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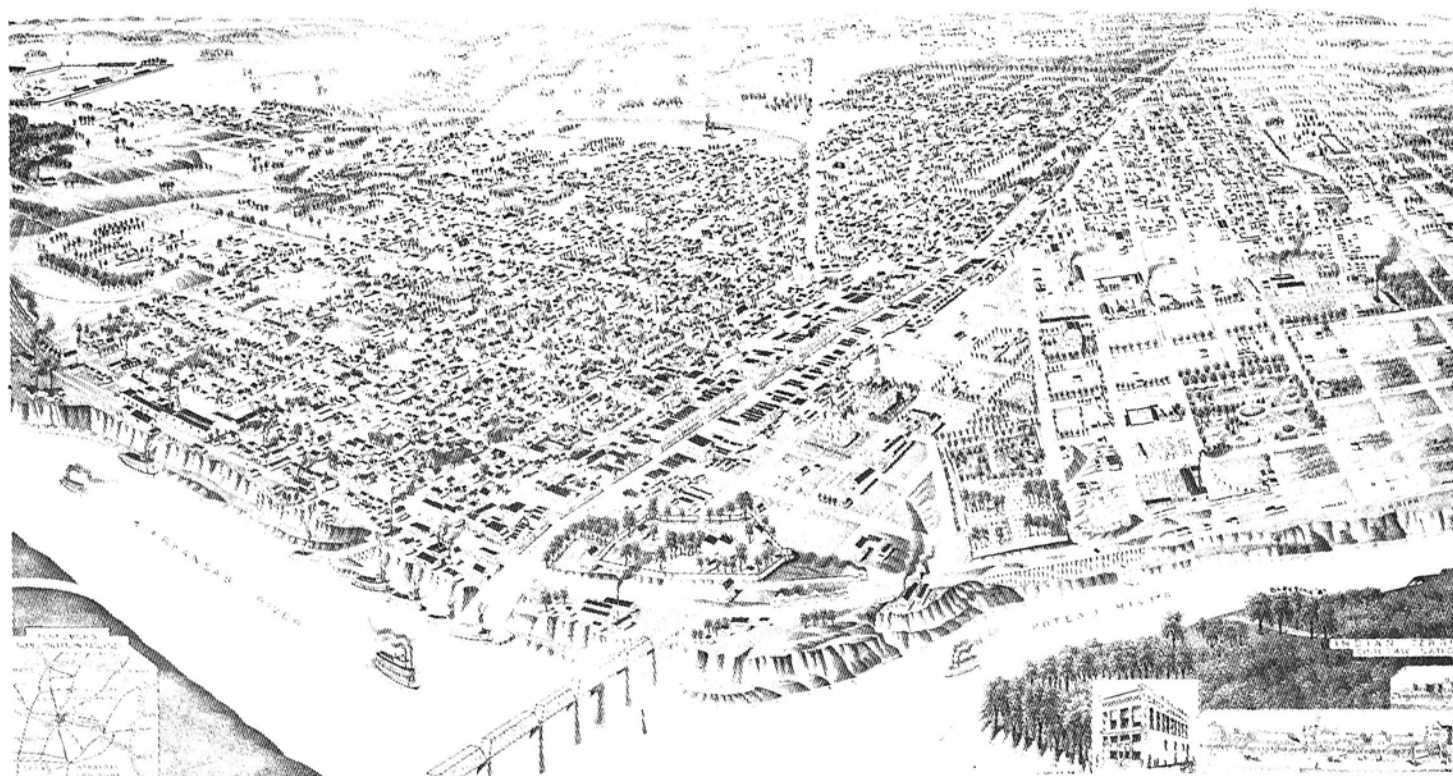


# RUDAT

R E G I O N A L / U R B A N D E S I G N A S S I S T A N C E T E A M

M A R C H  
**FORT SMITH, ARK. 1977**

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a study of garrison avenue and the  
 central business improvement  
 district a study of garrison avenue

FT. SMITH, ARK.

r/udat—aia r/udat—aia r/udat—aia

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# INTRODUCTION



#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The R/UDAT visit was coordinated by Larry L. McGowan, AIA, and Edwin J. Drimmel, Jr., AIA, of the Fort Smith Section, Arkansas Chapter, American Institute of Architects with the assistance of Carl J. Smith, AIA, and John E. Lane, AIA.

Valuable assistance was provided by the entire membership of the Fort Smith Section, Bob Gisler of the Fort Smith Planning Department, and especially Jim Horton of Fort Smith Chamber of Commerce. The report was printed by Yoes Printing and Lithographing Company.

Numerous civic and business leaders, public officials and private citizens contributed their time and effort to the R/UDAT study. Many downtown property owners gave generous financial assistance.

The team was assisted by the University of Arkansas Architecture Department and Professor Mort Karp. Student participants: Bob Galloway, John Jackson, Betty Lee and Richard Renfro.

Other participants: Doug Corner, Bill Edwards, Dave Fitts, Tony Leraris, Margie Mosack and Walter Stephens.

Secretarial staff: Nancy Brock, Cynthia Brown, Melinda Brunnemeyer, Doris Henley, Judy Willcoxon, Cissy Walker, Donna Wilkin, Gale Chamberlin, Rhonda Pritchett, Melita Pickle.

#### R/UDAT PROGRAM

The Urban Planning and Design Committee of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) has been sending teams of skilled practitioners--called regional/urban design assistance teams, or R/UDATs--to American cities since 1967. The Fort Smith team is the forty-first such team.

The teams deal with environmental and urban problems in areas ranging in size from a region to a small town. The problems they study range in type from improving recreation areas to evaluating public policy to developing methods to implement programs.

The teams respond to the problems as described by local AIA chapters, municipalities, and community leaders.

Each urban design assistance team is selected specifically to include professionals experienced in the particular problems of the area under study. Members are not to accept commissions for work resulting from their recommendations.

The team acquaints itself with the community and its people, presents its analysis from a fresh perspective, and offers its recommendations--perhaps a new approach for planning or action.

## THE VISIT

The request for a R/UDAT team was approved in January. On February 16, 1977, Mr. Lawrence Melillo, team chairman, made a reconnaissance visit to Fort Smith to observe the city and discuss the details of the team's visit. A team was organized and was sent extensive background material on the study area. From March 11 to 14, the team visited Fort Smith. They met with city officials and planners, civic leaders, community organizations, and interested citizens and surveyed the city by bus and air and on foot.

With this information, the team engaged in intensive work sessions, which culminated in a press conference and a public presentation on March 14. This report was presented at that time.

## SPONSORSHIP

The request to the AIA was accompanied by letters of interest and support from the Fort Smith Section of the Arkansas Chapter of the American Institute of Architects and the city of Fort Smith.

Financial support for the expenses of the R/UDAT visit and this report were underwritten by the Central Business Improvement District of Fort Smith.

## THE TEAM

Lawrence P. Melillo, AIA  
Louisville, Kentucky  
Team Chairman

Mr. Melillo is a member of the Urban Design Committee of the American Institute of Architects; former national chairman of the R/UDAT program; B.Arch. and M.Arch., Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Troy, New York; registered architect in Kentucky, Indiana, Ohio, West Virginia, Tennessee, New York, and the District of Columbia.

Douglas M. Schwartz  
Atlanta, Georgia  
Economic and Planning Consultant

Mr. Schwartz is a registered professional community planner, Michigan; member, American Institute of Planners, American Society of Planning Officials, and the Georgia Planning Association; B.Arts, Hunter College; Master of Urban Planning, New York University; specialist in market and financial feasibility analyses, environmental impact assessments, and recreation and tourism studies.

Charles F. Harper, AIA  
Wichita Falls, Texas  
Architect

Mr. Harper is president of Charles Harper Associates and is actively involved in environmental design, with many award-winning designs; B.Arch., Texas Tech; member, Texas Chapter of AIA; National Urban Planning and Design Committee; National Human Resources Committee; chairman, City Planning Board of Wichita Falls; vice-president of Downtown Improvement Corporation.

Langdon E. Morris, Jr., AIA  
Denver, Colorado  
Architect

Mr. Morris is a member of the National Committee on Historic Resources; regional preservation coordinator for the American Institute of Architects; member, American Institute of Planners; instructor, Division of Urban Planning and Community Redevelopment, University of Colorado; B.Arch., Pratt Institute; graduate work at Illinois Institute of Technology.

Alastair M. Black, AIA  
Atlanta, Georgia  
Architect/Ecological Planner

Mr. Black is an associate member of American Institute of Planners; chairman of Regional Development and Natural Resources Committee of AIA; former chairman of the Special Energy Commission of the Atlanta chapter; former officer of the Sierra Club, Georgia Conservancy, and Friends of the River; Regional Planning Degree, Ian McHarg's School of Regional Planning, University of Pennsylvania; vice-president, Dougherty Associates, architects/planners.

#### THE CHARGE TO THE R/UDAT TEAM

The charge to the urban design assistance team, as expressed in a statement of conditions and objectives issued by the commissioners of the Central Business Improvement District, was broad in scope. The commissioners charged the team with giving them assistance in defining the highest and best use of the Central Business District and developing ways to achieve that end. In more specific terms, the commissioners expressed concern with such factors as traffic and transportation patterns, the lack of people-oriented activities in the Central Business District, the need for better utilization of existing facilities (particularly the river and the National Park), the historical and architectural character of the area, and the economic future of Fort Smith, particularly the Central Business District.



## THE REGION

Fort Smith is the center of a trading area extending approximately half the distance to the major cities within a 120-mile radius. The cities are Oklahoma City, Tulsa, Joplin, Springfield, Little Rock, Pine Bluff and Texarkana. National forests, including lakes and mountains, make up a majority of the land area. The Arkansas is the major river, linking several of these major cities with Fort Smith.

## THE METRO AREA

The city of Fort Smith along with the cities of Van Buren, Barling, Arkoma, and Moffett compose the metro area as referred to in this report. We will be concerned almost entirely with the city of Fort Smith, Arkansas. This area includes all shopping centers, the river, and the Central Business District of the city of Fort Smith.

## THE CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT

The Central Business District (CBD) is that area in the city of Fort Smith that contains the Central Business Improvement District (CBID) along with the Belle Grove National Historic District and the Fort Smith National Historic Park. The Central Business District must of necessity include those adjacent spaces and businesses around these areas as well.

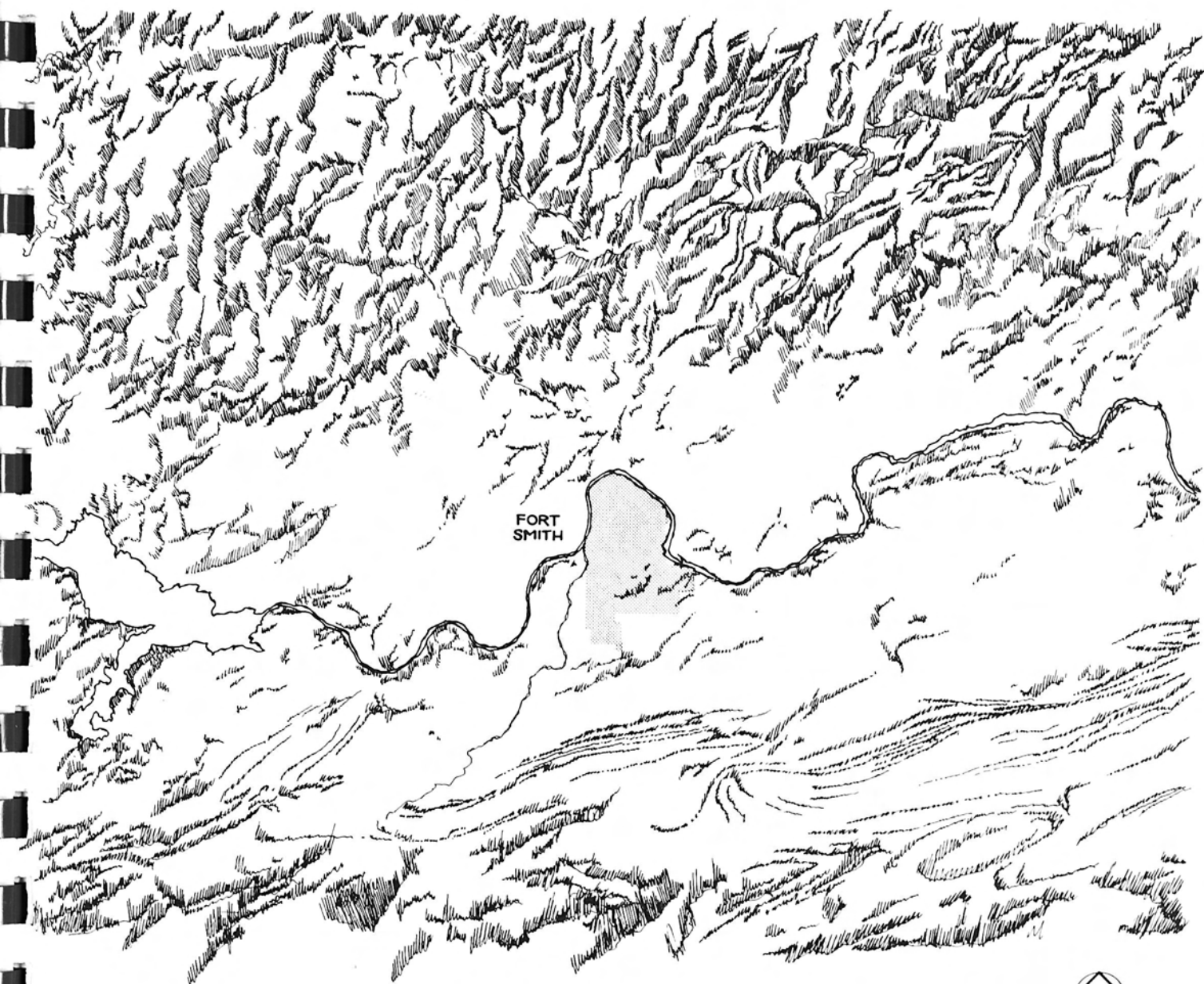
## GEOPHYSICAL ANALYSIS

The view from 270 miles above Fort Smith shows the Arkansas River meandering through a wide, straight valley. The valley was the original bed of a gargantuan torrent which drained the meltwater of the retreating continental glacier. Between the raised remnants of resistant bedrock, deep deposits of rich alluvial soil were built up. The soil that weathered out of the local sandstone and shale is also fertile, but shares with alluvial soil very poor drainage capacity; that is, it does not absorb surface water easily nor transport it quickly underground.

The river does not travel a steep gradient in this region. The swirls of color in the soil and the numerous oxbow lakes indicate frequent changes in the path of the river.

The wide valley and its mountainous walls form a regional airshed, and storms are often guided along it. Tornadoes are frequently seen in the valley.

