

AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS
REGIONAL URBAN DESIGN ASSISTANCE TEAM
APRIL 1975



NEW ROCHELLE

NA9127
.N45A4

NEW
YORK

RUDAT PROGRAM

The Urban Planning and Design Committee of the American Institute of Architects has been sending Urban Design Assistance Teams to various American cities since 1967.

The New Rochelle Team is the 27th such team to be invited into a specific area to deal with environmental and urban problems which range in scale from a region to a small town, and in type from recreational areas to public policy and implementation methods.

The teams respond to the problems as described by the local AIA Chapters and their sponsors from the community leadership.

Each Regional/Urban Design Assistance Team is specially selected to include professionals experienced in the particular problems of the area under study. Members are not compensated for their service and agree 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 ... offers its recommendations ... perhaps a new approach for planning for action.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the RUDAT Program are:

to improve the physical design throughout the nation

to illustrate the importance of urban and regional planning

to stimulate public action

to give national support to local AIA Chapters in their efforts to improve their own communities and become actively involved in urban design and planning issues.

An assistance team cannot provide detailed analyses solutions nor final plans to complex problems in the 3-day visit, but it can objectively approach long standing problems with:

a new look by experienced outsiders

give new impetus and perhaps new directions for community action

make clear and comprehensive recommendations which are professionally responsible as well as politically and economically feasible and publicly understandable.

SPONSORSHIP

The request to the AIA was made by its Westchester Chapter and was accompanied by letters of interest and support from the following:

New Rochelle Development Council

Chamber of Commerce of New Rochelle

William F. O. Shaughnessy, President of Radio Station WVOX

League of Women Voters

Charter League and Citizens Council of New Rochelle, Inc..

The Standard Star Newspaper

Westchester County Department of Planning

Financed By:

The City of New Rochelle

The New Rochelle Development Council

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The RUDAT visit was co-ordinated by Daniel Kearin, AIA of the Westchester Chapter of the American Institute of Architects.

Members of the Team were assisted by:

Laslo Papp, AIA, Walter Mocak, AIA, Donald Breismeister, AIA, and Stephen Roth and Andy Lacombe of the Westchester Chapter of the American Institute of Architects.

John Carr, John Rose and Mike Kitner of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute School of Architecture.

The Mayor, Council and Staff of the City of New Rochelle.

Daniel Locitzer, Director of Development, Robert G. Emerson, City Planner, the Department of Development Staff.

Report Printing: City of New Rochelle
Mrs. Harriet Newton
Co-ordinator

RUDAT TEAM

Members of the American Institute of Architects Regional/Urban
Design Assistance Team
New Rochelle, New York
April 26-28, 1975

ROGER CREIGHTON

Creighton, Hamburg, Inc.
Transportation Consultants
Albany, New York

Mr. Creighton has been a transportation consultant to numerous communities and states throughout the country.

He has lectured on transportation planning in Poland, Sweden and Austria for the U.S. State Department and is the author of the textbook Urban Transportation Planning.

ISAAC GREEN, AIA

Deputy Executive Director
Michigan State Housing Development Authority
Lansing, Michigan

Architect, former Professor of Urban Planning, University of Chicago, author of numerous papers on housing.

LAWRENCE P. MELILLO, AIA (Team Chairman)

Architect and Urban Designer
Louisville, Kentucky

President: Melillo & Associates
Former National Chairman of the AIA
RUDAT Programs

Architect-Author-Lecturer

KARL B. RADOV

Economist
Boston, Massachusetts

Mr. Radov is a consulting economist specializing in urban and community development problems, urban finance, and market studies. He has taught at De Paul University in Chicago, University of California at Irvine, and is presently on the faculty of the Boston Architectural Center.

RANDHIR SAHNI

Architect/Planner
Houston, Texas

Mr. Sahni is an Associate with the firm of Caudill Rowlett Scott Architects/Planners.

Mr. Sahni is an architect and planner who has participated in planning and development projects in Texas, South Carolina, and Saudi Arabia. He has been active in master planning for several universities across the country.

MILO THOMPSON, AIA

Architect and Urban Designer
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Mr. Thompson is an architect and urban planner with the firm of Frederick Bentz - Milo Thompson and Associates of Minneapolis, Minnesota. An associate professor at the University of Minnesota School of Architecture, Mr. Thompson participated in RUDAT study of McMinnville, Oregon in 1973.

