establishment founded by a Ukrainian-Jewish immigrant couple; the store offered a diverse range of merchandise, including men's and women's clothing, baby clothing, women's hats and wedding dresses.⁸⁵ To the west, at the intersection of Grand Avenue and Olive Street, lied the historic DelMonico's Hatter, a fixture in the area for decades.⁸⁶

79 Emily Hays, "Tour Tells of Grand Transformations," *New Haven Independent*, April 12, 2021, https://www.newhavenindependent.org/article/grand_avenue_walking_tour.

80 "Walk New Haven: History of the Grand Avenue Neighborhood."

81 "Walk New Haven: History of the Grand Avenue Neighborhood."

82 "Walk New Haven: Congregation Mogen David."

83 "Site 9 Terese Furniture Company LAURA PARISI," *The Ethnic Heritage Center*, accessed January 29, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nGIGFTu-pzU>.

84 "Site 9 Terese Furniture Company."

85 "Walk New Haven: Perelmutter's Department Store," *The Ethnic Heritage Center*, accessed February 1, 2023, <https://walknewhaven.org/perelmutters-department-store>.

86 "About DelMonico Hatter," *DelMonico Hatter*, accessed February 1, 2023, <https://www.delmonicohatter.com/aboutus.htm>.

My grandfather, my grandfather's brother, my uncles, everybody would all pitch in [at the store]. Nobody would say anything—that's what you had to do, and you did it. It was a fun thing.⁸⁷

- Harold Miller

Beyond commerce, the Grand Avenue area hosted spaces for gathering and entertainment. The Apollo, and later the Dreamland Theatre, acted as arts hubs where live theatre and musical performances were made easy accessible to working class patrons.⁸⁸ For youth, an establishment called the Boys Club of New Haven moved to its location off of Grand Avenue in 1915. The Boys Club "...was the only recreational facility in the neighborhood, a welcoming place where boys could play sports as well as games like ping pong, checkers, and table hockey."⁸⁹ The Club also contained sporting facilities like a basketball court and swimming pool.⁹⁰ For local children, the Club played a pivotal role in their upbringing:

I made a lot of friends—a ton of them. It was a good place to be, brought us up and stayed out of trouble.⁹¹

I learned to swim there, we had a woodworking shop...We used to get sneakers there, high ankles. We'd wear them out and then bring them back—it didn't cost us anything.⁹²

87 Interview with Harold Miller, published January 31, 2022; "History of former Miller's Clothes, 751 Grand Avenue," The Ethnic Heritage Center, accessed February 11, 2023. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ye4daCAvdfQ>.

88 "Walk New Haven: San Carlino Theater," The Ethnic Heritage Center, accessed February 10, 2023, <https://walknewhaven.org/san-carlino-theater>.

89 "Walk New Haven: The Boys Club," The Ethnic Heritage Center, accessed February 10, 2023, <https://walknewhaven.org/the-boys-club>.

90 "Walk New Haven: The Boys Club."

91 "Site 13 Walk NH Grand Ave Grand Opening JOHN RAGOZZINO BOYS CLUB," The Ethnic Heritage Center, accessed February 10, 2023. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OBEUwmMjM0U>.

92 "Site 13 Walk NH."

What was Lost, and What Remains



Fig. 5.19 Detailed view, Grand Avenue Before Renewal.



Grand Avenue After Renewal

The urban renewal plans for Wooster Square called for a combination of rehabilitation and demolition in the Grand Avenue area, and centered primarily around the creation of new automobile-focused spaces. Jane Jacobs states that vehicular infrastructure elements are “...powerful and insistent instruments of city destruction.”⁹³ This was certainly the case along Grand Avenue; many of the older structures along the retail strip were demolished and replaced with new parking lots, drastically reducing the number of businesses present (Figure 5.20). Beyond parking, the construction of the I-91 highway erased even more businesses and homes in this area. While the intent of the highway and new parking spaces might have been to reduce automobile presence in Wooster Square, the renewal of Grand Avenue had an opposite effect. Jacobs notes that “...the more space that is provided cars in cities, the greater becomes the need for use of cars, and hence for still more space for them.”⁹⁴ Today, Grand Avenue acts as a major vehicular thoroughfare through the city of New Haven, connecting nearby Fair Haven to the downtown.

We were notified by letter, ‘eminent domain’ that the state was coming through and that we had to move out. In our building my mother had her market, on the other side my husband his dry cleaning plant. He got knocked right out of business.⁹⁵ - Theresa Argento

The intentional reduction of commerce activity along Grand Avenue has erased the vibrant, pedestrian-friendly and welcoming shopping district of the past. Many of the hallmark family businesses of Grand Avenue are no longer present; these include Kruger’s Furniture and Appliance, Miller’s Clothes, Therese Furniture Company, and Perlmutter’s Department Store. Through demolition of select buildings along the Avenue, the building density and diversity was drastically reduced. As a result, the associated pedestrian activity and sense of safety offered by the area has evaporated. Upon my own site visit to Grand Avenue in June 2022, I immediately sensed this desolation; the lack of other pedestrians, paired with the presence of fast-moving automobile lanes, marked a stark shift in my perceived sense of safety in comparison to adjoining streets.

93 Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, 338.

94 Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, 351.

95 Interview with Theresa Argento, May 23, 1999.; Riccio, *The Italian American Experience*, 415.

Beyond the loss of density, many of Grand Avenue's remaining buildings have declined into a state of neglect. While these older buildings may still occupy the Avenue, as Jacobs explains, the destructive choices during renewal and lack of intentional care in subsequent decades have made a liability of one of Grand Avenue's previous assets:

The only harm of aged buildings to a city district or street is the harm that eventually comes of nothing but old age—the harm that lies in everything being old and everything becoming worn out. But a city area in such a situation is not a failure because of being all old. It is the other way around. The area is all old because it is a failure.⁹⁶

During my site visit, I observed a distinct contrast between Grand Avenue and Wooster Street, two of Wooster Square's historic commercial arteries. While it was clear that Wooster Street was afforded a high level of maintenance and attention as the (new-found) tourist destination of Little Italy, no such sign of municipal investment was obvious on Grand Avenue. Many of the remaining buildings were seemingly vacant; windows and doors were boarded with plywood, and graffiti abounded (as illustrated in Figure 5.20). With such unequal treatment of two previously-treasured areas of Wooster Square, it is no surprise that residents and visitors alike have abandoned Grand Avenue in favour of Wooster Street.

While Grand Avenue has undoubtedly deteriorated since renewal, there are some successful elements that have persisted. For example, although the Boys Club moved out of its location near Grand Avenue after renewal, a similar non-profit organization took over the building—Leadership, Education, & Athletics in Partnership (LEAP) provides mentorship and education to children in New Haven, particularly to those of colour.⁹⁷ Some businesses, such as Unger's Flooring, are still operating in their original location. Lucibello's Italian Pastry Shop, a longstanding bakery in Wooster Square, was relocated to Grand Avenue due to urban renewal but has managed to survive thanks to its dedicated customer base.⁹⁸

96 Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, 188.