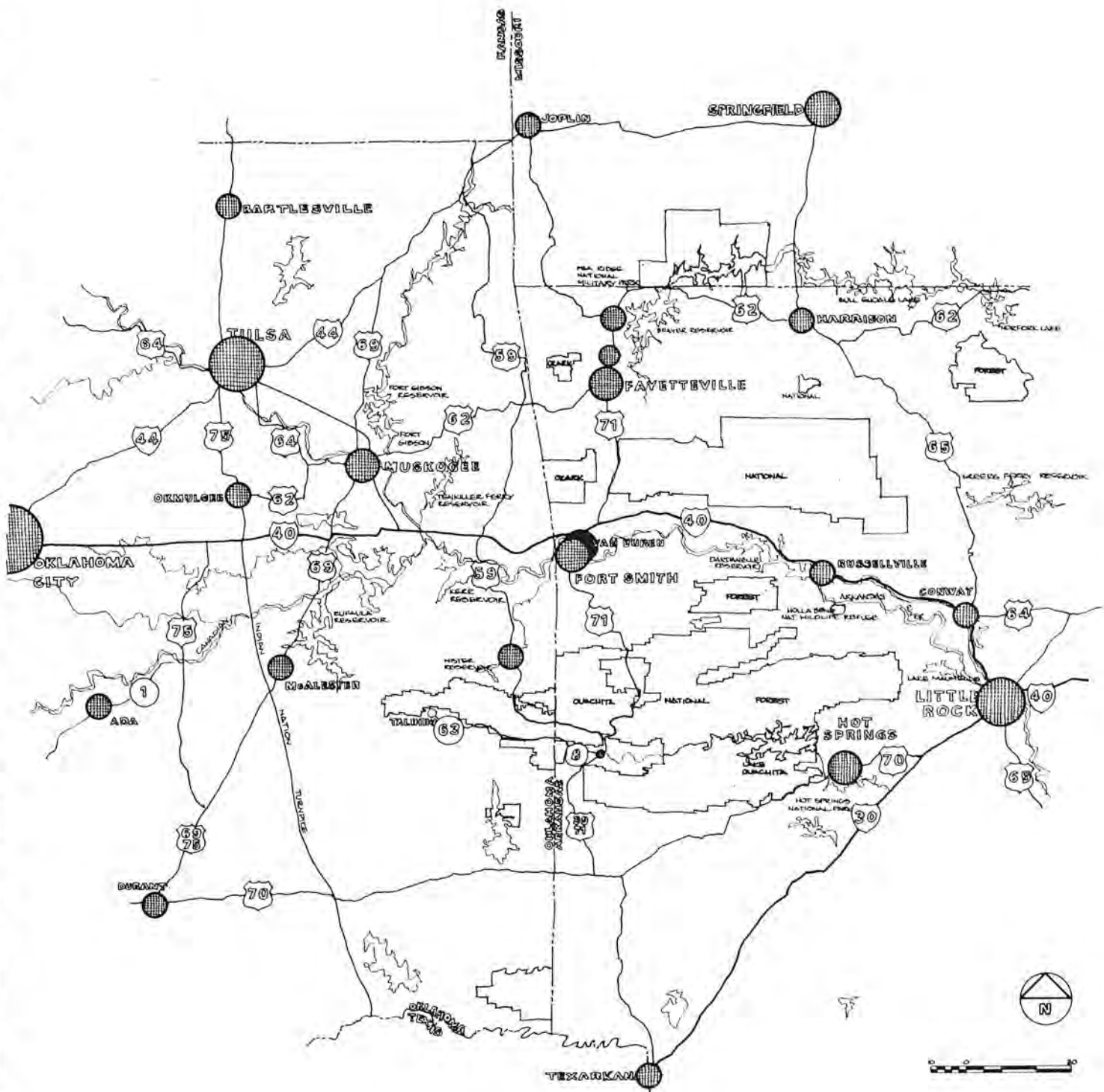
The soil and water patterns affect the vegetation. Even with its high water table, the fertile bottom land is premium agricultural country. Where it is not so employed, only willow trees and water-tolerant scrub growth are apparent. But in the higher ground where pine trees might be expected, relatively few pines are found, generally as introduced specimen trees rather than as volunteers. Possibly in this region, as in much of the South, the city-building days at the turn of the century saw much of the region clear-cut, and upland hardwood grew back faster than conifers. This theory is reinforced by the prevalent species--various oaks, elms, and sycamores--and by the great number of trees approximately 60 to 70 years old. Except where displaced by urbanization, the growth seems healthy and luxuriant.



# GEO—PHYSICAL ANALYSIS

### Regional Location

The settlement patterns clearly were modified by the geophysical character of the region. A shift in the earth's crust had weakened and shattered the rock so that the meltwater found a path it could exploit on its way to the sea. Ages later, the ancient river bed formed a wide, easily traveled path to the west. Early American settlers who had traveled far enough built homes in a string of towns along that "highway." The regional location diagram included here shows a section of the valley extending from Little Rock to Tulsa, with Fort Smith in the center. Later, roads pushed through the mountains to the north and south, but most travel is still along the valley alignment.



# REGIONAL LOCATION

## HISTORY

Fort Smith is steeped in the history of the American West. In 1808 the U. S. Government granted to the Cherokee certain lands belonging to the Osage in what is now Arkansas and Missouri. The two tribes clashed continuously and by 1817, Bvt. Maj. William Bradford was ordered into the Arkansas Territory. On Christmas Day of that year his Pittsburgh Rifles began building a fort at a strategic site, Belle Point, overlooking the Arkansas River. But the Indian wars continued until August 9, 1822, when the Cherokee and Osage signed the Treaty of Fort Smith. The treaty could not guarantee peace, however, and the battleground simply moved up river, prompting the army to quit Fort Smith and to establish a new post 80 miles up the Arkansas.

Fort Smith was not entirely abandoned, though, and when new outbreaks of violence occurred, the white settlers demanded that a new post be built near the original fort. This "second fort," erected from 1838 to 1846, became a supply depot for the more westerly posts, a function it continued to fill up to the start of the Civil War. In 1865 the federal government ordered all the Indians to a Great Council at Fort Smith, at which time the government took away most of their lands. By 1871 the army found that Fort Smith had outlived its usefulness and left it forever.

The army's retreat signaled the opening of a new era for Fort Smith, when it became the seat of the United States Court for the Western District of Arkansas, which included the Indian Territory (now Oklahoma).

The history of that period is tied intrinsically to the life of one man, Judge Isaac C. Parker, who for two decades worked ceaselessly to bring law and order to the wilderness. He brought more than 9,000 criminals to justice and sentenced 79 of them to hang. By the time of his death in 1896, relative peace reigned in the area. Today, the remnants of those wild and woolly days--the preserved site of the first fort, the commissary, the jail, Judge Parker's courtroom and gallows--remind contemporary residents of Fort Smith of their heritage.

Yet another reminder of earlier days is the Belle Grove neighborhood, a 22-block area of homes built from 1840 to 1900. Belle Grove, rich in Victorian architecture, was the first fully-established historic district in Arkansas. Along with individual historic structures in the city--the Joseph Knoble Brewery, built in the 1840's, and Miss Laura Ziegler's "Social Club" (1899), for example--it is part of Fort Smith's colorful history.

The centerpiece of this heritage is Garrison Avenue, a 13-block thoroughfare laid out by city founder John Rogers in 1838. With its many Victorian structures, Garrison Avenue is truly a link between the Fort Smith of the past and the Fort Smith of today.

## BACKGROUND

The Central Business District of Fort Smith began its decline in about 1970 when the Central Mall opened. Many stores which fronted primarily on Garrison Avenue moved to the Mall and were not replaced. The remaining office and professional workers still had difficulty getting to work in the rush hour and difficulty parking after arriving. The amenities that are considered important to an attractive atmosphere were missing. An overall cohesive design was missing. The Central Business District was automobile oriented and fragmented.

In 1977 things are still the same.

This report summarizes the team findings and recommendations for the Central Business District of Fort Smith. The reader will notice that it was necessary for us also to study the metropolitan area in order properly to determine our conclusions.

## THE APPROACH

This is not a final plan but the beginning of a planning process. The four days of intensive study by the team, assisted by faculty and students from the University of Arkansas, local officials and citizens, underlie our proposals. Despite the brief study period, we feel the ideas here are sound and, as further defined and debated, can assist the community in realizing the full potential of this unique opportunity.

We hope you find our proposals stimulating. We appreciate the chance to be of service.

# ASSETS & LIABILITIES



## ASSETS AND LIABILITIES

The assets and liabilities of the region correspond closely with the assets and liabilities of the area, which now enjoys a healthy job climate, a growing medical center, a strong economic base, the river, many recreation areas, and energy in the form of natural gas.

The Central Business District's assets in addition are its physical continuity, historical significance, and the location of institutional, professional, and government offices, as well as a strong link to the river.

Some of the very strong assets of the downtown are as follows:

Some very good nineteenth-century buildings are to be found.

Eighteen per cent (18%) of the total buildings in the downtown area are a very strong visual asset.

Of the 350 or so buildings in the CBID, 12 could be listed as extremely significant, 25 as significant, and 25 as support, infill, background, or continuity for the other buildings.

There is a large physical plant resource of unused or underused buildings.

The Immaculate Conception Church is a strong, interesting visual landmark and helps tie down the east end of Garrison Avenue.

The gateway to the city from the west by way of the Garrison Avenue Bridge from Oklahoma is dramatic.

Several of the banks are contributing to the amenities of the downtown by either an old and continuing visual asset or a new, relatively conforming structure.

The liabilities of the area include:

Traffic circulation within the area and the city needs improvement.

Public services and capital improvements lag far behind need.

The river cuts off and directs the growth of the city in one direction only.

The Oklahoma/Arkansas state line has emotional, as well as some real, liabilities.

Fort Chaffee is taking up valuable space in one of the few paths where the city can grow.

Storm water drainage is a continuing problem.

The supply of sanitary land fill sites is diminishing.

The Central Business District major liabilities are:

Parking

Traffic circulation

Many vacancies in existing buildings

Lack of amenities in the downtown area

Scale of Garrison Avenue not in correct proportion to the buildings and human environment

Specifically:

The downtown is unclean, with garbage and trash present.

There is a lack of sun and rain canopies to protect pedestrians.

The width of Garrison Avenue is formidable and divides each side into distinct islands, separating them into concrete masses and fragmenting the downtown area.

The building lines are not related by setback, break, or interruption.

There is no place for people to congregate and visit.

There are few if any places with tourist or visitor facilities, such as toilets, fast-food eateries, or seating shelters.

The bleak area around the civic center and municipal and federal sections lacks scale and relation to the rest of the buildings in the area. The oversized surface parking lots are out of scale and distract viewers from the other assets of the area.

There are many deteriorated buildings.

Unfortunate exterior renovation and modernization has occurred.

There are almost no trees or greenery along the streets, alleys, and rights-of-way.

There are no visual ties to the National Historic Site, Civic Center, or National Park.

Employees and occupants of the downtown buildings preempt the parking spaces for others.

Vacant or almost vacant buildings comprise about one-fourth of the total space.

There is no sense of place.

There is considerable visual blight.

The street lighting fixtures do not relate to the buildings.

The signage needs to be upgraded and related to the area.

There is no relief from the austerity of the building space, such as softness in trees or the presence of mini-parks.

There are excessive unbroken walls (three blocks) on the south side of Garrison Avenue.

The wall effect of Garrison Avenue is without lateral integration to the areas immediately adjacent. Most of the vacant land is not developed in the area.

# 4

## SOCIOECONOMIC OVERVIEW



## SOCIO-ECONOMIC OVERVIEW

Fort Smith is one of the most important manufacturing and service centers of the Southwest. Fort Smith is well located along major transportation arteries, which include interstate and state highways, the Arkansas River and port, railroads, and major airport facilities for commercial and general aviation and military aircraft.

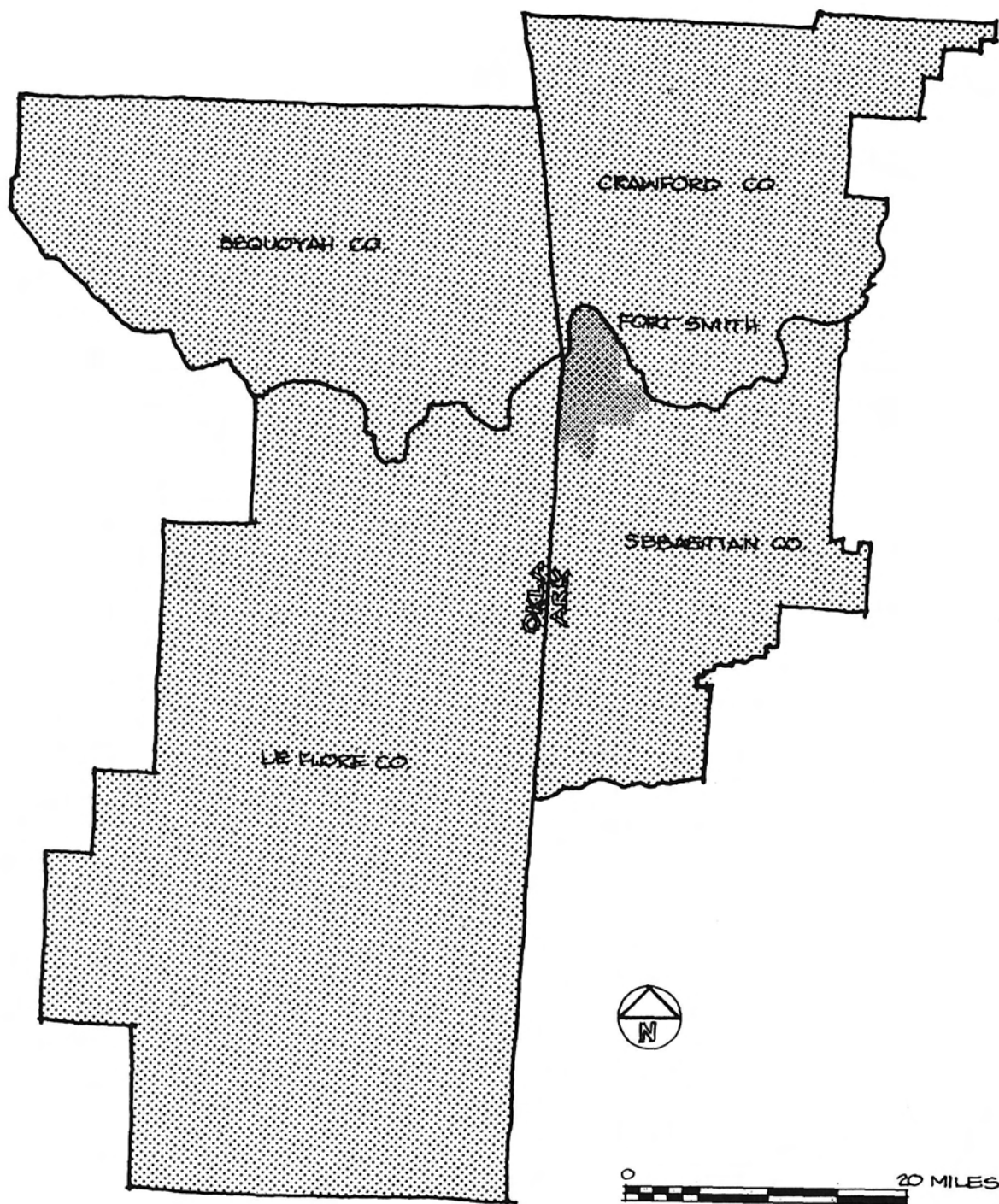
### Population

Fort Smith has an estimated 1977 population of 70,000 persons. A special census is currently underway to determine the area's existing population and selected demographic characteristics. Table 1 gives the population of Fort Smith and the metropolitan area for the years 1900-1977.

Between 1960 and 1970 the city of Fort Smith's population increased by 9,811 persons, or 18.5 per cent. The city's current population is estimated at 70,000, representing an annual average increase of 1.6 per cent. This increase is conservative.

The Fort Smith metropolitan area or Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area (SMSA) increased from 1960 to 1970 by 25,311 persons, an overall increase of 18.7 per cent and an average annual increase of 1.9 per cent.

The Fort Smith SMSA consists of four counties: Sebastian and Crawford in Arkansas and LeFlore and Sequoyah in Oklahoma. Figure A represents the Fort Smith SMSA.



**FORT SMITH SMSA**

TABLE 1      POPULATION OF CITY AND COUNTY, 1900-1977

<u>Year</u>	<u>City of Fort Smith</u>	<u>Sebastian County</u>
1900	11,587	36,935
1910	23,975	52,278
1920	28,870	56,739
1930	31,420	54,426
1940	36,548	62,809
1950	47,942	64,202
1960	52,991	66,685
1970	62,802	79,237
1977	70,000*	90,000*

\*Estimated

SOURCE: U. S. Bureau of the Census, 1900-1970.

Sebastian County is made up of a number of political jurisdictions, the largest of which is the city of Fort Smith. Table 2 shows the various jurisdictions of Sebastian County. The county's population in 1970 was 79,237 persons. The city of Fort Smith represented approximately 79 per cent of Sebastian County and 39 per cent of the Fort Smith SMSA in 1970. The percentage of Fort Smith as compared to its region and county will likely increase in the short term and decrease over the long term as continued suburbanization and growth occurs in the Fort Smith region.

#### Racial Characteristics

Table 3 shows the racial characteristics of the Fort Smith SMSA and city. Between 1960 and 1970 while the city and SMSA populations increased by about 19 per cent, the minority populations of the area, including blacks, American Indians, and Asians, remained relatively unchanged at about 7 per cent of the total population of the area. Even though Fort Chaffee was a major settlement readjustment center for the Vietnamese who fled their homeland to the United States, the area did not absorb a major concentration of Asians. The special census being conducted in Fort Smith today will confirm or deny this assumption.

#### Employment

Employment opportunities abound in the Fort Smith area. Fort Smith is a major manufacturing, service, and distribution center for the Southwest. Fort Smith provides employment opportunities for persons who live within the city and in other counties and for some persons residing in Oklahoma.

TABLE 2                      POPULATION BY JURISDICTION, 1970

Barling	1,739
Bonanza	342
FORT SMITH	62,802
Greenwood	2,032
Hackett	462
Hartford	616
Huntington	627
Lavaca	532
Mansfield	654
Midland	294
Population in Municipalities	70,100
Unincorporated Rural	<u>9,137</u>
Sebastian County	<u><u>79,237</u></u>

SOURCE: U. S. Census of Population

TABLE 3            POPULATION OF CITY AND COUNTY, 1900-1977

<u>Fort Smith SMSA</u>		<u>1960</u>	<u>1960-1970 Increase</u>
Total Population	160,421	135,110	18.7%
White	149,624 (93.3%)	-	
Black	6,741 (4.2%)	-	
Others	4,056 (2.5%)	-	
 <u>Fort Smith City</u>			
Total Population	62,802	52,991	18.5%
White	58,050 (92.4%)	-	
Black	4,331 (6.9%)	-	
Others	421 ( .7%)	-	

SOURCE: U. S. Census of Population, 1960 and 1970

The civilian labor force in Fort Smith is shown in Table 4. The number of employed persons nearly equals the population of Fort Smith-- a very high percentage. Major employment sectors of the local economy include manufacturing, construction, transportation, wholesale and retail trade, finance, services, and government.

The economy of Fort Smith is diversified and growing in manufacturing, service, and trading sectors. Although other parts of the United States experienced recessionary trends in the late 1960's and early 1970's, the Fort Smith area economy remained relatively strong. Tables 5 and 6 demonstrate area new plant locations and growth or expansion of existing local industries or operations.

Major employers in the Fort Smith area include:

- Arkansas Best Corporation
- Ayers Furniture Industries
- Baldor Electric Company
- DeSoto, Inc.
- Gerber Products Company
- Planters Manufacturing
- Rheem Manufacturing
- Southwestern Bell Company
- Thomas Industries
- Whirlpool Corporation
- Wortz Biscuit Company

TABLE 4            CIVILIAN LABOR FORCE, CITY OF FORT SMITH

	December 1976	December 1975
Civilian Labor Force	75,050	72,250
Unemployed	6,000	6,200
Per cent Unemployed	8.0%	8.6%
Total Employed	69,050	66,050
Manufacturing	21,650	19,800
Non-Manufacturing	36,300	35,400
Mining	350	350
Construction	2,350	2,050
Transportation & Public Utilities	2,850	2,750
Trade--Wholesale	2,700	2,650
Trade--Retail	10,000	9,650
Finance, Insurance, Real Estate	2,100	2,000
Services	9,000	8,650
Government	6,950	7,300
Other	8,350	7,950
Agriculture	2,150	2,150

SOURCE: Fort Smith Office of the Arkansas Employment  
Security Commission

TABLE 5

ANNUAL NEW INDUSTRIAL GROWTH,  
CITY OF FORT SMITH, 1957-1976

<u>Year</u>	<u>New Plants Located</u>	<u>New Jobs Created</u>
1957	2	83
1958	4	65
1959	8	248
1960	6	2,367
1961	25	607
1962	18	730
1963	15	131
1964	5	115
1965	6	162
1966	9	1,189
1967	12	223
1968	4	63
1969	9	1,349
1970	12	212
1971	6	231
1972	5	25
1973	3	265
1974	6	964
1975	0	0
1976	3	79
Total	<u>158</u>	<u>9,108</u>

SOURCE: Annual Survey of Local Industries; Newspaper;  
Building permits  
Fort Smith Chamber of Commerce

TABLE 6      ANNUAL INDUSTRIAL EXPANSION, 1957-1976

<u>Year</u>	<u>Plants Expanded</u>	<u>New Jobs Created</u>
1957	3	275
1958	31	362
1959	37	264
1960	20	810
1961	24	321
1962	30	694
1963	32	607
1964	34	419
1965	44	876
1966	43	771
1967	27	903
1968	35	996
1969	36	1,224
1970	24	1,804
1971	39	901
1972	33	534
1973	34	989
1974	36	2,486
1975	22	185
1976	<u>26</u>	<u>276</u>
TOTAL	<u>610</u>	<u>15,697</u>

SOURCE: Annual Survey of Local Industries;  
Newspaper; Building permits.  
Fort Smith Chamber of Commerce

### Income

Personal income in Fort Smith is comparable to other major cities in the Southwest. The area has a high proportion of hourly and lower wage employees. The per capita incomes for Fort Smith are shown in Table 7. Due to the high concentrations of large employers in the area, expanding job opportunities and increasingly common two-person worker households, the average household incomes will significantly increase in the area in both the short and long term.

TABLE 7      PER CAPITA INCOME,  
CITY OF FORT SMITH, 1965-1975

1965	\$2,256
1966	2,280
1967	2,415
1968	2,510
1969	2,784
1970	3,037
1971	3,302
1972	3,723
1973	4,077
1974	4,419
1975	4,897

SOURCE: Sales Management Annual Survey of  
Buying Power

### Housing

The Fort Smith area has a strong housing market in all sectors of the area, particularly in the south and southeasterly parts of the city. It has been estimated, as shown in Table 8, that Fort Smith will have a need for 4,602 new units of housing by 1990. The R/UDAT team feels that this figure is extremely conservative in light of existing development trends and expected population increases by the year 2001.

Housing characteristics for 1970 of the city and Fort Smith SMSA are illustrated in Table 9.

There is a high population of owner-occupied, single-family detached units in the region and city. The housing stock is basically sound with some areas of substandard housing in the older and minority-group areas of the city.

Residential and business construction trends are shown on Table 10 for the years 1966 through 1976. Permits secured are much less than the number of units built, as there are usually significant number of permits issued for multi-unit buildings or single-family subdivision building activity.

TABLE 8 HOUSING NEEDS FOR SEBASTIAN COUNTY THROUGH 1990

Housing Needed for New Population

Barling	408
Bonanza	83
FORT SMITH	4,602
Greenwood	232
Hackett	108
Hartford	0
Huntington	187
Lavaca	325
Mansfield	40
Midland	0
Subtotal	5,985

Replacement Housing Needs

FORT SMITH	7,890
Rural Communities	2,508
Non-Incorporated	
Rural	<u>3,452</u>
Subtotal	13,850

TOTAL HOUSING NEEDS 19,835

SOURCE: ARPC Housing Report 1974

TABLE 9      HOUSING CHARACTERISTICS, CITY OF FORT SMITH AND SMSA, 1970

	<u>SMSA</u>	<u>FORT SMITH</u>
Total Housing Units	56,920	22,896
Population in Housing Units	158,618	61,919
Owner Occupied Housing Units	36,885	14,114
Renter Occupied Housing Units	15,704	7,213
Vacant Year Round Housing Units	4,312	1,568
One Unit Structures	49,741	18,467
Two Units or More	5,410	4,155
Mobile Home or Trailer	1,747	274
Average No. Persons Per Occupied Unit	3.0	2.9
Median Value Owner Occupied Homes	\$9,500	\$11,900
Median Rental of Occupied Units	\$51	\$60

SOURCE: General Housing Characteristics Arkansas, U. S.  
Bureau of Census, 1970

TABLE 10      ANNUAL RESIDENTIAL AND BUILDING PERMITS,  
CITY OF FORT SMITH, 1966-1976

RESIDENTIAL BUILDING PERMITS		BUSINESS BUILDING PERMITS (INCLUDES COMMERCIAL & INDUSTRIAL)	
<u>YEAR</u>	<u>NO. NEW PERMITS</u>	<u>YEAR</u>	<u>NO. NEW PERMITS</u>
1966	226	1966	83
1967	249	1967	76
1968	215	1968	71
1969	215	1969	72
1970	310	1970	60
1971	378	1971	53
1972	407	1972	91
1973	280	1973	102
1974	317	1974	72
1975	333	1975	60
1976	<u>471</u>	1976	<u>110</u>
TOTAL	3,401	TOTAL	850

SOURCE: Building and Planning Department, City of Fort Smith

### Retail Trade

Due to the nature of the R/UDAT assignment in Fort Smith, special emphasis has been placed on the downtown retailing situation. Downtown retailing in Fort Smith is on a serious downslide. Recession is not a strong enough term. Although retail trade statistics for Fort Smith, as shown in Table 11, demonstrate a strong growth in sales, from \$119 million in 1963 to \$535 million in 1975, downtown Fort Smith may be on the verge of a total collapse.

Downtown Fort Smith represents a serious negative dislocation in retailing activity. From being the main shopping district, downtown Fort Smith is now in a state of despair. Before downtown will resurge, it is likely to decline further. Many existing retailing operations (in 1977) are marginal at best. Some of the existing 93 stores still operating in downtown will probably abandon downtown before the end of the year, regardless of whether improvement programs suggested elsewhere in this report are implemented.

The major shopping districts in Fort Smith are shown in Figure B and described in Table 12. Downtown Fort Smith has declined from some 150 store operations in the area in the mid-1960's to 93 today. Retailing in the Fort Smith area is strong, but is being devastated downtown.

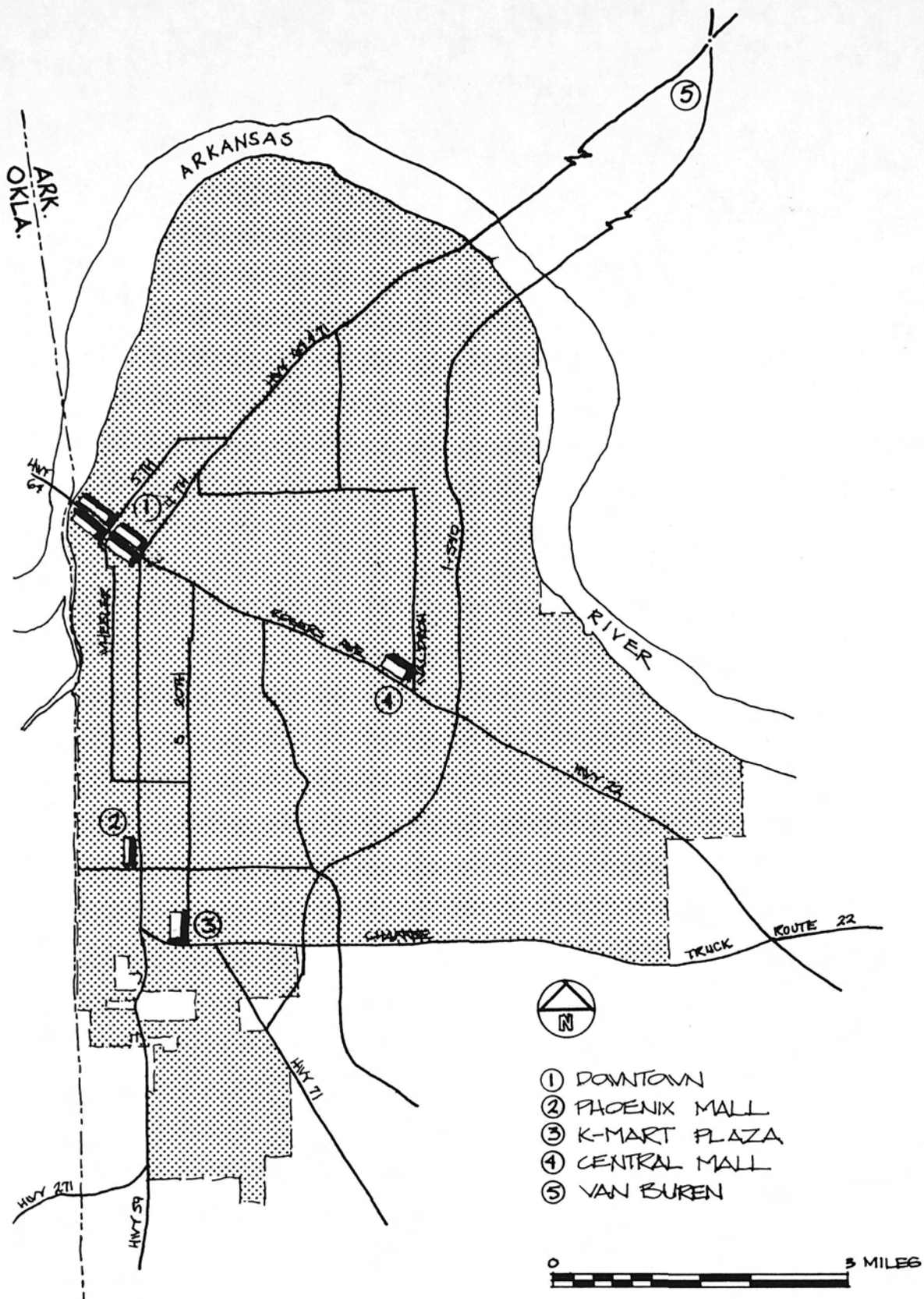
Table 13 illustrates the tremendous growth of retail sales in the city and SMSA. Much of the growth in the city is a result of a shift in shopping patterns away from downtown, the abandonment of older stores, and the opening of new stores in Central Mall and in strip commercial developments along Rogers Avenue.