97 "About Us," Leadership, Education & Athletics in Partnership, accessed February 1, 2023, <https://www.leapforkids.org/about-us>.

98 "Walk New Haven: Lucibello's Pastry Shop." The Ethnic Heritage Center, accessed February 1, 2023, <https://walknewhaven.org/lucibellos-pastry-shop-1>.



Fig. 5.20 Detailed view, Grand Avenue After Renewal.



Location 5

WOOSTER SQUARE PARK

The final location on the graphic tour of Wooster Square is Wooster Square Park. Figure 5.21's representation of the park before renewal demonstrates its role as a gathering place for the community, where families and children from surrounding streets could socialize and play. The park also served as a venue for celebrating the Italian heritage of the neighbourhood, particularly through music. The diversity of functions around the park provided a constant variety of users, adding vitality to the neighbourhood. Figure 5.22 illustrates Wooster Square Park today, which remains a gathering place for residents. Surrounding the park, renewal plans called for the construction of new townhouses and a school with an adjoining community centre. Following renewal, the park and buildings in its vicinity were added to the National Register of Historic Places.

Urban Renewal as Violence

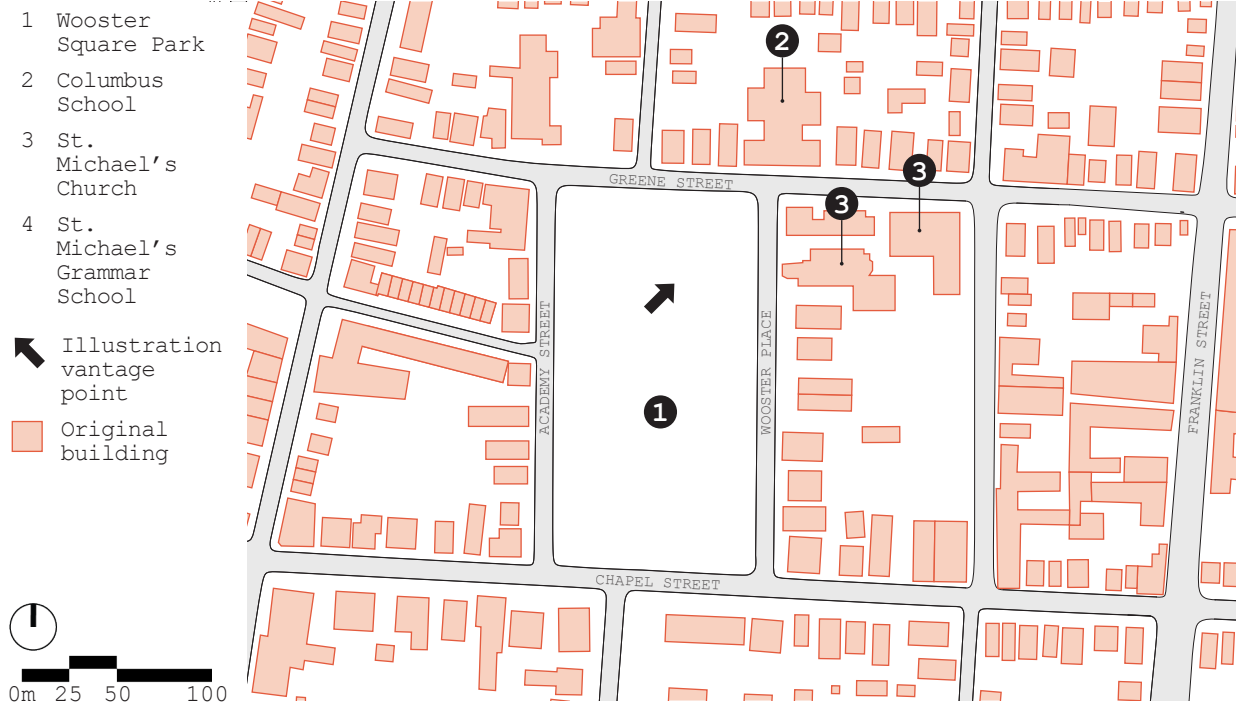


Fig. 5.21 Wooster Square Park Before Renewal key map and perspective drawing.

What was Lost, and What Remains

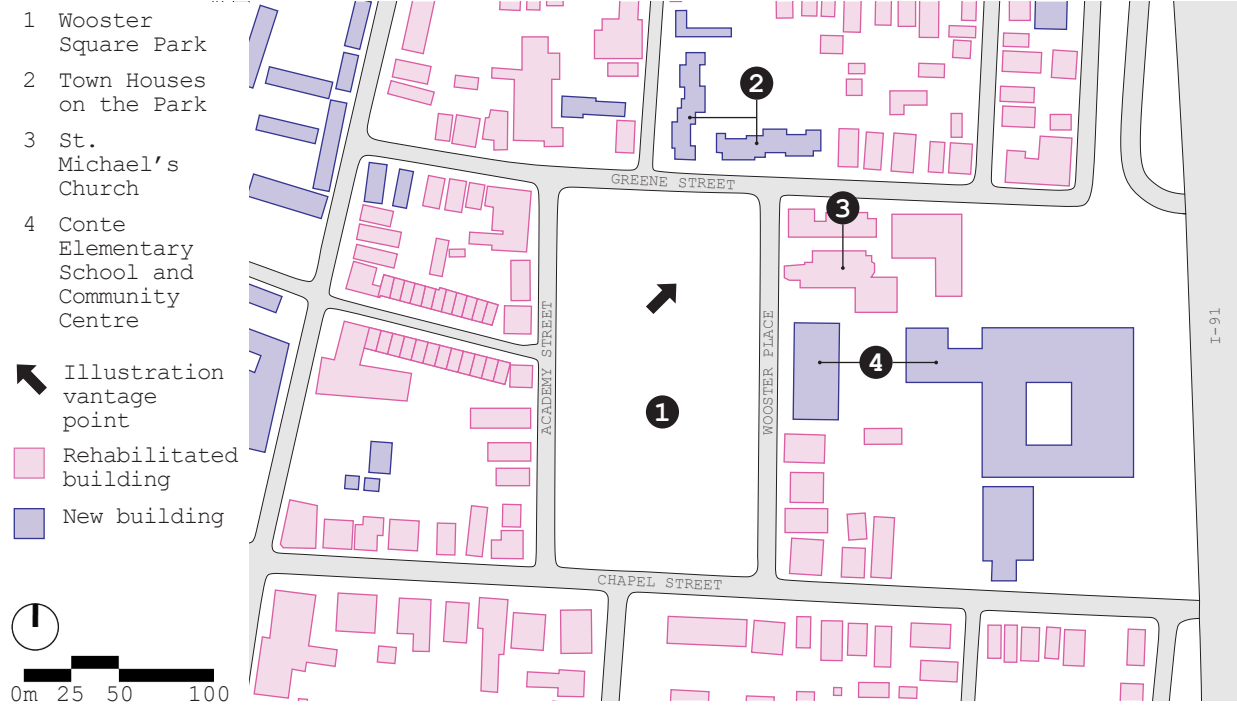


Fig. 5.22 *Wooster Square Park After Renewal* key map and perspective drawing.