TABLE 11 TOTAL RETAIL SALES, CITY OF FORT SMITH, 1963-1975

(\$1,000)

	<u>1963</u>	<u>1966</u>	<u>1972</u>	<u>1975</u>
<u>Store Types</u>				
Bldg. Materials	\$ 10,089	\$ 15,656	\$ 15,040	\$ 32,525
Gen. Merchandise	19,366	24,946	(D)	82,204
Food	22,746	23,816	35,476	133,443
Auto. Dealers	29,061	22,124	51,821	106,907
Gas Stations	7,360	6,854	10,174	48,503
Apparel	6,392	5,852	10,977	23,501
Furniture	5,873	7,873	9,251	21,340
Eating & Drink.	6,148	6,567	13,381	37,267
Drug Stores	3,531	3,296	(D)	15,198
Miscellaneous	<u>8,581</u>	<u>7,419</u>	<u>16,974</u>	<u>35,000</u>
Total	\$119,147	\$124,403	\$208,100	\$535,888

(D) - Not Disclosed Due to Reporting Techniques



# FORT SMITH

TABLE 12                      SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS OF MAJOR  
SHOPPING CENTERS IN FORT SMITH

	<u>Date Opened</u>	<u>Size In Sq. Ft.</u>	<u>Parking Spaces</u>	<u>Number of Stores</u>
Central Mall	1969	720,000	3,200	78
Grand Plaza	1955	62,000	191	6
K-Mart Plaza	1963	95,000	900	5
Park Plaza	1958	60,000	389	8
Phoenix Village	1961	500,000	2,750	63
Downtown	1817	N/A	N/A	93 (1)

Note:    (1)    Number of Stores in 1977 -- 93  
                       Number of Stores in 1972 -- 113  
                       Number of Stores in 1965 -- 150  
                       N/A    Not Available

SOURCES:    U. S. Census of Business and estimates by R/UDAT

TABLE 13 RETAIL TRADE STATISTICS FOR SELECTED AREAS, 1972

	STATE OF ARKANSAS (\$1,000)		FORT SMITH SMSA (\$1,000)		CITY OF FORT SMITH (\$1,000)	
	No.	Sales	No.	Sales	No.	Sales
Bldg. Materials	967	\$269,331	71	\$21,721	34	\$15,040
General Mdse.	929	434,772	78	53,067	27	(D)
Food	4,068	880,037	270	75,156	87	35,476
Auto Dealers	1,891	939,540	149	79,560	76	51,821
Gas Stations	3,144	335,652	289	26,856	112	10,174
Apparel	1,481	215,754	123	16,218	73	10,977
Furniture	1,250	177,294	105	14,798	58	9,251
Eating/Drinking	3,081	198,099	323	20,604	169	13,381
Drug Stores	604	122,996	56	8,905	18	(D)
Miscellaneous	4,703	338,780	399	22,322	234	16,974
TOTALS	22,118	\$3,912,255	1,863	\$339,207	888	\$208,100

(D) - Not Disclosed Due to Reporting Techniques

SOURCE: U. S. Census of Retail Trade, 1972

Downtown Fort Smith is approximately 40 per cent vacant or abandoned. Twenty per cent of the downtown improvement district is in streets or open space. Thus, only 40 per cent of the area has "viable" commercial or residential uses still functioning in the area.

This situation represents a serious problem to the entire Fort Smith area, not just to those whose future is tied to downtown.

### Tourist Attractions

Downtown Fort Smith lacks retailing successes but has many important tourist and historical points of interest. Some of the major attractions include the Fort Smith National Historic Site, governmental center, the Arkansas River, Municipal Auditorium, and cultural facilities and hotel/motel accommodations. Table 14 is a listing of major hotel/motel facilities in Fort Smith, primarily in downtown locations.

### Municipal Auditorium

The Municipal Auditorium is run as a city department. It is presently greatly underutilized. Excluding the use of its meeting rooms by the public and some private groups, the Municipal Auditorium is used at only one-third capacity. Table 15 illustrates the annual Municipal Auditorium usage between 1972 and 1976.

### Visitations to Fort Smith Historic Site

The number of visitors to the Fort Smith National Historic Site has increased from 40,000 in 1964 to about 100,000 persons in 1976. Visitations are concentrated during the summer months. Visitors to the site stay about one or two hours and are largely from outside the Fort Smith region.

TABLE 14 HOTEL AND MOTEL UNITS, CITY OF FORT SMITH, 1977

<u>Name</u>	<u>No. Rooms or Units</u>
Continental Motel	54
Dennis Motel	15
Flamingo Capri	23
Holiday Inn North	154
Holiday Motel	24
Kings Row Inn	111
Motel 6	111
Peddlers Motor Inn	143
Ramada Inn	156
Regal 8	60
Sands Motel	90
Sheraton Inn	150
Swan Motel	20
Terry Motel	37
Town & Country Inn	60
Trade Winds Inn	<u>133</u>
TOTAL	1,341

TABLE 15      ANNUAL MUNICIPAL AUDITORIUM USAGE,  
CITY OF FORT SMITH, 1972-1976

	<u>1972</u>	<u>1973</u>	<u>1974</u>	<u>1975</u>	<u>1976</u>
Days Used	125	134	135	155	144
Total Events	168	168	195	184	154

NOTE: These figures do not include use of facilities  
for meetings only.

SOURCE: Auditorium Monthly Reports, 1972-1976,  
City of Fort Smith

## CENTRAL BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT

The Central Business Improvement District (CBID) was created in 1976 in Fort Smith as a result of state enabling legislation. This district is modeled after a similar one in Little Rock.

The CBID was formed after two-thirds of all assessed-value property owners agreed to its creation. The CBID was modeled after the Central Business Improvement District Act dated February 20, 1973, which purposes shall include but not be limited to:

The constructing, establishing and operating of a shopping mall or malls, sidewalks, plazas, landscaping, fountains, parking facilities, including one or more parking garages, pedestrian overpasses; and other improvements, facilities, services and equipment as may be authorized by the said Act, within the perimeters of the district as contained in [Figure C].

The property owners upon the establishment of the CBID agreed to pay for improvements within the CBID by the issuance of bonds, to be repaid by assessments on property within the district, to be limited to one million dollars.

Under the enabling legislation, the governing body of the city of Fort Smith is to provide and assist the CBID to undertake and carry out recommendations in the CBID plan of improvement, which has yet to be fully developed.

In order to carry out the mandate of the CBID, a person needs to be hired or retained, along with other professionals or experts, to prepare and implement the plan of improvement for the district.

### Qualifications of the Executive Director

An executive director is needed to be hired or retained by the CBID to help prepare, implement, and coordinate the activities of the CBID. The minimal qualifications of the executive director should include but not be limited to:

Extensive and exemplary experience in public and private redevelopment and/or public economic development with a demonstrated ability to bring projects to successful conclusions;

A demonstrated ability to work within complex political situations;

An extensive knowledge of the developmental economics of cities and urban counties;

A knowledge of municipal and corporate finance, especially as it applies in Arkansas;

An ability to negotiate complex issues between public and private participants;

Exhibiting a personality that is aggressive, dynamic and capable of commanding the respect of public and private sector leaders...;

An ability to secure and solicit grant monies, donations and joint venture opportunities;

An ability to carry out the goals, objectives and priority programs of the CBID;

Provide liason with public and private agencies, governments and persons;

An ability to spearhead activities of the CBID; and,

An ability to develop and assist in the comprehensive and realistic (achievable) economic development programs and projects for the CBID, downtown and the city of Fort Smith.

\* \* \*

#### CBID GENERAL COMMENTS

In addition to the goals and programs of the CBID outlined in the legislation, an expansion of the CBID Plan of Improvement should include the following:

Its desire to promote employment opportunities within the city for those persons unemployed, underemployed, handicapped, minorities and new arrivals;

That the interests of the CBID are primarily related to economic development; however such interests include, but are not limited to, commercial and industrial development, marketing, promotion of civic and cultural growth, public welfare, trade, commerce, education, amusement and entertainment attractions, recreation and environmental enhancement;

That there is a need to influence the geographic location of new industry to make jobs and local service opportunities accessible to downtown city residents;

To provide assistance to minority entrepreneurial, contracting and other agencies to assure full participation of city residents, especially minorities, in the full range of activities related to economic development;

To assemble public and private powers, resources and

capabilities to assure implementation of specific projects; and,

To create coordinated activity and financing packages of public and private efforts directed at increasing employment, support to small businesses, community development and overall achievement of the CBID Plan of Improvement.

\* \* \*

### Financing Strategies

In order to support the proposed improvements within the CBID, the following means to finance projects can be utilized. These proposals for financing can be used individually or in combination with other sources. The sources for financing include:

- Property assessments in the CBID (initially not to exceed \$1,000,000)
- Tolls on the river bridges to and from Fort Smith to Oklahoma. Revenues estimated to exceed \$500,000 per year by 1980. These funds to be pledged to the improvement of the CBID
- Community development block grants
- General revenue sharing
- Local option sales tax
- Local option hotel/motel occupancy room tax
- General obligation funds
- Revenue bonds
- Endorsement/donations
- Categorical grants-in-aid
- Federal and state assistance programs
- Special user taxes

- Admission charges
- Transfer of development rights
- Tax increment financing
- Tax abatement
- Joint venture
- Public/private development corporations
- Nonprofit sponsors
- Sale/leaseback

#### Next Steps

In addition to the financing alternatives discussed above, the city of Fort Smith and the CBID need to consider whether to:

- Coordinate improvement plans and programs
- Hire an executive director for the CBID
- Establish local area priorities
- Maximize existing resources
- Strengthen role of CBID
- Improve aesthetic environment

- Provide improved land use controls
- Provide free parking within the CBID
- Promote tourist, convention, and recreational opportunities in Fort Smith
- Consider making downtown Fort Smith an area for specialty retail; an office and financial center; governmental center; entertainment district; residential neighborhood; or community and commercial services center
- Establish liason and goals program for the community
- Carry out all programs necessary to make downtown Fort Smith viable as a part of the total community.

5

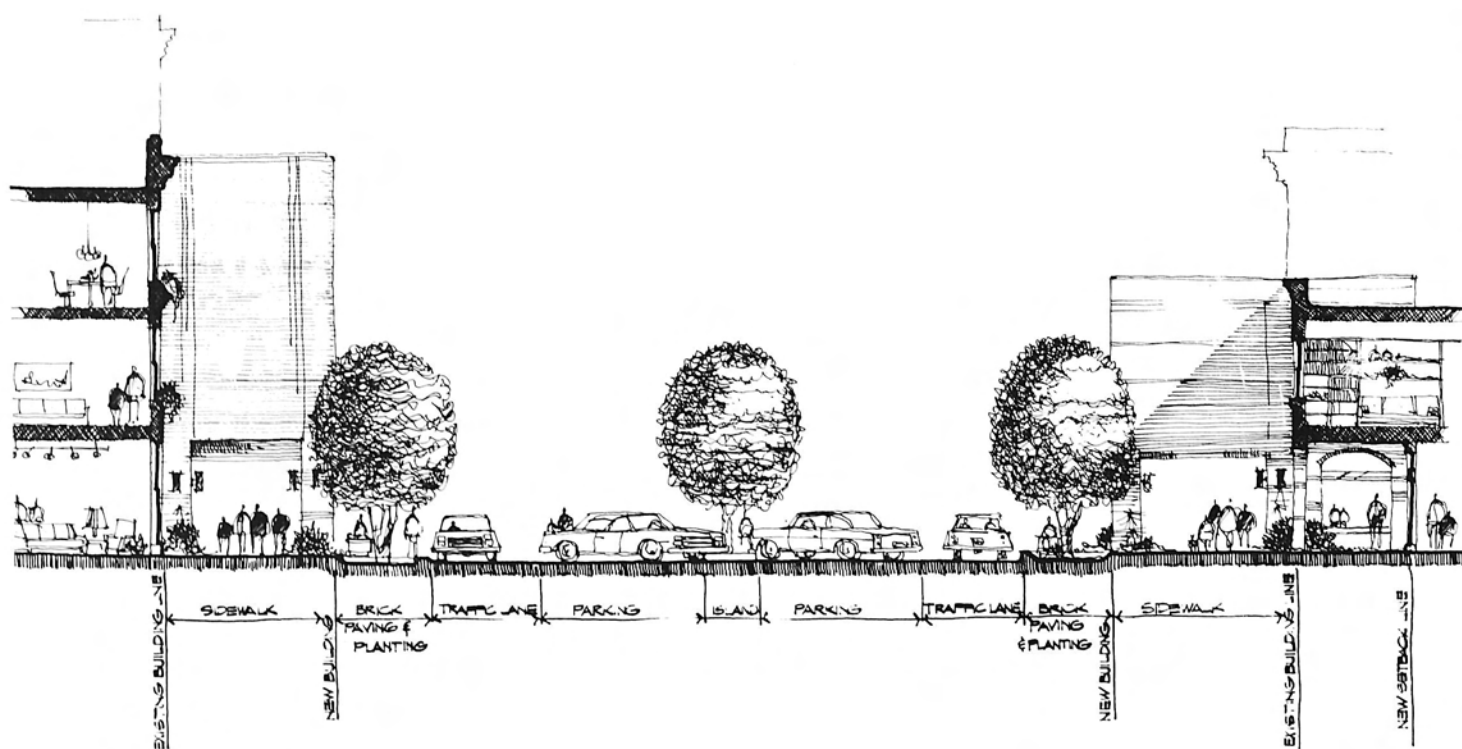
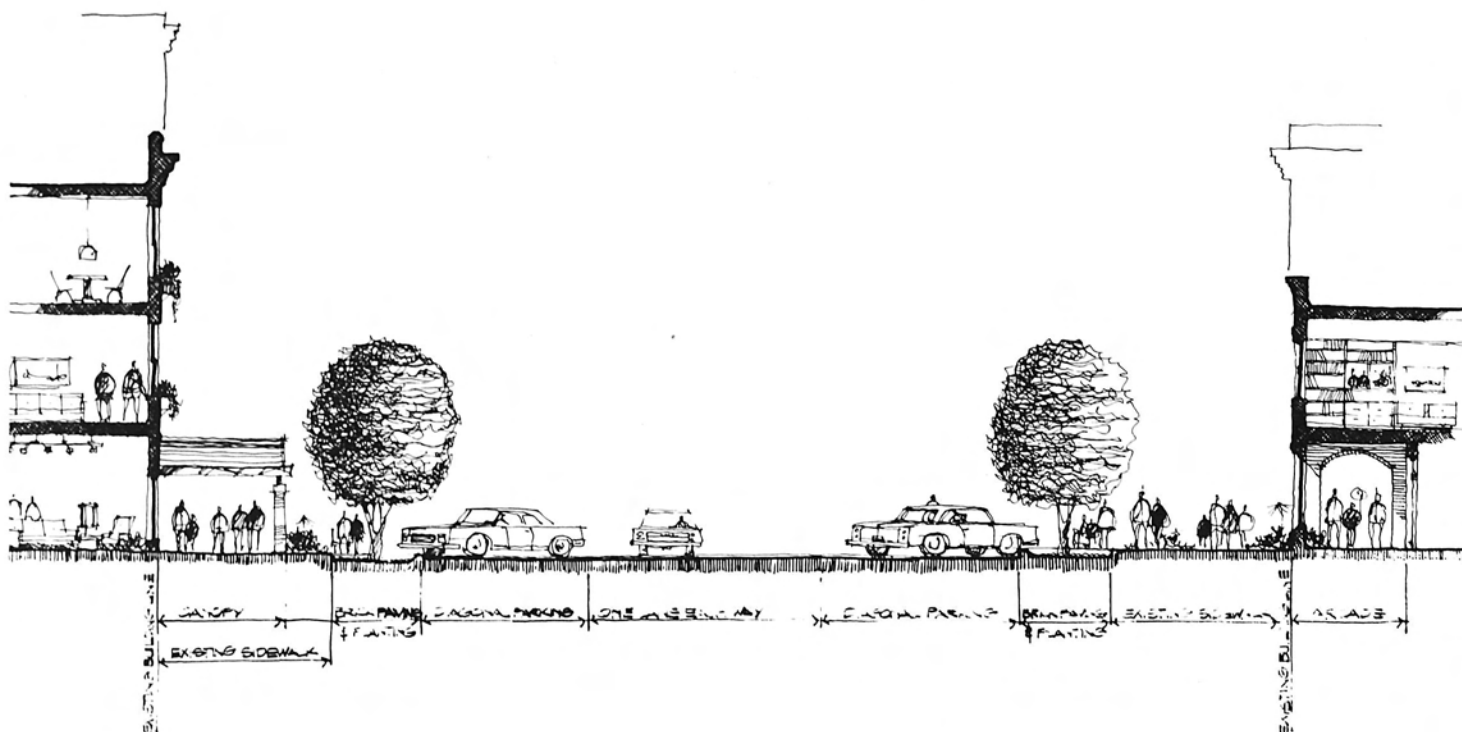
# OPTIONS



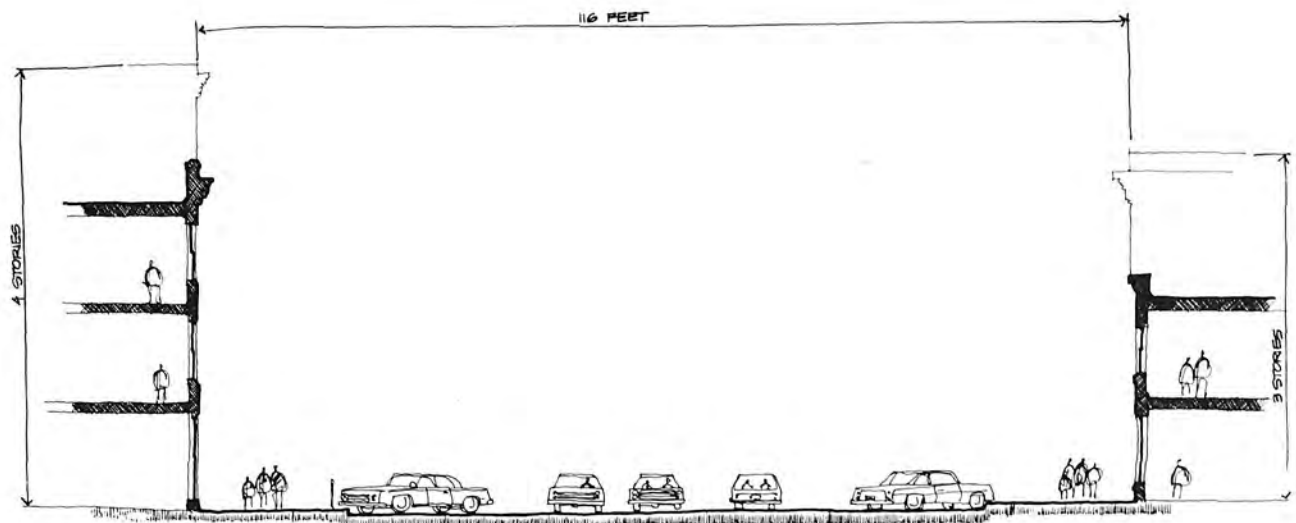
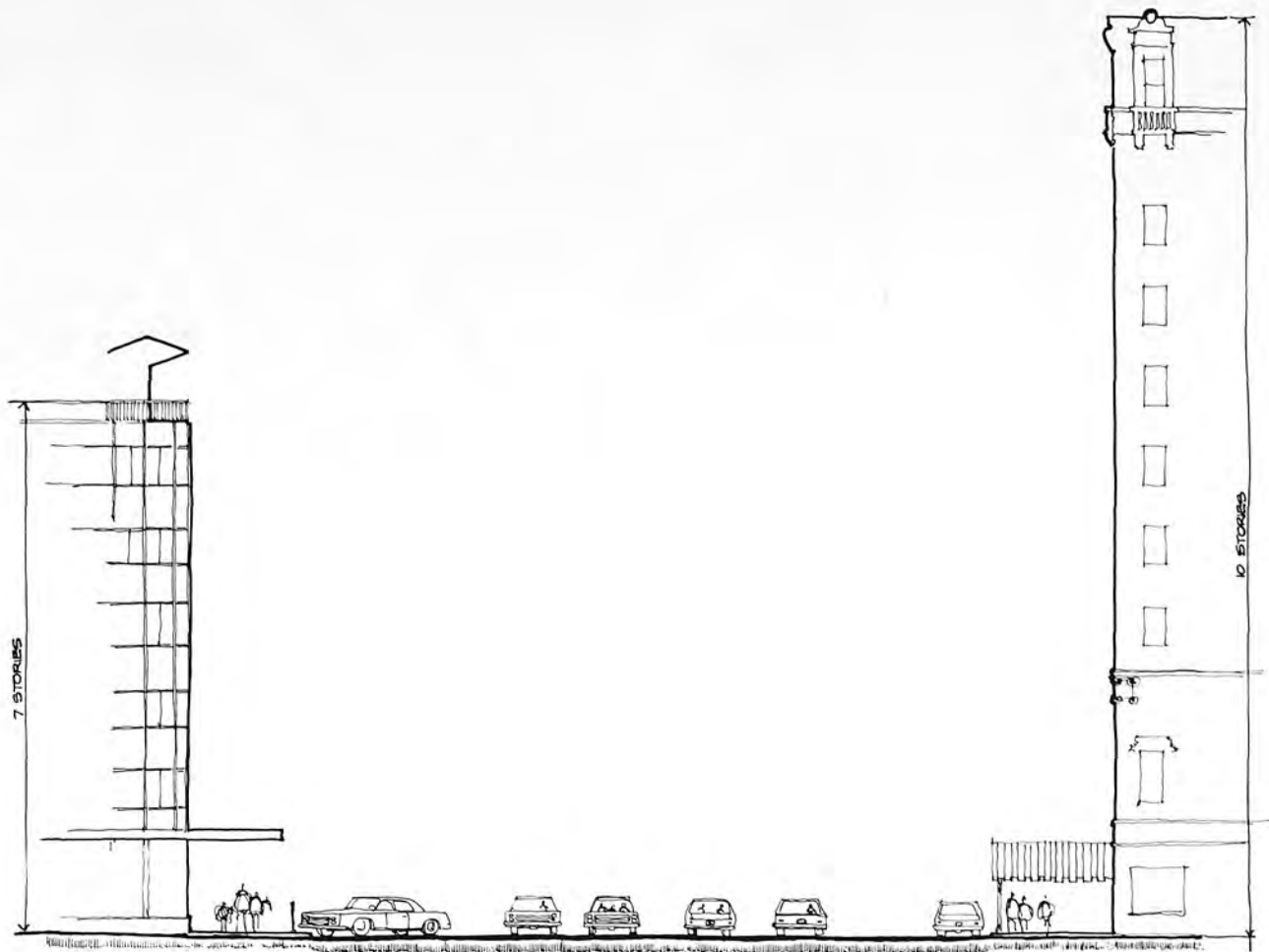
## OPTIONS

### General Information and Background

- The downtown has both immediate and long-range housing shortages. There is a need for mixed kinds of housing, ranging from subsidized to luxury in price.
- The river frontage along the northwest and northeast should be developed as low- to medium-density residential. Some tradeoffs should be permitted so that the 2,000 acres of railroad-owned land can be developed into a mixed-use project containing housing, convenience commercial, industrial and warehousing, open space, and buffering.
- Future gasoline shortages, tied to an effective public relations campaign, should act as an incentive to remove the negative image attached to the north side of the city.
- Better vehicular access to downtown from the south will lead to more vehicular congestion, increased driver frustration, and consequent further withering of the Central Business District.
- The Civic Center and federal area is bleak and without human scale. It is isolated and not properly linked to the retail area.
- There are enough nineteenth-century structures with sufficient visual or architectural significance to warrant a major preservation effort.
- The entire CBD should be considered in any re-development design project.
- There appears to be a significant community wide emotional attachment to Garrison Avenue and support for the concept of preserving the facades.

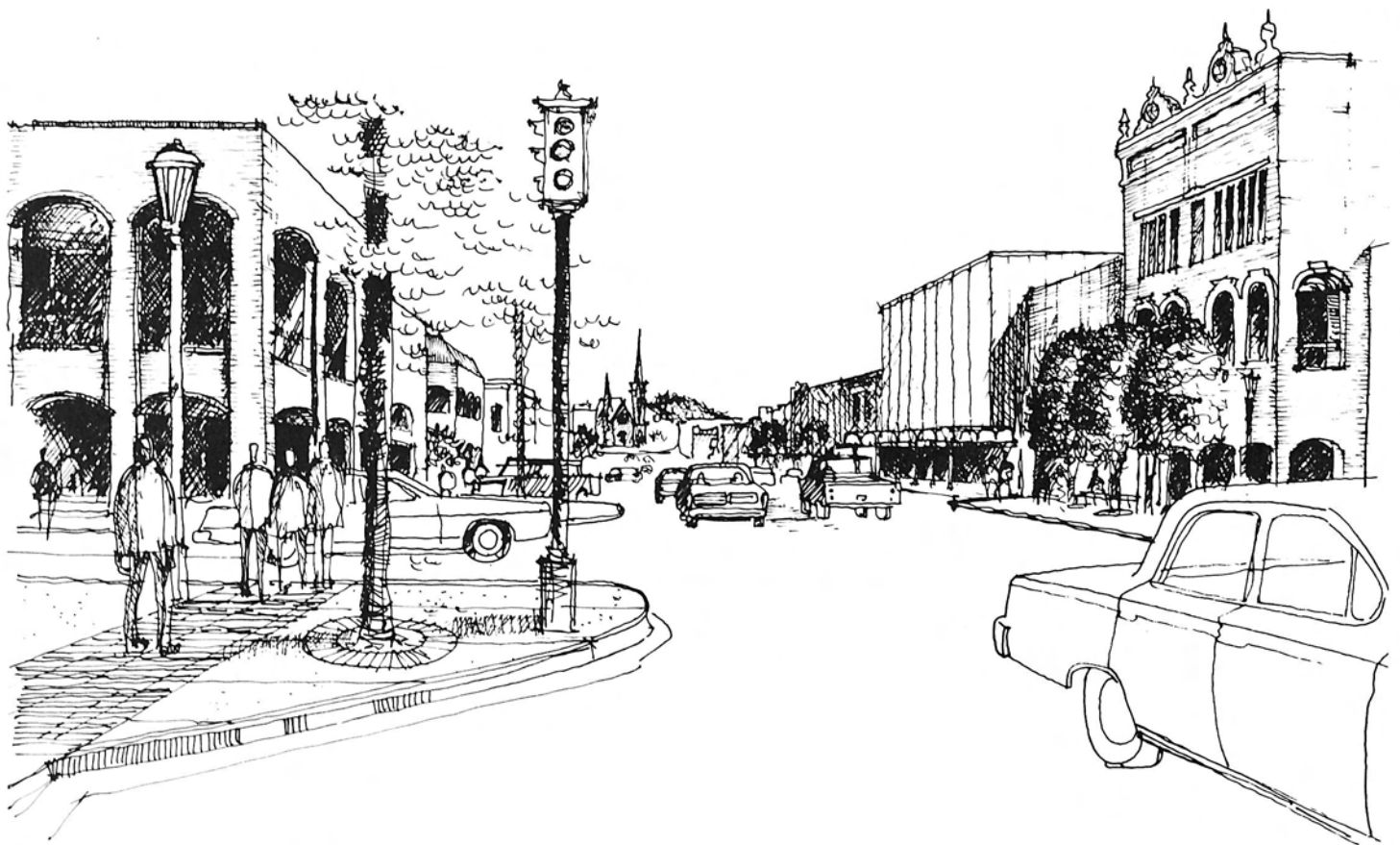


# STREETSCAPE CROSS SECTION CONCEPTUAL ALTERNATIVES



**STREETSCAPE  
CROSS SECTION**

**EXISTING**



# **STREETSCAPE DEVELOPMENT CONCEPTUAL ALTERNATIVE**

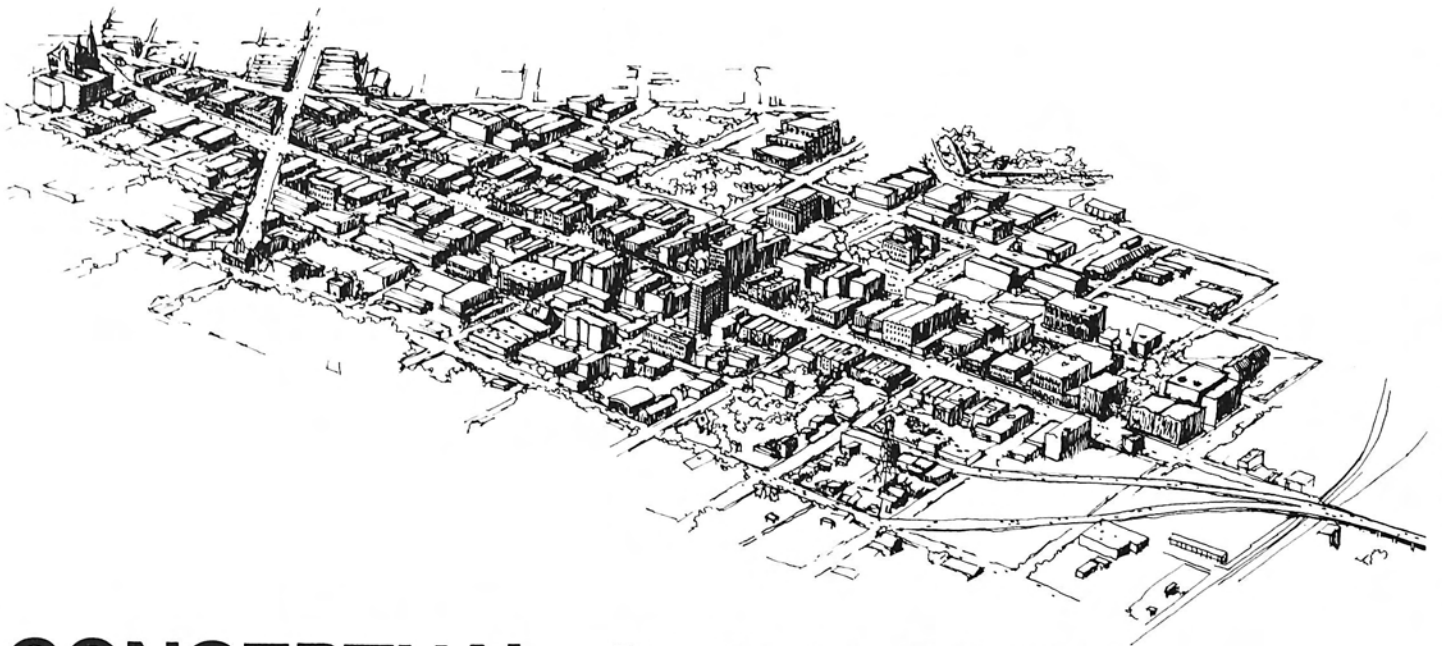
- "Old" does not necessarily mean "good." Property owners should not improve old buildings in the renovation process, but should maintain the flavor of the building era.
- Downtown has some near-miss renovations.
- Downtown needs a totally unified environment, something which suburban malls already exploit.
- CBID should capitalize on its existing--and unique--human scale, expand it and incorporate it into new buildings. It is a powerful magnet to visitor and resident alike.