Wooster Square Park Before Renewal

Wooster Square Park before renewal acted as the centre of the neighbourhood, geographically and symbolically. Illustrated in Figure 5.23 is the northeastern corner of the park. Here, families from the surrounding streets would gather and children would play with other neighbourhood friends. Socialization was a critical component of life in Wooster Square—residents freely shared news of births, deaths, and other life events within the community.⁹⁹ The park, therefore, was an ideal setting for social interactions, as it offered residents an attractive outdoor extension of indoor private space. Beyond socialization, the park was also a venue to celebrate the prominent Italian heritage in Wooster Square; Italian music in particular was commonplace in the neighbourhood, and the park acted as a venue for live music performance.^{100,101} The high density of residents in surrounding Wooster Square meant that the number of users in the park at any given time would be high. The liveliness of Wooster Square Park and the community fostered within it is evident through the testimony of its residents:

And believe it or not there was an Italian band playing Italian songs and a couple of operatic singers when we came through the park.¹⁰²

...when they were growing up, you had to wait your turn to play in the park because all the neighbourhood kids would come here.¹⁰³

We didn't have an awful lot. But we thought we had everything because of the friendships and the strong family ties and the comfort of living in a neighborhood where you know

99 Riccio, *The Italian American Experience*, 362.

100 Interview of Theresa Argento, 9 March 2004, Oral Histories Documenting New Haven, Connecticut.

101 "Wooster Square: A Conversation with Beverly Carbonella," New Haven Museum, accessed January 27, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WjfhRSd4PQQ>.

102 Interview with Beverly Carbonella, published September 30, 2017; "Wooster Square: A Conversation with Beverly Carbonella."

103 Interview with Pete Malfese, published December 14, 2009; Alice Walton, "Wooster Square, Wooster Life: Chapter 1," accessed January 27, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r2nr3xJ7WG0>.

everybody and you share the same values and, in our case, the same language and customs that makes you feel like you all belong together. A neighborhood is a place where everyone should feel that they belong.¹⁰⁴

Wooster Square Park's success could be largely attributed to the diverse urban fabric that surrounded it. As Jane Jacobs explains, parks themselves do not inherently add vitality to a neighbourhood—instead, they “... help to knit together diverse surrounding functions by giving them a pleasant joint facility; in the process they add something back to their surroundings.”¹⁰⁵ The diversity of uses near Wooster Square Park provided a constant variety of users, and at differing times of the day and week. For example, St. Michael Church (seen furthest right in the background of Figure 5.23), provided ample traffic to the park around weekly mass times, as well as holiday services and weddings. Opposite the church (at the centre of Figure 5.23) sat Columbus School, generating daily streams of neighbourhood children who could pass through the park in the mornings and afternoons. Another school, St. Michael's Grammar School, sat directly behind the church and added even more children to the park's daily visitors. Finally, the historic homes that surrounded the park, as well as the homes situated on adjoining streets, established a strong community of locals who could occupy the park on weekends.

104 Statement from Frank Carrano; Stannard, “Documentary.”

105 Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, 101.



*Fig. 5.23 Detailed view,
Wooster Square Park
Before Renewal.*



Wooster Square Park After Renewal

The renewed Wooster Square Park still acts as a pleasant gathering place for residents of the neighbourhood, as the park itself was left intact in renewal plans (Figure 5.24). What may identify the present-day version of the park from its predecessor, however, is the sheer amount of visitors who frequent it. Because of the decision to create an Industrial Park on the eastern side of the neighbourhood, Wooster Square’s population was effectively reduced in half. Beyond this, the density of residential spaces on the western side of the neighbourhood was also reduced. Therefore, there are simply less residents nearby who may use Wooster Square Park on a regular basis.¹⁰⁶ This was evident to me when I visited Wooster Square in June 2022; upon approaching the park, I realized that I could not see another single user of the space. In this deserted state, the park did not seem like a welcoming or safe place—one I might have encountered before renewal.

Two modern projects were constructed in this area of Wooster Square. Firstly, Columbus School was demolished to make way for a series of new townhouses overlooking the park (as seen in the left background of Figure 5.24). Slightly east of the park, the new Harry A. Conte Elementary School and Community Center, designed by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, was constructed after the demolition of existing buildings on its site. St. Michael Grammar School was closed and children from both schools, and others replaced by the Industrial Park, were enrolled at Conte School.¹⁰⁷

The insertion of Conte School into the renewal plans of Wooster Square is indicative of the misguided nature of designers in the urban renewal era. In municipal records, the new school and community centre was described as “...a demonstration of [the City’s] faith in the neighborhood.”¹⁰⁸ As Jane Jacobs explains, in the postwar era it was “...fashionable to suppose that certain touchstones of the good life will create good neighborhoods—schools, parks, clean housing and the like.”¹⁰⁹ In actuality, the pursuit of this oversimplified understanding of what made a successful neighbourhood led to the creation of many new urban issues

106 Walton, “Wooster Square.”

107 Hommann, *Wooster Square Design*, 29.

108 “Summary of New Haven Development Program,” 29 November 1956, p. 5, Edward J. Logue Papers.

109 Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, 112–113.

in Wooster Square, that have been illustrated throughout this chapter: the loss of diversity in uses; the reduction in concentration of residents, services and businesses within walking distance; an increased distance to places of employment; the reduction in safety, especially for pedestrians and children; an increased presence of automobiles; and perhaps worst of all, the loss of a vibrant and robust immigrant and working class community.

...I was absolutely incensed to see the city begin to fall to pieces under the wrecker's ball. And that's precisely what was happening there with these grandiose, utopian schemes, which of course never really took effect.¹¹⁰ - Ralph Marcarelli

Wooster Square Park and the surrounding urban fabric are now protected by a historic designation. In 1970, the area was named a local historic district, and a year later it was added to the National Register of Historic Places.¹¹¹ Chosen in part because it "...demonstrated to the nation's city planner a new potential for the rehabilitation of deteriorated neighborhoods," the Wooster Square Historic District marks the region of the neighbourhood deemed worthy of preservation.¹¹² This National Register designation imposes restrictions on property modifications that are carried out as part of a project receiving federal funding.¹¹³ As such, current residents of the neighbourhood are now offered a protection not afforded to those from the postwar period—the protection from any future attempts by the City of New Haven to bring demolition and displacement to Wooster Square.

110 Interview with Ralph Marcarelli, May 6, 1998; Riccio, *The Italian American Experience*, 409.

111 "Wooster Square," New Haven Preservation Trust, accessed February 10, 2023. <http://nhpt.org/wooster-square>.

112 New Haven Preservation Trust, "Wooster Square."

113 "National Register of Historic Places FAQs," National Park Service, accessed February 10, 2023, <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalregister/faqs.htm>.