#### Recommendations

- Preserve, on a long-range basis, at least those identified structures making a significant visual or architectural contribution--interest, scale, variety, or color.
- Designate those structures to be removed in order to open up vistas to the Belle Grove Historic District, the federal and county buildings, and the Fort Smith Historic Site.
- Stop through traffic at 2nd and 12th.
- Remove structures to create mini-parks, which serve also as pedestrian access to interior block parking.
- Change the Garrison Avenue building line. Extend the pedestrian and planting area one travel lane on each side and expose existing brick paving.
- Reduce Garrison Avenue to one traffic lane each way. Change North A and B Streets into a one-way couplet serving as a Garrison Avenue bypass.



**EXISTING AERIAL VIEW**



**CONCEPTUAL AERIAL VIEW**





- Abandon the Garrison Avenue "facade" concept, which can only serve to wall off north and south downtown; which will create an artificial, nonintegrated, Disneyland effect; which can only be a static, late nineteenth-century town museum; and which forces segregation of both activities and people.
- Define and agree upon goals and objectives for the CBD. Develop communitywide support. Educate the business community and CBD property owners to the benefits of a common goal and elicit their cooperation.
- Hold a workshop to educate the Fort Smith architectural community on historic building renovation problems and their solutions.

### Strategies

- Establish a historic district and nominate it to the National Register to take advantage of the 1976 Federal Tax Reform Act, which permits five-year depreciation of renovation costs for historic structures.
- Initiate an ordinance for the CBD that will protect a developer's investment in either old building renovation or new construction. Include policy statements, goals, general criteria, zoning and other enforcement mechanisms and a board to administer it.
- Set up a central processing agency for Small Business Administration loan guarantees. (The 1977 program was increased to \$2.3 billion for rehabilitation of older structures.) This could be done through the community development program or housing authority.
- Persuade bankers to make real estate or construction loans for renovation (or new construction) only to those applicants whose projects conform to the redevelopment design.
- Set up a grant application team for National Park Service restoration matching grants. (This program will have \$150 million on a 30% local/70% federal basis available in 1979.)



# LEGEND

-  MAGNETS
-  HEAVY DRAIN COMMERCIAL
-  EMPTY BUILDING
-  SECOND FLOOR UNOCCUPIED
-  COMMERCIAL RETAIL
-  WHOLESALE
-  SERVICE



## DOWNTOWN VACANCY DISTRIBUTION - EXISTING





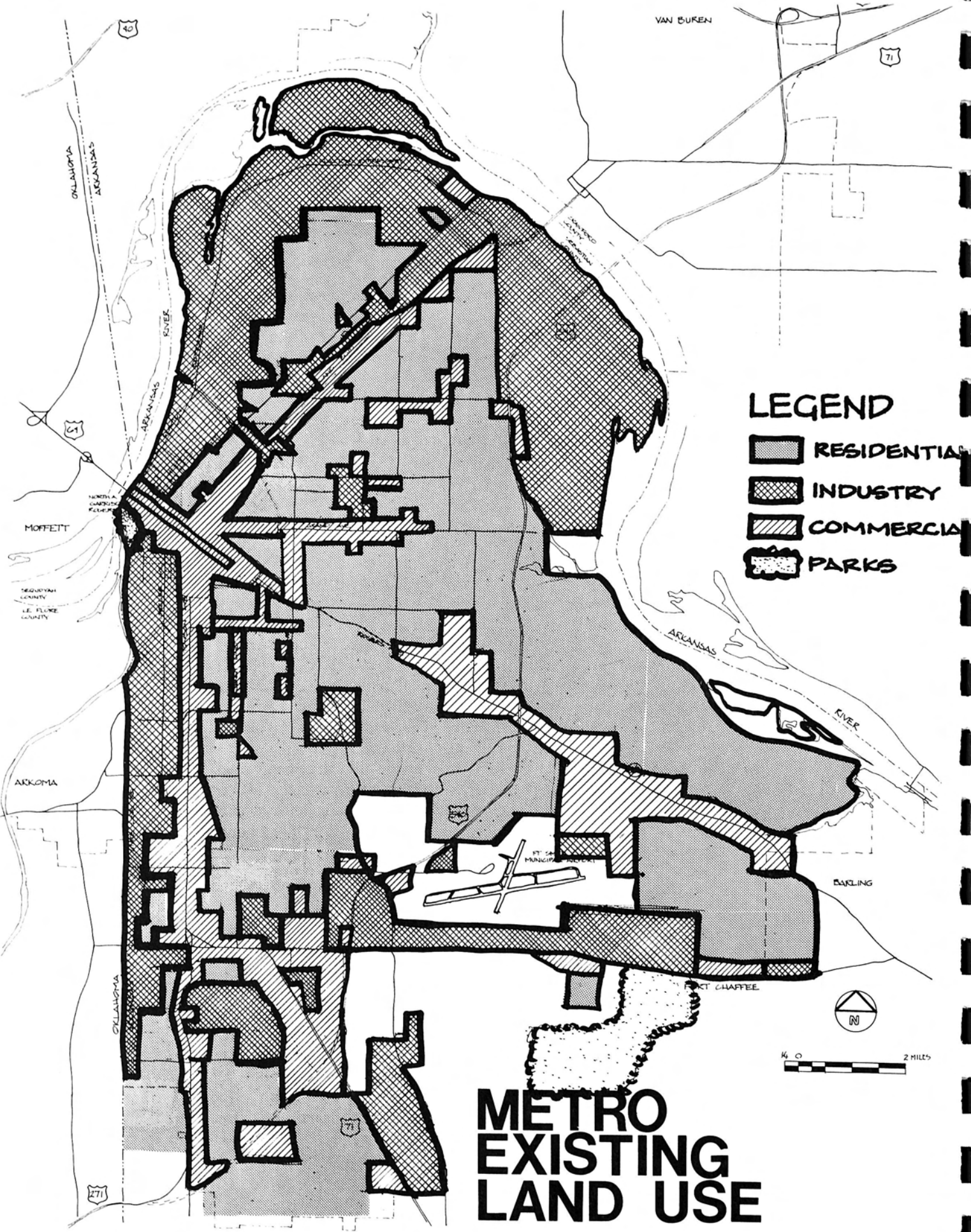
### Metro Land Use Options

While the existing zoning ordinance has some very good points, the present plan does not seem to totally exist in some locations. This makes the administration very difficult if not impossible in some cases. From looking at the zoning map, the concept is not clearly defined as to how the usage shown therein fulfills the goals and objectives stated in the ordinance. This situation will make exploitation of the zoning conditions inevitable.

A central need for the continued health of the city is a more positive mechanism for land use control. At present, zoning controls are successful mostly because the city has not had to contend with the high-volume, "big-time" exploitive developer. The zoning ordinance itself is a valuable document, listing many significant standards. The difficulty--potential as yet--is in the land use plan, which is the necessary complement to the ordinance. The plan is not clearly defined, it appears to be out-dated, and its administration would be difficult if there were a skillful effort to subvert it. That skill can be expected to move in very soon, in view of the great development opportunities in Fort Smith.

An effective land use control system will require two areas of effort, one rather difficult, one much easier. The work should begin immediately.

The lengthiest and most demanding of the projects will be the development of a new land use plan. Several concepts can be listed here which have proved effective in other cities.



# LEGEND

- RESIDENTIAL
- INDUSTRY
- COMMERCIAL
- PARKS

**METRO  
EXISTING  
LAND USE**

Concept 1: Encourage diversity.

It is traditional to segregate activities and building types--single-family houses here, apartments over there, etc. More recently, it has become clear that the most successful cities are characterized by their diversity. It is now seen that the character of an activity is far more important than its name. A well-designed apartment house can be not only an acceptable neighbor for detached houses, it can enhance their value. Many municipalities now zone by descriptive specifications for quality, rather than by category. Fort Smith's ordinance could easily be modified to work in this way.

Concept 2: Plan to avoid energy waste.

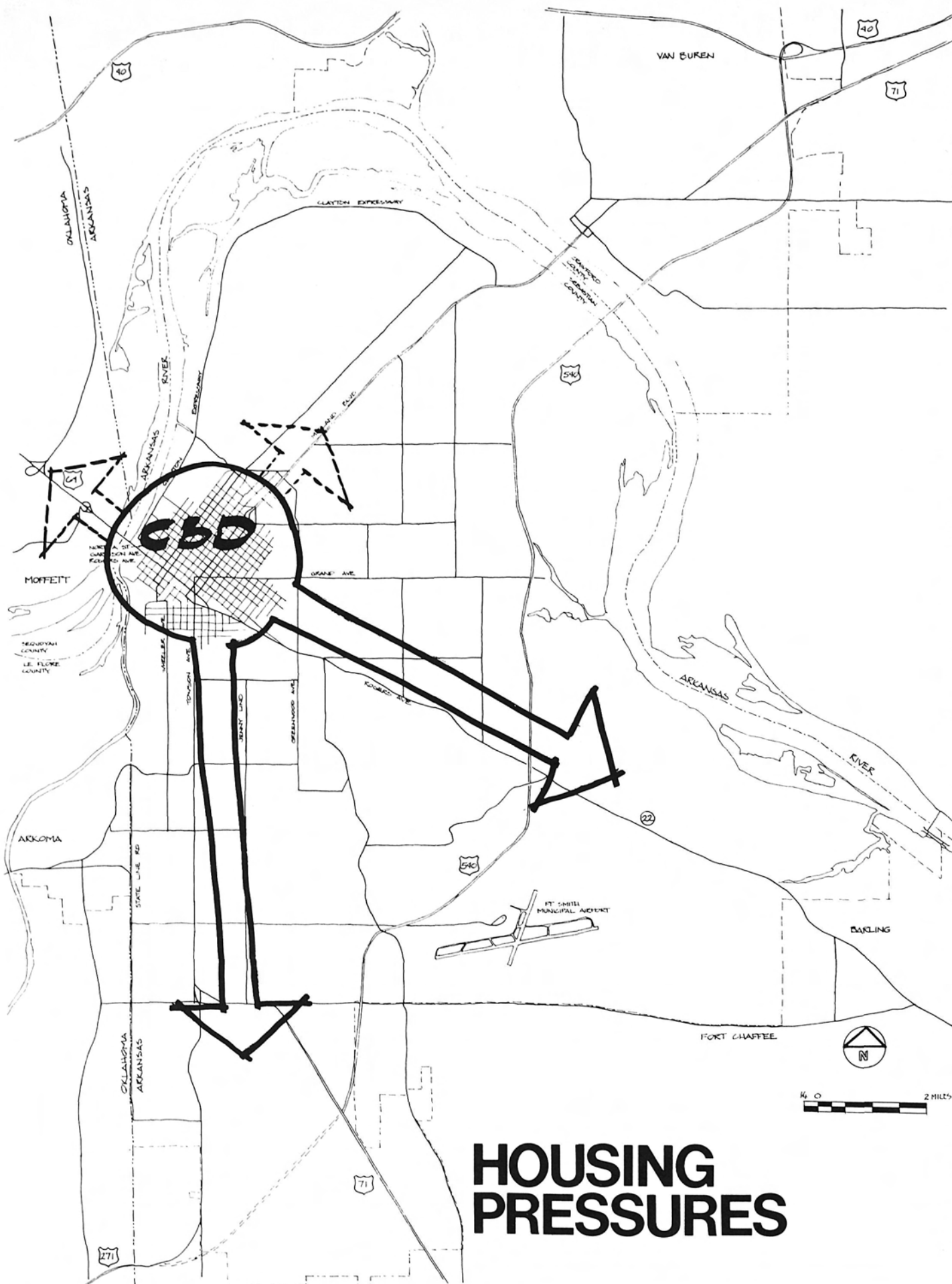
Direct developers to use natural systems constructively, so as to reduce fossil fuel demands.

Concept 3: Plan to reduce speculative rezoning.

It is a reality of development that rezoning almost automatically results in appreciated value, even before any development takes place. There is constant pressure, therefore, to break down the land-use plan. If this is not countered, the plan can become simply record-keeping, losing all influence over the direction of development. One mechanism which has been used to minimize this tendency is the introduction of an immediate official reassessment of a rezoned parcel, with a city levy falling due for a significant portion of the appreciation increment.

Concept 4: Plan to integrate constructive change.

The recommended steps for development and implementation of a land plan should include an extensive citizens' participation program in the development of the plan; a continuing citizen involvement in the application of the plan (a citizens' review board is often effective); and clearly defined, objective procedures to evaluate development applications, revision of the plan, and review of official decisions. Commissioners are thus relieved of any need to act arbitrarily and can avoid the political consequences of an unpopular decision.



# HOUSING PRESSURES

### Energy and Transportation Options

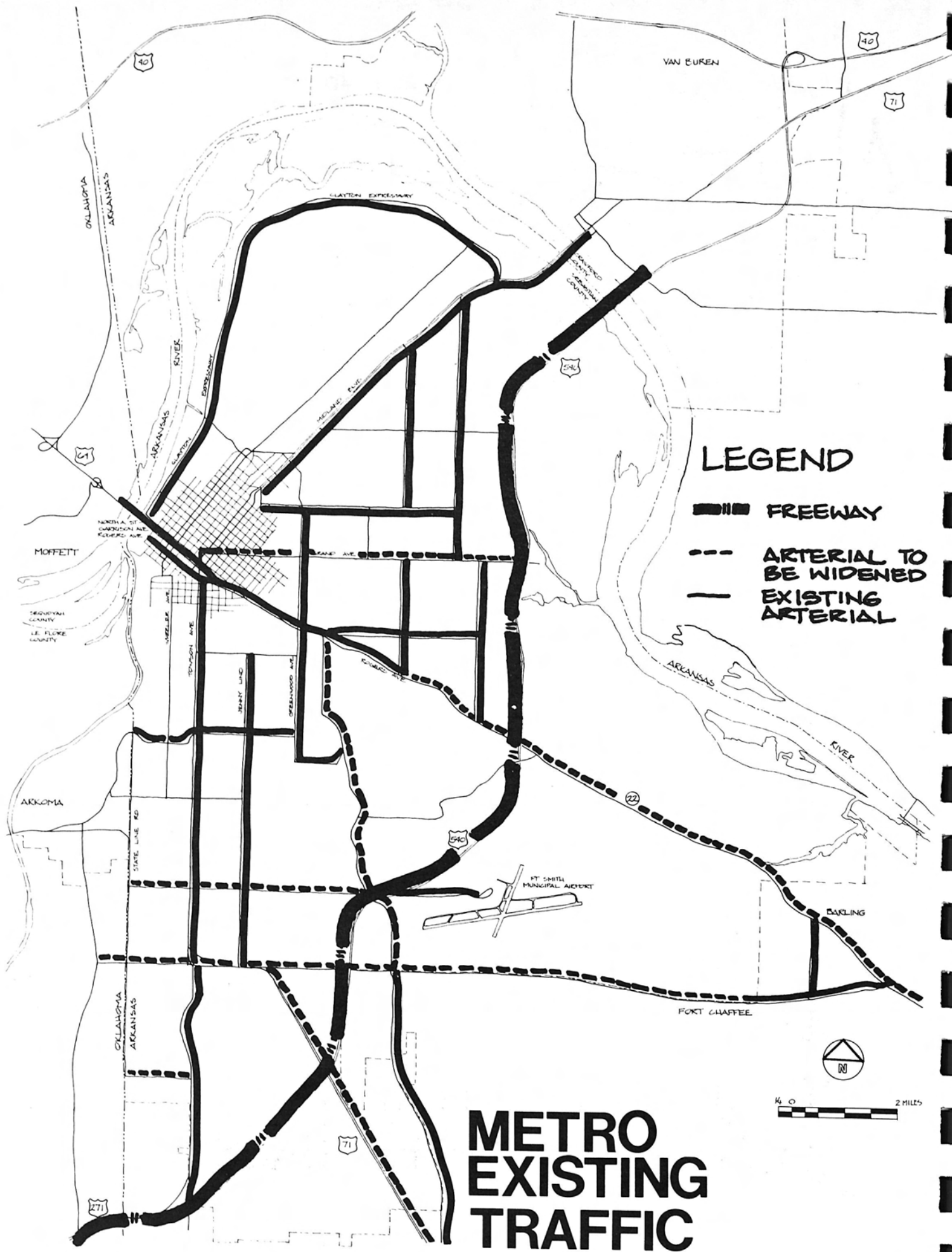
Another opportunity to use free natural systems to reduce purchased energy is the introduction of trees into the downtown area. The heat reduction offered by their shade, added to their humidification, their breeze-catching and their air-freshening reduces air-conditioning loads while making outdoor spaces more pleasant.

There is no doubt that slow travel in a congested area wastes fuel, but there is little prospect of improvement through building more roads.

The energy investment in road construction often exceeds the savings gained through easier movement. A modest strategy for easing traffic flow which promises to make sufficient improvement to carry the city for the immediate future is offered here. The volume and character of traffic is certain to be greatly affected by exterior circumstances, so that a major investment in new road building should be postponed while the entire 1990 Transportation Plan is carefully reviewed. At the least, the north parallel to Rogers Avenue, the State Line Road widening, and the connection of Clayton Expressway to I-540 should be the lowest priority improvements. These proposals offer minimal help to present congestion problems, are of high ecological impact, and invite greater dispersal rather than concentration and resurgence.

The option described here contains these elements:

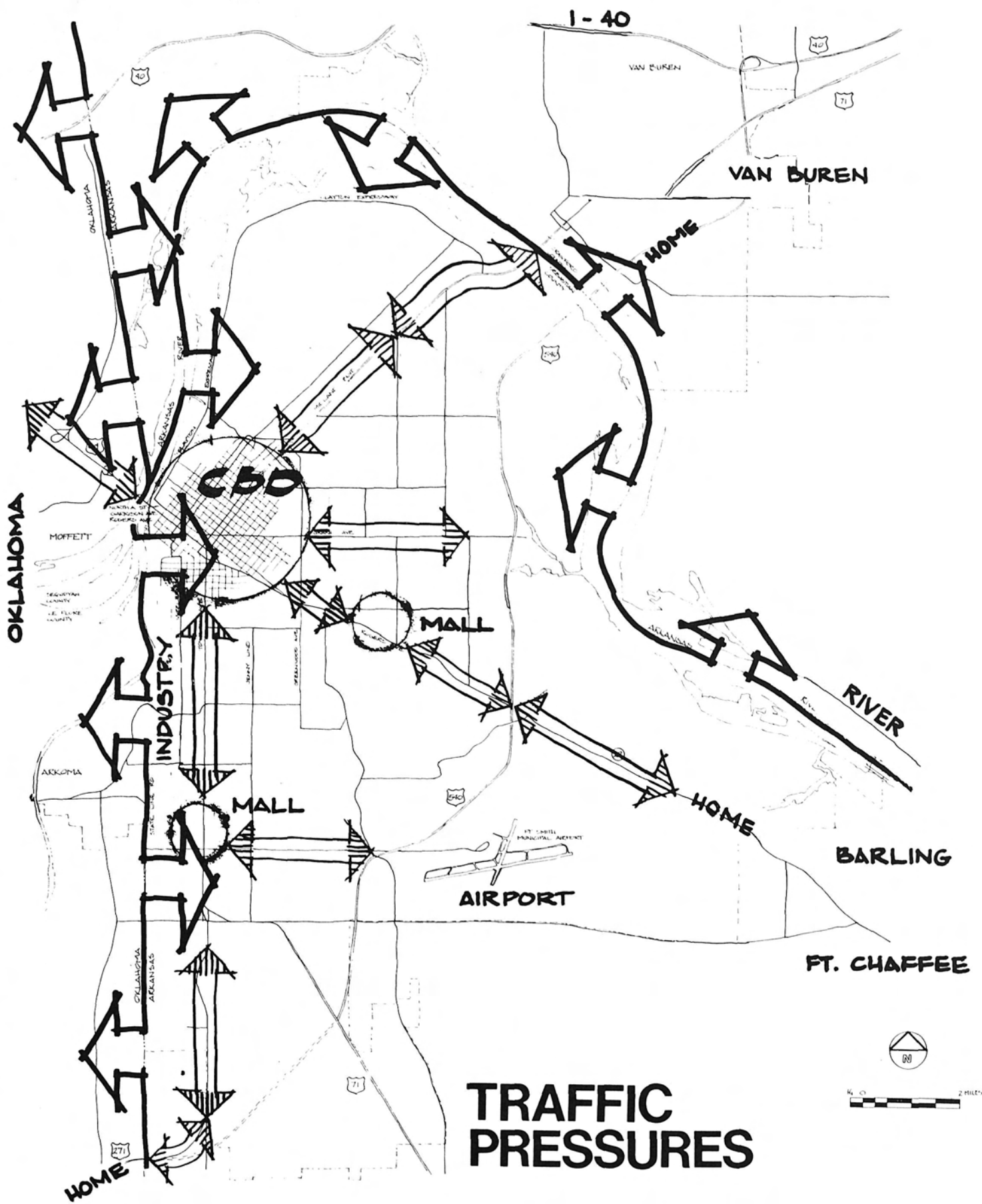
- Turn all eastbound traffic off Garrison at the bridge, split traffic into two one-way streams along A and B,, rejoining at Rogers Avenue, allowing (but not inviting) return of auto traffic to Garrison.
- Split traffic into two one-way streams along 4th and 6th streets, bringing them together at Midland Blvd. and at the widened Wheeler Avenue.
- Re-engineer the exit controls at Central Mall, reducing interference with Rogers Avenue flow. Install a changeable lane on Rogers, allowing three lanes into town in the morning, three lanes out at night.