*Fig. 5.24 Detailed view,
Wooster Square Park
After Renewal.*



06

WHO WAS LOST, AND
WHO REMAINS

The Erasure of a Community

A Strategy of Misinformation

In order for Mayor Lee and his administration to achieve their goal of a visionary Model City, a favourable public perception of urban renewal was required. However, the prospect of renewal, entailing the seizure of property through eminent domain and the forced relocation of families, was met with resistance by many residents of New Haven's planned renewal neighbourhoods.¹ Wooster Square was a unique case in the city's renewal program in that the neighbourhood had some structures seen to be of inherent value and worthy of saving. Therefore, the renewal plans were to partially comprise of building rehabilitation—this was not the case anywhere else in the city.² In order to communicate the renewal of Wooster Square in the most favourable light, the municipality exploited this unique component of the renewal plan; the project was often simply described as 'rehabilitation' or 'preservation', neglecting to adequately acknowledge the project's equal amount of full-scale demolition.

In reviewing municipal records of the time, it is clear that Lee and his staff, skilled at shaping public messaging to achieve a desired result, consistently minimized demolition in Wooster Square as a strategy for gaining widespread support of the project:

A Program of this type is called renewal because the basic neighborhood unit is left unchanged—just a few of the bad spots are cut out.³

More [homes in Wooster Square] are simply in need of general clean up action... There are, of course, examples of overcrowding and slums. However, they do not constitute a majority or justify wholesale redevelopment.⁴

Wooster Square is still a pleasant place to live...but there are tiny pockets of blight beginning to develop in scattered spots throughout the neighborhood—and blight spreads very rapidly. In fact, it can destroy a neighborhood in a matter of months. This is what you want to prevent and there is a way

1 Riccio, *The Italian American Experience*, 406.

2 Lee and Adams, 1966, p. 18, New Haven Redevelopment Agency Records.

3 "Wooster Square Neighborhood," 1955, p. 4, Edward J. Logue Papers.

4 "Wooster Square Area," 1955, p. 2, Edward J. Logue Papers.

to do it—to preserve Wooster Square as a residential area.⁵

Contrary to this messaging, at the conclusion of Wooster Square’s renewal a significant portion of its built fabric had been demolished (Figure 6.1). Not only was essentially the entirety of the eastern side of the neighbourhood opposite I-91 demolished, but many individual buildings within the fabric of the western side were also removed to reduce density and to make way for select modern buildings and for parking.

Another component of fostering support for renewal efforts involved conducting public outreach. It was necessary for the municipality to consult with affected communities to create the perception that urban renewal was not only sensitive to the opinions of locals, but also that when renewal was executed, those opinions had been incorporated into the project. For the Wooster Square project, a “community relations specialist” was hired by the Planning Department to coordinate outreach in the community. According to Project Director Mary Hommann, the specialist was to “...develop a plan which could be welcomed by the neighborhood...”—this would be facilitated through the creation of a 35-person committee, comprised of Wooster Square residents, who would work directly with the specialist.⁶ However, the selection of these 35 individuals was questionable; Hommann stated that “[n]o special effort was made to make [the committee] broadly representative...”⁷ Conveniently, the committee found no issue with renewal in Wooster Square and presented findings in favour of its execution in the neighbourhood.⁸

Displacement of Residents

Due to the significant amount of demolition that took place in Wooster Square, a large number of families and businesses were displaced from the neighbourhood through the power of eminent domain. By 1968, over 2500 households would move out of Wooster Square—more than double of any other urban renewal area in the city (Figure 6.2).

5 “Draft of Mayor’s Talk,” 11 May 1955, p.1, box 37, folder 120, MS 959, Edward J. Logue Papers, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

6 Hommann, *Wooster Square Design*, 21-24.

7 Hommann, *Wooster Square Design*, 21-24.

8 “Wooster Square Neighborhood,” 1955, p. 4, Edward J. Logue Papers.

In that same time period, over 400 businesses were forcibly closed in the neighbourhood. Apart from the Church Street project, where the urban fabric was comprised primarily of commercial ventures, Wooster Square had the highest business displacement in the city (Figure 6.3). These figures are staggering, particularly when considering the City's narrative that Wooster Square required comparatively minimal attention to become a desirable neighbourhood. However, Mary Hommann would justify the displacement of residents in her official report on the renewal of Wooster Square, stating that "[e]ven though over 1800 families had to relocate [as of 1965], their homes had been unlivable slums, and there never was any question of there being enough good homes at the right price elsewhere in New Haven..."⁹

Financial Compensation

The process of eminent domain did not adequately compensate displaced residents of Wooster Square. Jane Jacobs explains that compensation for the seizure of a business property only accounted for the property itself, not for the value of the property *and* the business: "[a]lthough [a business owner's] entire property and his full investment is taken from him, he receives substantially nothing."¹⁰ As explored in the previous chapter, families in Wooster Square were often entrepreneurs—because of the compensation loophole, many businesses were forced to close, or more aged owners decided to retire upon receiving notice of the insufficient compensation they were to receive.¹¹ The true financial and emotional adversity suffered by affected residents at the hands of the City is evident when they recall the process of eminent domain:

I think the original offer was like ten thousand...I'll never forget when we went to look for another house and the guy wanted fourteen thousand five hundred. We had to pick my mother up off the floor. She didn't think there was that much money in the world. She said, "How am I going to buy this? How can I do this?"¹²

9 Hommann, *Wooster Square Design*, 29.

10 Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, 312.

11 "Site 9 Terese Furniture Company."

12 Interview with Frank DePonte, November 21, 1999; Riccio, *The Italian American Experience*, 419.



Fig. 6.1 Map of buildings demolished as part of the Wooster Square renewal project.

They gave you eminent domain and that was it, you had no choice. They gave whatever they thought your property was worth. Nothing extra that “We’re going to pay you. We’re going to give you a few more dollars for the aggravation and all the stress that we’re putting you through.” No. No, they didn’t do that. Everybody complained...they still had mortgages on the homes that they built that they had here. It was a problem. It was a problem.¹³

The state [in the late ‘50s] gave only the Depression price... They said, ‘Take this or go to court.’...They stole that.¹⁴

Relocation Procedures

Although the City created a Family Relocation Office with the mandate of aiding in the relocation of displaced residents, no legitimate plan materialized to execute this task. The first director of the Office, who resigned in 1956, stated that his “job [was] impossible.”¹⁵ His successor found equal difficulty in the role, claiming that the relocation of vast numbers of families was “...chaotic and often improvisational... because of poor planning strategies or clear guidelines from city or federal government.”¹⁶ In municipal documents produced for public consumption, the City claimed to understand the nuance and sensitivity of relocating households: “[h]uman feelings, motivations, aspirations and problems come into the foreground when people are moved from one area to another.” In contrast, however, the recollections of Wooster Square residents reveal a different picture altogether—a process devoid of any empathy or kindness:

Yes, they were brutal. The state people were very, very—they had no compassion. Maybe they had a deadline, but I know that our property stayed for a couple of years before it was really demolished, they demolished the area. But they were just, even they would harp on, “You have to get out! You

13 Interview of Theresa Argento, 9 March 2004, Oral Histories Documenting New Haven, Connecticut.

14 Interview with Eugene and Frances Calzetta, October 10, 1998; Riccio, *The Italian American Experience*, 406.

15 Rae, *City*, 338.

16 Riccio, *The Italian American Experience*, 405.

Who was Lost, and Who Remains

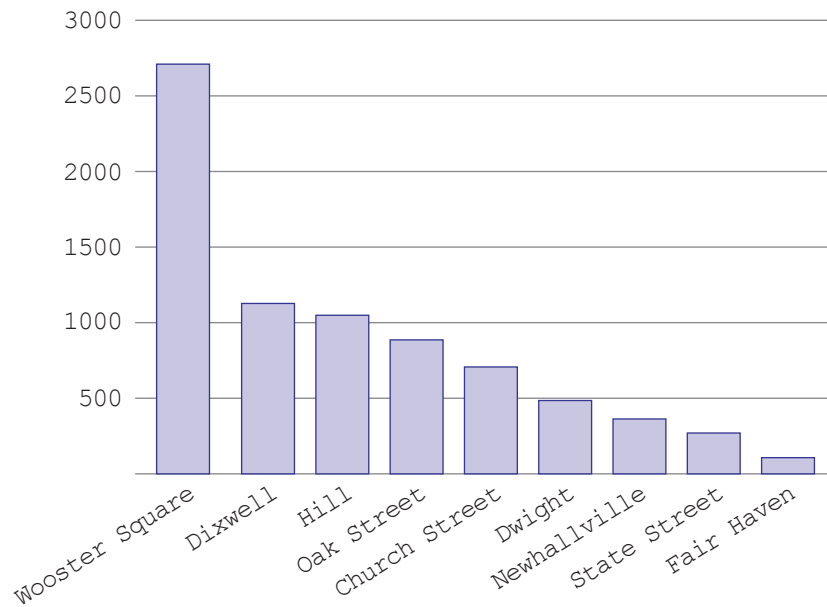


Fig. 6.2 Number of households displaced per neighbourhood, 1954 to 1968.

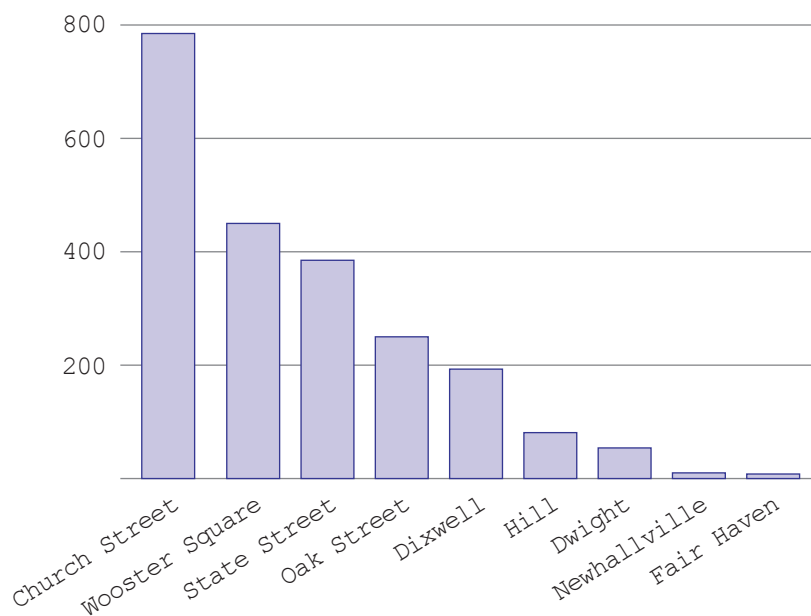


Fig. 6.3 Number of businesses displaced per neighbourhood.

have to get out! I'm giving you this. I'm going to give you an extension, but you have to get out."¹⁷

They condemned them and took it right away. They gave you a few days to move out. That's how fast it was.¹⁸

Without adequate help from the City, displaced residents were left to find new housing on their own. One advantage that those leaving Wooster Square had over many of the other renewal neighbourhoods was that they almost all owned the properties being seized—this meant that unlike those who rented, the families directly received the financial compensation provided by the City (even if it was meagre). Often faced with difficulty finding affordable alternatives in New Haven, many of the displaced families eventually moved to the city's suburbs, such as East Haven, Hamden, Woodbridge, Branford, and Orange.^{19,20,21}

Public Narrative

Although the relocation of residents was privately understood as a failure, the City again made use of public messaging to diminish the negative impact of displacement on affected communities. In their 1959 *Annual Report and Development Guide*, claims by the Citizens Action Commission directly contradict the lived experiences of Wooster Square residents who were forced to find new housing and relocate or close their businesses:

Very few displaced firms have left the City or gone out of business. A surprisingly large number of companies have found business much better in their new quarters than before relocation.²²

17 Interview of Theresa Argento, 9 March 2004, Oral Histories Documenting New Haven, Connecticut.

18 Interview with Pat Barone, May 5, 1999; Riccio, *The Italian American Experience*, 422.

19 Interview of Theresa Argento, 9 March 2004, Oral Histories Documenting New Haven, Connecticut.

20 Interview with John and Mary Nappi, September 15, 1999; Riccio, *The Italian American Experience*, 366-367.

21 Interview with Ralph Marcarelli, May 6, 1998; Riccio, *The Italian American Experience*, 409.

22 *New Haven CAC Annual Report*, 1959, p. 48, Edward J. Logue Papers.

The Redevelopment Agency and CAC have established a healthy climate in the City for family relocation. Citizens have been prepared for a change. A carefully scheduled timetable insures relocation action to be carried out at a reasonable pace and with minimum disruption to the individuals involved.²³

The inability of the Lee administration to publicize the shortcomings of urban renewal is not surprising—the City presented a united front in a sincere effort to revitalize New Haven. However, this disregard for the foreseeable logistical challenges of mass relocation, combined with a lack of empathy in enforcing eminent domain, inflicted an inexcusable financial and emotional burden upon Wooster Square residents who were suddenly forced to uproot their lives.

Personal Impact of Displacement

Understandably, displaced residents of Wooster Square were left emotionally shattered by the process of eminent domain. Families were forced to leave a neighbourhood that many had lived in for years, abandoning a life they would have never willingly left. Adding even more to the trauma of displacement, these residents were forced to then witness bulldozers reducing their cherished homes, businesses and workplaces to rubble. Their once-vibrant neighbourhood was replaced by barren or industrial land, offering no trace of the lively community that once inhabited those same streets. Testimony from residents who suffered through the process of eminent domain reveals the emotional impact that renewal had on themselves and their families:

I was perfectly happy. I went downstairs to help my husband. I went to help my mother. My children went to St. Michael's School. My church is right here. Why would I want to move? Why would I want to move?²⁴

I felt really sick at the time. I didn't know why they were doing that. Why would they do that?...For a while I never felt the same.²⁵

²³ *New Haven CAC Annual Report*, 1959, p. 46, Edward J. Logue Papers.

²⁴ Interview of Theresa Argento, 9 March 2004, Oral Histories Documenting New Haven, Connecticut.

²⁵ Statement by Alphonse Proto; "Wallace St. New Haven, CT."

It was devastating. It was very hard. We felt like something was taken out of us—something wonderful.²⁶

All of a sudden a group of people were lost—I mean really lost. You walked around the streets and you remembered what was here and there—but it wasn't here.²⁷

After settling in new areas, many former Wooster Square residents failed to recover from the emotional trauma of displacement. For those living in New Haven's suburbs, daily life changed drastically; no longer situated in a walkable neighbourhood, completing everyday tasks was especially difficult for those who did not drive.²⁸ Beyond the forced forfeiture of conveniences that a dense and diverse Wooster Square had offered, former residents struggled with the loss of the equally rich social fabric of their previous neighbourhood. Life in the suburbs was devoid of a lively community in which neighbours, friends and family members played a primary role in daily life—a community in which meaningful connections were easily made. The sudden disappearance of this environment "... meant the loss of identity, of culture, of lifestyle, and of self."²⁹ According to former residents, this had a fundamental impact on themselves and their families:

It killed them, you know why? They used to walk to church, walk down the avenue, go shopping, right? Now they moved over to Charter Oak Avenue...They didn't know anyone there. They couldn't go anywhere on their own if their sons didn't come and pick them up. It was a sad thing. It was a waste. They were happy.³⁰

My mother was so despondent that she cried every day...She was just unhappy. She was tired of being here. She was so used to seeing people.³¹

26 Interview with John Raggozino, 2019; "Overview of the Cultural History of Grand Avenue."

27 Statement by Alphonse Proto; "Wallace St. New Haven, CT."

28 Interview of Theresa Argento, 9 March 2004, Oral Histories Documenting New Haven, Connecticut.

29 Riccio, *The Italian American Experience*, 406.

30 Interview with Lou and Rose Marie Guarino, August 24, 2000; Riccio, *The Italian American Experience*, 424.

31 Interview with Theresa Argento, May 23, 1999; Riccio, *The Italian American Experience*, 415.

Everybody had to move into other neighbourhoods and had to start all over again, where you knew no one—no one from school, no one from the churches, and it became difficult. I think what we're saying is we loved what we had, we really [did].³²

By using eminent domain to pursue urban renewal, the City of New Haven stripped the dignity away from an important group within their own constituency. This group, consisting of hard-working immigrants, minorities and middle class residents, made vital contributions to the city's culture and economy—in return, the City labelled their communities as slums, tore down their homes and businesses, and forced them to leave New Haven. Residents of Wooster Square, many of whom had travelled across the world from Italy in search of a better life, worked hard to create a welcoming, tight-knit and productive neighbourhood in the city. This contribution was entirely disparaged in the urban renewal era when Wooster Square was violently ripped in half. This lack of respect and value attributed to the neighbourhood's immigrant community is clear from the experience of former residents:

It was like taking your dignity away from you. We lost our dignity; they didn't respect us at all. You're killing them; you're chasing them out of their homes. That's the bottom line, chasing them out of their homes.³³

And that was their dream. All their lives, they wanted to buy a house. That was their American dream. You come to America, you get a job, you own your own house and have a garden in back, a vegetable garden and all that and that was their dream. They finally got it, you know...And then wham! The state came along and said they were going [to] take their property in 'eminent domain.'³⁴

Even worse still, the City further diminished the impact of renewal on residents of Wooster Square by claiming these same residents were dissatisfied with their existing neighbourhood and welcoming of urban renewal. Municipal records reveal that City officials were fast to assume

³² Statement by Alphonse Proto; "Wallace St. New Haven, CT."

³³ Interview with Theresa Argento, May 23, 1999; Riccio, *The Italian American Experience*, 417.

³⁴ Interview with Lou and Rose Marie Guarino, August 24, 2000; Riccio, *The Italian American Experience*, 423-424.

residents' negative perception of the state of Wooster Square, and attribute this apathy to the decline of the neighbourhood:

...[residents] considered the blighting situation to be hopeless.³⁵

In recent years the Wooster Square area has been losing population—but those who leave do so regretfully and only because they believe that nothing can be done to prevent the complete disintegration of the neighborhood.³⁶

In somewhat of a contrast, however, municipal officials also claimed that residents of Wooster Square felt pride towards their neighbourhood, and that this was the motivation behind their endorsement of renewal:

The civic pride of past residents created Wooster Square and the civic pride of today's residents has led them to undertake the Urban Renewal Program to preserve the neighborhood... the enthusiasm of the people makes the success of the program a certainty.³⁷

It is clear that the City of New Haven made false or misleading statements throughout the urban renewal process, in order to ensure the execution of renewal in Wooster Square. Unfortunately, in doing so the municipality absolved itself of the negative repercussions of the program, and opted to avoid taking accountability for the inherent violence of the renewal process.

Community Impact of Displacement

After the renewal of Wooster Square was complete, the Italian spirit of the neighbourhood was permanently minimized. This could be directly attributed to the central placement of the I-91 highway and the creation of the Industrial Park, which forced the displacement of effectively half of the existing population out of the neighbourhood. This would have a fundamental impact on the remaining Italian community of Wooster Square: speciality grocers, butchers and other businesses offering

35 Hommann, *Wooster Square Design*, 17.

36 "Wooster Square Neighborhood," 1955, p. 3, Edward J. Logue Papers.

37 "Wooster Square Neighborhood," 1955, p. 5, Edward J. Logue Papers.

distinctly Italian merchandise would lose half of their customer base; St. Michael's Church, a home for Catholic Italians, would see a loss in parishioners; residents who were lucky enough to escape eminent domain themselves would experience the disintegration of their social network as lifelong friends and relatives reluctantly left the neighbourhood; children were uprooted from their familiar school settings and faced the sadness of losing friends with whom they used to play in the street.