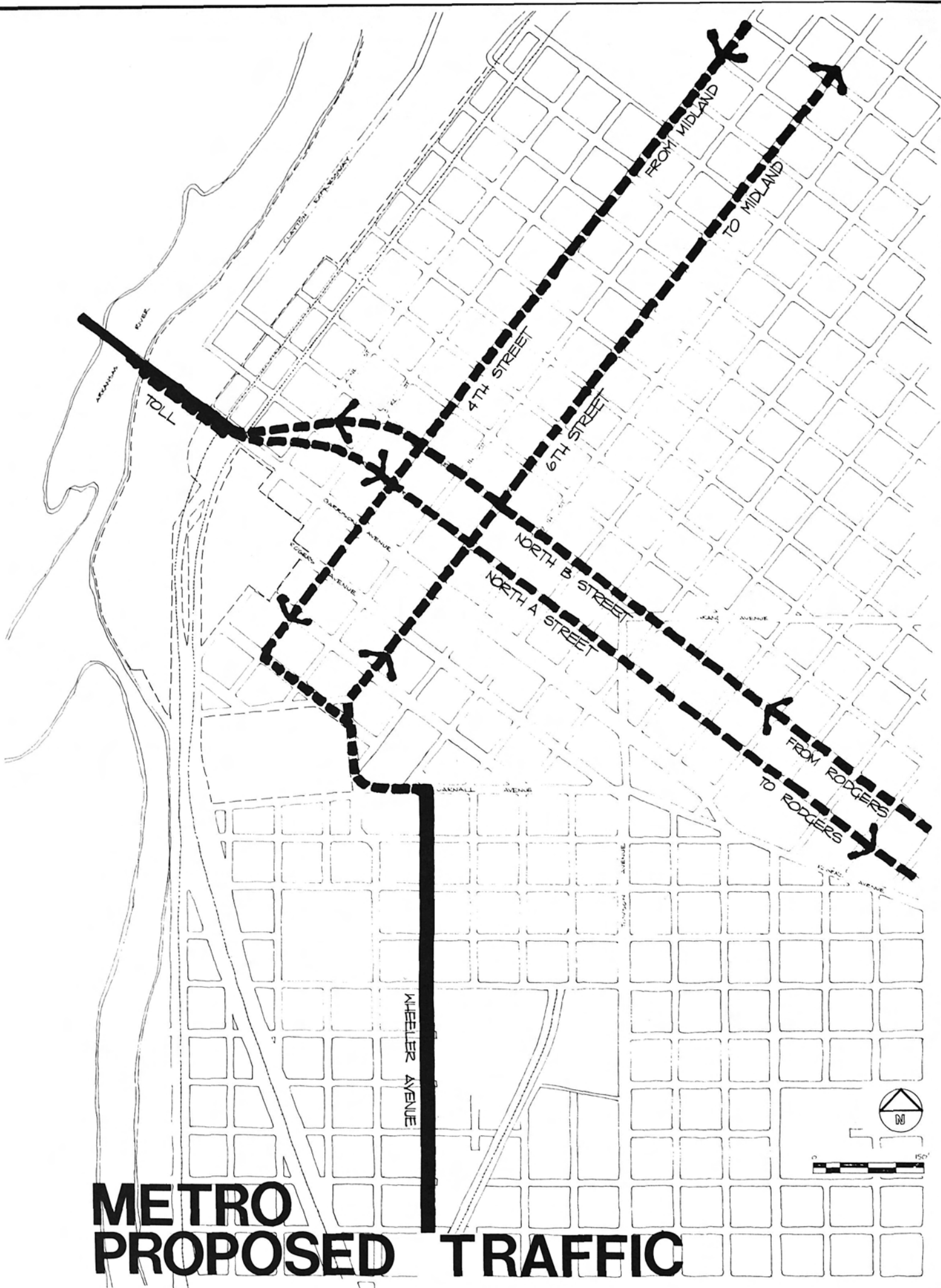
# LEGEND

- THICK SOLID LINE** FREEWAY
- DASHED LINE** ARTERIAL TO BE WIDENED
- THIN SOLID LINE** EXISTING ARTERIAL

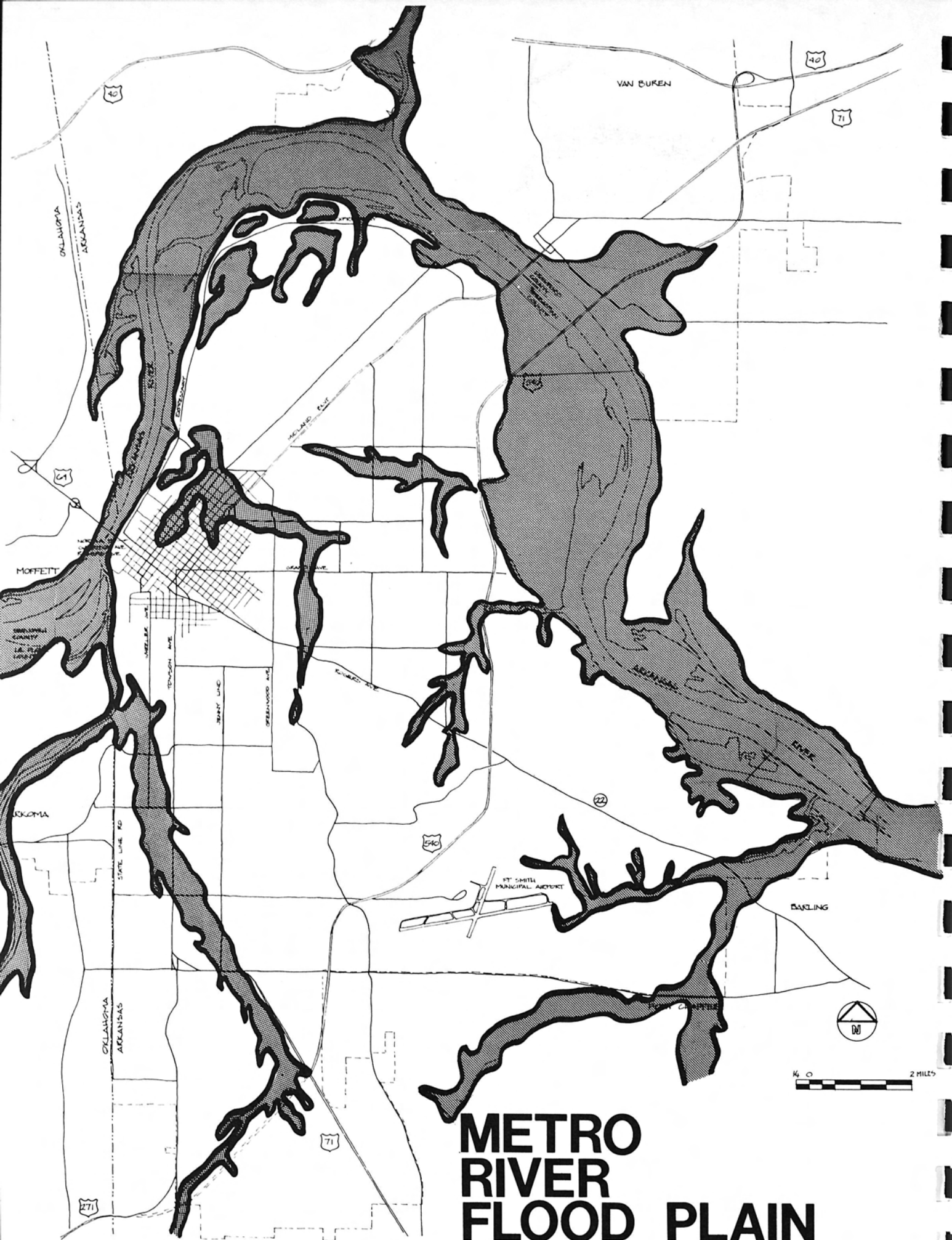
# METRO EXISTING TRAFFIC



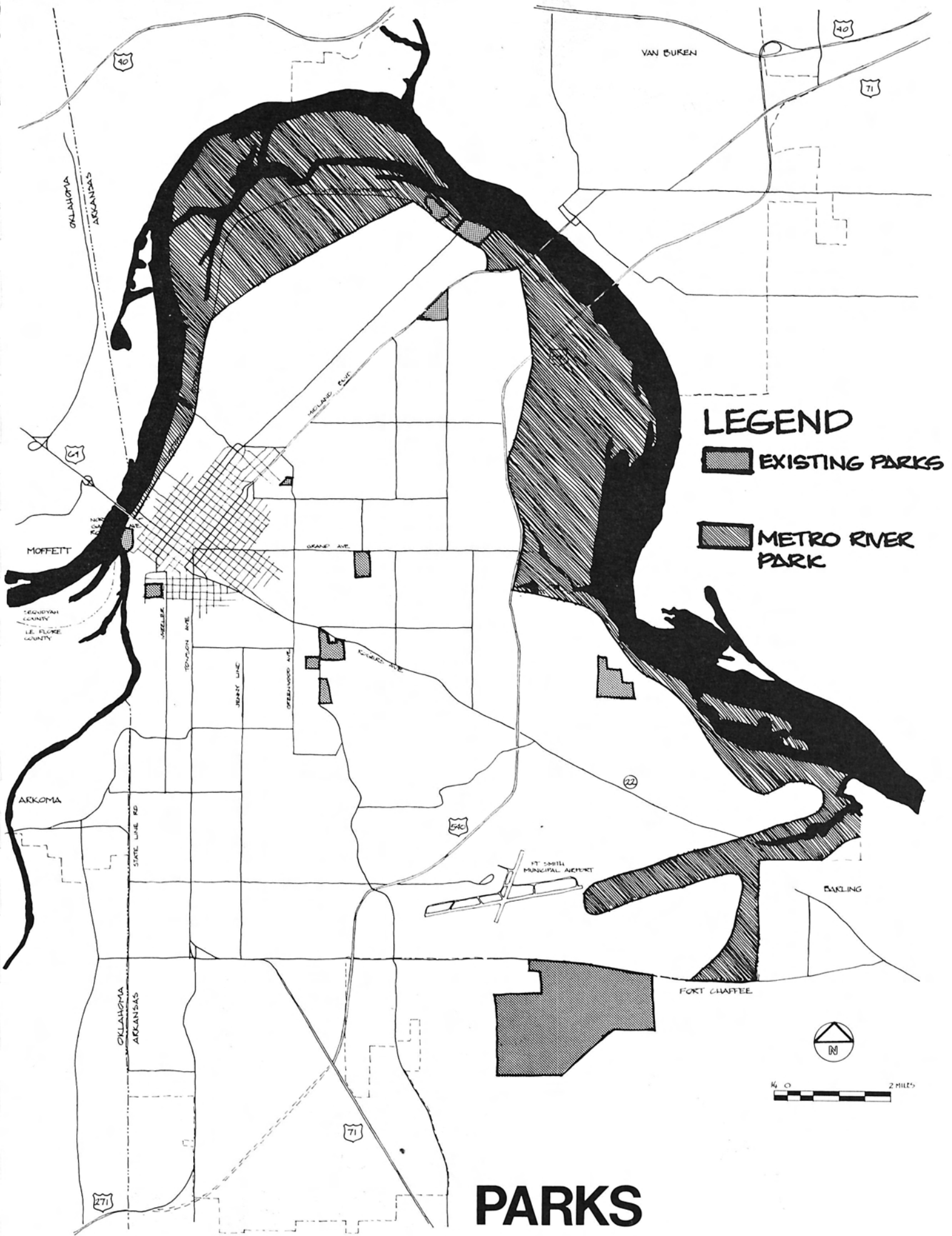
# METRO PROPOSED TRAFFIC



An attractive alternative for Fort Smith is to reserve at least the 100-year floodplain from development. Workable strategies can include limiting permitted uses to recreation, open space or agriculture; development of a program for acquisition of already built-up floodplain, making land swaps, or setting aside particular revenues for purchase of development rights or other techniques. The potential exists for a Fort Smith recreation area providing an amenity which would make the city clearly competitive with the suburbs, which would provide a tourist attraction unique in the country, and which could be a direct financial asset. In short, it offers an unusually fine disaster insurance policy.



# METRO RIVER FLOOD PLAIN

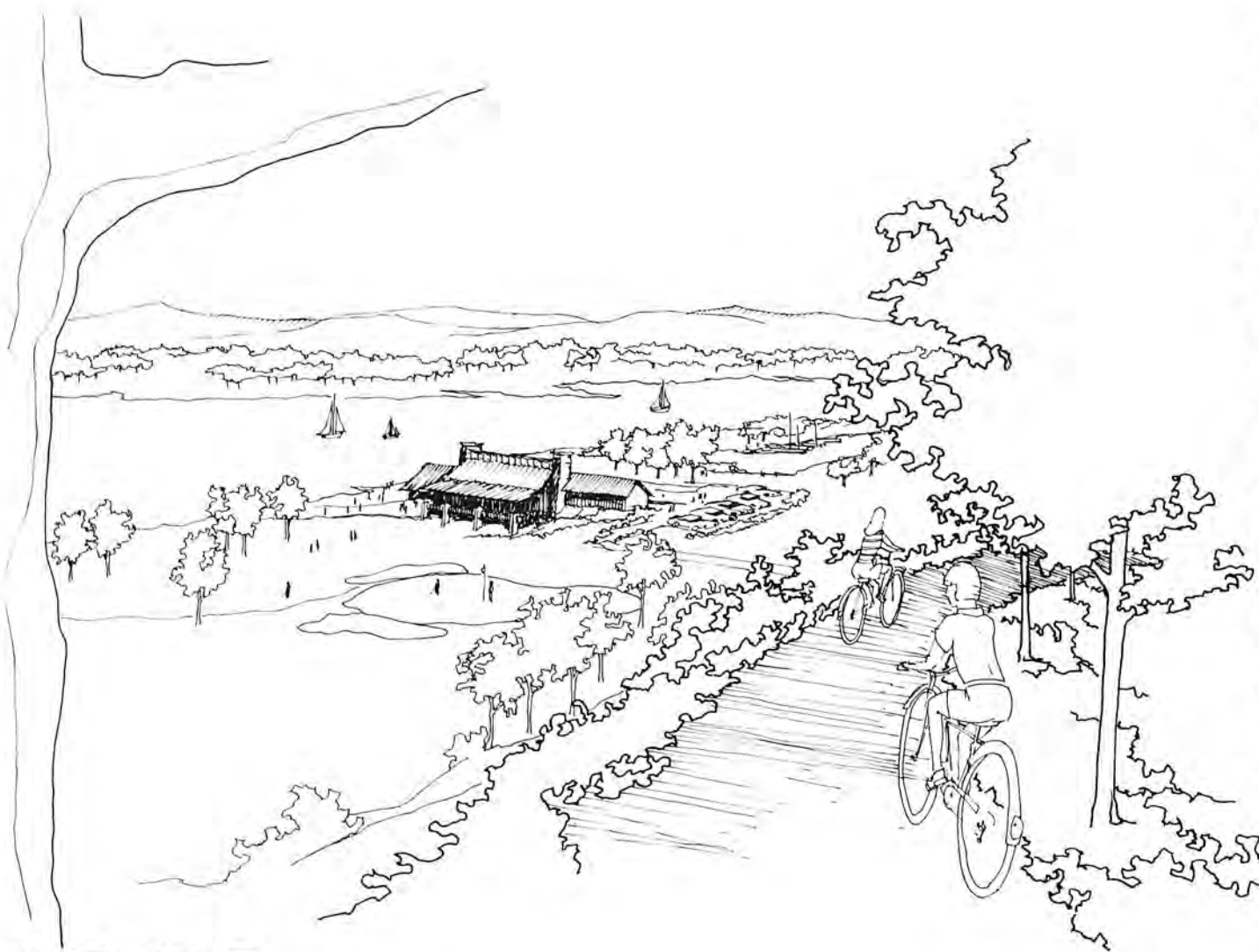


## LEGEND

 EXISTING PARKS

 METRO RIVER PARK

PARKS



# METRO RIVER PARK

### Regional Concerns for the Future

Reduction of energy demand: The character of the region offers many opportunities to reduce waste of energy without sacrificing the quality of life. Some of these are already being developed, while others should be explored as quickly as possible. The engineered flow control of the river opens the entire region to increased water transportation, which is one of the most energy-efficient modes. The city should expedite the construction of dock facilities, so as to grasp this opportunity.

Storm water drainage is now a major difficulty, and future urban growth can multiply it. The impermeable soil and low slopes result in high-volume runoff, and the existing system is completely overloaded. This may be an unrecognized advantage, since high-volume urban runoff is a dangerous contaminant for the river. Yet water is a valuable resource. Ways should be sought to catch rain water, use it beneficially and meter it slowly into the river. Landscaped catch basins, evaporation ponds, irrigation reservoirs--these are available, tested strategies.

Another neglected resource is solid waste. Hidden in a sanitary landfill, this is a future hazard and a present nuisance. Yet modern incinerator plants are available which are nonpolluting and which use the waste as fuel for electric generation. Similarly, modern sewage treatment plants can use land disposal, recovering nutrients and increasing crop production. Such municipal investments have proved profitable, both directly and indirectly.

The energy demand for travel from distant suburbs is one of the most serious problems of urban America. In addition, the stretching out of urban services is expensive in all resources. A new concentration on central-city liveability will conserve energy and materials.

The worst congestion found in Fort Smith is far milder than in many other cities. Further, it may be time for Fort Smith citizens to ask themselves how far the city should be disrupted to ease the travel of the transient noncitizen. Perhaps future traffic planning should be directed to influencing the noncitizen to move into the city, so he can help in conceiving and paying for improvements.

The options for long-range traffic improvement include these strategies: revise land-use patterns to reduce concentration of similar demands; reduce arterial concentration through paired one-way systems; enforce limited through-town routes for large vehicles, but maintain the capacity for service deliveries.

Floodplain management is one of the greatest challenges now facing Fort Smith. The present intention of the zoning plan is to offer the floodplain for industrial development. This course would be so hazardous that some of its dangers should be listed. First, the nature of the gamble should be made clear: When a structure is introduced into the floodplain, the owner and the user are betting against nature in a particularly unrewarding fashion. Floods inevitably will occur and loss will be suffered. The only doubt is the time. Even in a "controlled" river there will be floods which exceed the control capacity. Tomorrow? Next year?

The municipality could perhaps permit such a questionable bet if it were completely uninvolved, but this is impossible. The city's substance will be called upon for rescue, emergency relief, and replacement of damaged utilities. Further, its citizens are damaged by released industrial chemicals, navigation hazards, and assessments for disaster relief.

The sensible course for the city is to prevent such careless risks of public resources.

## CULTURAL ASPECTS

Fort Smith supports a strong and diverse list of cultural activities. The Little Theatre, for example, has a 30 year history, with 4 productions a year, each having an 8 day run. There is an active children's theatre, and numerous concerts are presented each season, among them a local symphony orchestra.

While the devotees of each interest participate with unflagging enthusiasm, a recent survey has shown that interest in the arts has reached a temporary plateau.

Yet there is apparently an untapped well of buoyant enthusiasm, and with the development of additional citizen support, perhaps sparked by a new access to the municipal auditorium, that enthusiasm not only could continue to give pleasure to local audiences, but may even help to create an expanding recognition of Fort Smith.

## CONVENTIONS

An economic opportunity so far under-emphasized by Fort Smith is the care and feeding of conventioners. While many cities are presently competing for this lucrative business. Few have the potential Fort Smith begins with. The city could enhance its present attractions--historic areas, proximity to mountain resorts, etc--by re-creating a lively and picturesque downtown, and a sensational river park. Its motel capacity, municipal center and other facilities can support a considerable initial visitation, and could expand to cater to a significant new economic activity. As in other cities, a "bedroom tax" could support a special convention agent.

#### A FINAL NOTE

The limited time available for a R/UDAT demonstration and the limited scope of our charge has kept the remarks in this report focused very tightly upon the city of Fort Smith. But no successful plan can be developed which ignores the connections between the planned area and its neighbors. At the same time, no municipality can impose its plan upon its neighbors. The aim, then, should be to develop a plan that invites the cooperation of the neighbors, but which does not depend on that cooperation for its own validity. The citizens of Fort Smith will profit by including that criterion in the charge to any planner.

6

# SUMMARY



## SUMMARY

As a result of its intensive study of the Fort Smith area, the R/UDAT team has come to four general conclusions. They are:

1. Downtown Fort Smith should be revitalized. The tremendous financial investment in physical plant and improvements, the important social and cultural ties associated with it, the significant potential for improvement--all these are factors leading to the conclusion that the downtown area is one of Fort Smith's most valuable assets and worthy of high priority in the community's agenda.
2. Any effort to redevelop downtown Fort Smith must be comprehensive in approach. Any redevelopment scheme that concentrates on one specific area or problem in the downtown is very likely to fail. Any successful scheme must capitalize on all the assets associated with downtown Fort Smith, including the Fort Smith National Park, the Belle Grove historic district, and the Municipal Auditorium and related government buildings.
3. Any program to redevelop the downtown must consider a wide range of possibilities and options, must be multi-disciplinary in approach, and must be sufficiently flexible to permit modification as conditions change.
4. Most important, the redevelopment of downtown Fort Smith must be viewed as a long-term, complex project that will require broad-based, on-going community support. Revitalization will not work if only a few individuals are involved. To succeed, the project must receive the active support of not only the downtown business interests, but of the large majority of Fort Smith citizens and public officials as well.

The R/UDAT team would like to thank the following organizations and individuals for their help:

American Institute of Architects,  
Urban Planning and Design Committee  
Fort Smith Section, Arkansas Chapter,  
American Institute of Architects  
Central Business Improvement District  
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Ed Bedwell  
H. L. Hembree, III  
Ross Pendergraft  
John Yantis  
Fort Smith Chamber of Commerce  
City of Fort Smith  
Western Arkansas Planning and Development District  
Belle Point Beverages  
Arkansas Best Corporation  
Broadway Restaurant  
Fort Smith Office Supply  
IBM Corporation  
Johnson-Sayers Photo Supply Company  
KFPW-TV  
KFSM-TV  
Mid-America Industries  
Morrow's Office Supply  
Southwest Times Record  
Westark Community College  
Xerox Corporation