Ethnic Politics

For many of its members, the fragmentation of the Italian community equated to the deliberate oppression of not only their physical presence, however, but also their collective voice in the political sphere. Former residents of Wooster Square assert a deep conviction that their neighbourhood was targeted by Mayor Lee on ethnic grounds, in an effort to solidify his own political security:

[The Italian-Republican population of Wooster Square] had rebelled against many years of the Irish Democratic rule of the town and the subsequent persecution of the Italians... Was it coincidental that you had the conjunction of I-95 and I-91 right in this ward wiping everything out? We don't think it was coincidental under any circumstances. I say it was a mini-Kosovo, a form of ethnic cleansing. They'll deny it but I'll assert it.³⁸

You know, Dick Lee at the time was running for mayor and the Italian people were very upset with him, they said he did it deliberately, to get rid of the Italian vote... They still curse him up and down.³⁹

It was done on purpose—he destroyed an Italian neighborhood here in New Haven—an unforgettable thing—because he couldn't defeat [his Italian-Republican opponent]...⁴⁰

38 Interview with Emiddio Cavaliere and Ralph Marcarelli, May 6, 1998; Riccio, *The Italian American Experience*, 411.

39 Interview with Luisa DeLauro, August 9, 1998; Riccio, *The Italian American Experience*, 423.

40 Interview with Andrea Colavolpe, June 14, 1999; Riccio, *The Italian American Experience*, 412.

From the standpoint of the Italians it had the effect—some would say I would be one of them—that it had the deliberate effect of driving many Italians out of the city. There's no proof; no one is going to say it. Lee was a megalomaniac.⁴¹

Although these testimonies cannot be concretely corroborated, there was undoubtedly a blur between ethnic and political lines in the city. New Haven municipal politics in the twentieth century was defined by what Douglas Rae describes in Chapter 9 of *City: Urbanism and its End* as an “Irish-Italian rivalry.” Historically, Irish Democratic leaders dominated the city’s political sphere; from 1917 until 1945, Irish mayors would serve New Haven for all but four years, including David Fitzgerald who served for eight years, and John Murphy who served for fourteen (Figure 6.4).⁴²

This Irish presence would be increasingly threatened by a growing Italian population who supported Italian Republican candidates. By the postwar period, Italian representation on the Board of Aldermen had grown equal to their Irish counterparts (Figure 6.5). When Richard Lee launched his first mayoral campaign in 1947, he faced the challenge of unseating William Celentano, who had become the first Italian-American to upset the longstanding Murphy and assume the highest municipal office. It would take two more terms, and two close losses to Celentano, before Lee would finally return the Mayor’s office to Irish Democratic control in 1953.⁴³

With this local political context in mind, it is understandable that Wooster Square’s Italian community felt targeted by Lee’s urban renewal scheme. Wooster Square residents, who voted in the 10th Ward, had given Celentano a sizeable victory against Murphy in 1945; it would have taken a major upheaval to upend Republican dominance in the ward.⁴⁴ As Lee’s future political aspirations likely hinged on a successful run as Mayor, the rise of the Italian vote was a legitimate threat to his career. Residents of Wooster Square were aware of this dynamic at the time of renewal:

Richard Lee seized on—I think always to aggrandize himself because he had huge draconian ambitions to go way beyond

41 Interview with Ralph Marcarelli, May 6, 1998; Riccio, *The Italian American Experience*, 409.

42 Rae, *City*, 410.

43 Rae, *City*, 410.

44 Rae, *City*, 294.

Who was Lost, and Who Remains

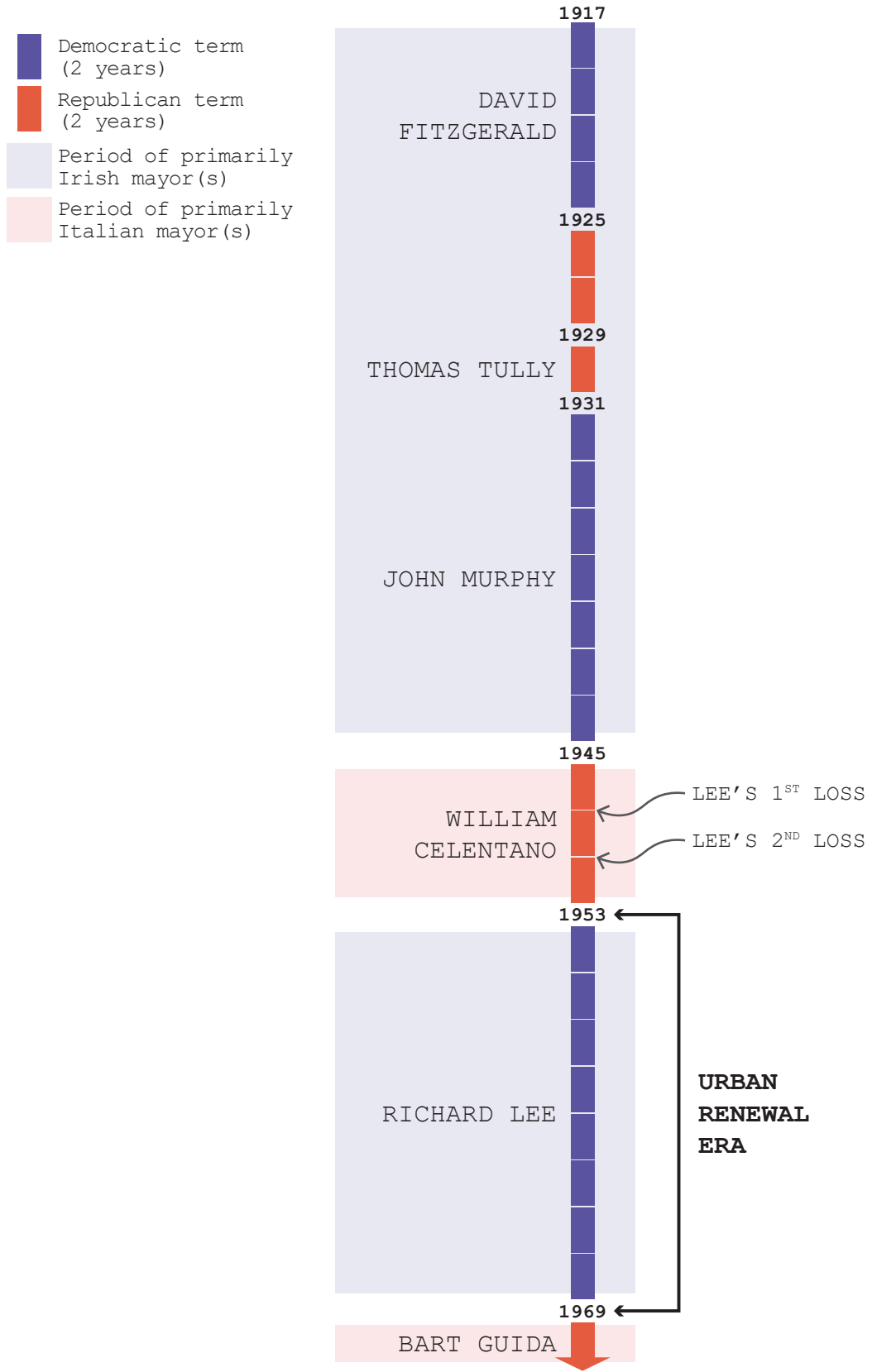


Fig. 6.4 Timeline of New Haven mayors.

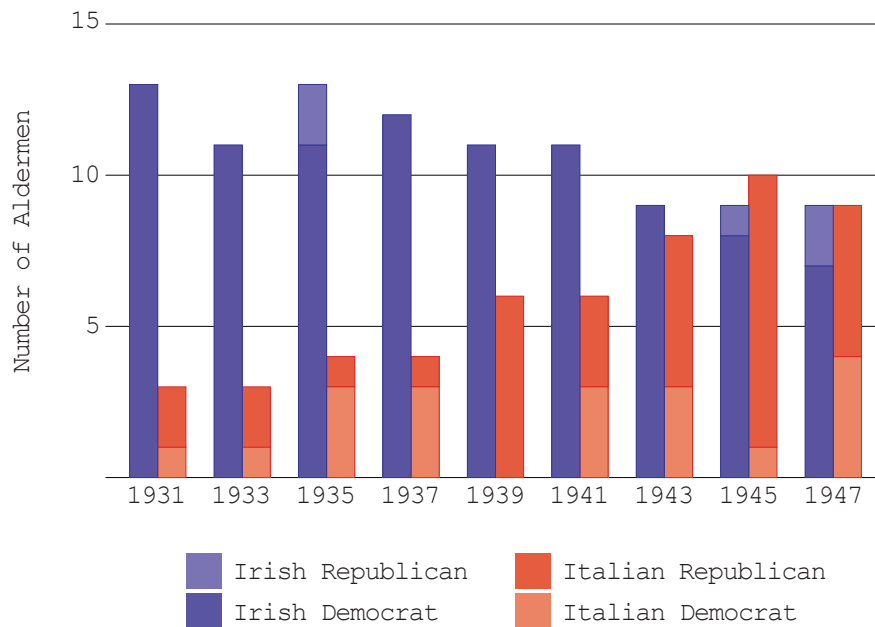


Fig. 6.5 *Ethnicity of the City of New Haven's Board of Aldermen.*

the mayoralty of the city. He might have had he not been as diabolically proud as he was—he might well have gotten to the U.S. Senate. He found something to launch himself into the national spotlight...⁴⁵

[Lee] was afraid to come down here because people would razz him. There was one guy on Saint John Street, he would get out the window and he'd say, "Get the hell out a this neighborhood, Dick Lee, you go to hell."⁴⁶

I think he was misguided to put it mildly, I think he was deliberately devious—he was doing that to further his own political career. And he did indeed get national publicity for

45 Interview with Ralph Marcarelli, May 6, 1998; Riccio, *The Italian American Experience*, 408.

46 Interview with Luisa DeLauro, August 9, 1998; Riccio, *The Italian American Experience*, 423.

the 'Model City.'⁴⁷

Today, the Italian roots of Wooster Square are celebrated by New Haven's municipal government; 'Little Italy' attracts tourists and economic stimulus for the city. However, for those who are familiar with the full scope of renewal that took place in the neighbourhood, the hypocrisy is blatant of a government who only half a century prior had attempted to erase this same cultural presence from the city.

47 Interview with Ralph Marcarelli, May 6, 1998; Riccio, *The Italian American Experience*, 409.

07

CONCLUSION

New Haven After Renewal

Urban renewal in New Haven led to the demolition of a significant portion of the postwar city. By the end of the era, "...140 acres of land were totally cleared, thousands of units of housing for low-income families were demolished. Hundreds of small businesses and dozens of dense, varied streets disappeared..."¹ Beyond demolition, a number of new modern buildings were constructed, and new highways were erected to connect New Haven to the growing Interstate network.

However, despite Mayor Lee's best efforts and an aggressive pursuit of renewal, the Model City failed to fully materialize. Land cleared during the renewal era was left indefinitely vacant (Figure 7.1); the Oak Street Connector was only partially completed, leading to it being dubbed the 'highway to nowhere'; urban renewal-era business ventures that were originally championed in the downtown, such as a new shopping mall and department store, failed and were closed; suburbs continued to boom, and economic activity in the city continued to dwindle.

The failure of urban renewal in New Haven demonstrates two fundamental errors by Lee and his administration. First, it was an error to dismiss communities that they did not understand—those of marginalized, working-class people—and assume that their neighbourhoods were not already a success. The City platformed the ideology of one dominant race and class, and refused to understand or accept communities with differing lifestyles, customs or priorities; it was much simpler to marginalize them with a derogatory label and attempt to erase their existence by tearing down their neighbourhoods, block after block. Secondly, it was erroneous to assume that the imposition of a singular vision of a desirable city would inevitably lead to the desired outcome; in Jane Jacobs' words, urban renewal failed when it supported "...a premise that government should intervene to do things for city neighborhoods, even to city neighborhoods, not with city neighborhoods."² Instead of designing with empathy, the renewal of Wooster Square was executed with arrogance.

While this thesis explored the urban renewal of a single neighbourhood in one American city, it is demonstrative of an urban planning initiative that affected practically every major city across the country, and beyond.

1 Jackson, *Model City Blues*, 14.

2 Rae, *City*, 304.

Conclusion



Fig. 7.1 Vacant land in New Haven, June 2022.

Therefore, it is crucial to acknowledge the enduring adverse effects of the renewal era on marginalized communities in the United States—particularly for African American populations, who were targets of urban renewal in virtually every participating city.

Perseverance of a Community

This thesis has illustrated the urban strategies used throughout the renewal of Wooster Square to physically reduce the presence of the Italian community in the neighbourhood. However, in the decades since renewal took place, the same Italian community has persevered and found new and inventive ways to keep the spirit of the old Wooster Square alive. The first avenue through which this has occurred has been in the continuation of the neighbourhood's Italian societies, Saint Andrew's and Santa Maria Maddalena.³ These societies have organized multiple reunions over the many years since renewal, giving the former community a venue to reconnect with old neighbours and friends. As one of the organizers, Theresa Argento describes, these reunions have proven to be a great success:

So when we have our feast, all these people that were literally chased out of New Haven, they love to come back. They come to the feast because it's like one big reunion. They love to meet one another and talk about, "Oh, don't you miss the neighborhood? Don't you miss the neighborhood?"⁴

Another method of connection for the Italian community of Wooster Square makes use of modern-day technology. A Facebook group entitled "Wooster Square Neighborhood Exchange" was established in 2010, and provides a venue for current and former residents, their families, and the general public to exchange historical photographs, stories and information about the neighbourhood. As of March 2023, the group has over 4,700 members and receives several new posts per week. When asked about the Facebook group, former resident Frank Carrano explained how much joy is found in sharing stories virtually:

³ Riccio, *The Italian American Experience*, 350.

⁴ Interview of Theresa Argento, 9 March 2004, Oral Histories Documenting New Haven, Connecticut.

I'm always so impressed by how those stories resonate with people...There's an immediate response from people, very emotional response. ... The reaction is always one of such great pleasure that "I'm so lucky to have grown up here" or "such a wonderful place to grow up."⁵

While Wooster Square is undoubtedly a shadow of its former self, Mary Hommann, Mayor Lee, and the rest of the City of New Haven underestimated the fighting spirit of the Wooster Square community. Despite a highway, countless bulldozers, and the passage of several decades, the people of Wooster Square—and their cherished neighbourhood—are not forgotten.

5 Stannard, "Documentary."

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