CONTENTS

THE TASK

EXISTING CONDITIONS

GOALS

MARKET DEFINITION

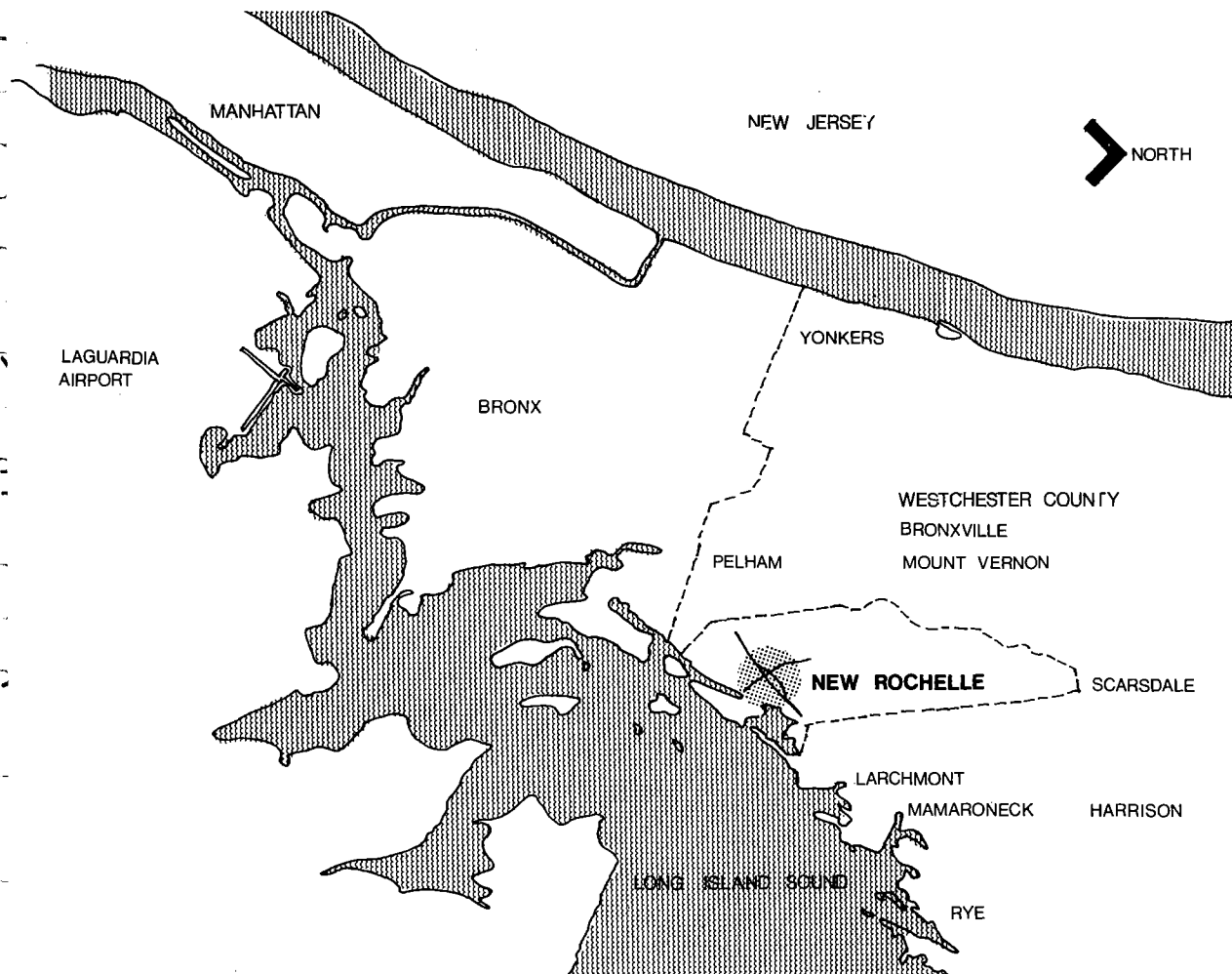
DEVELOPMENT
CONCEPTS

PLANNED ACTIONS

A PLAN
FOR PLANNING

CONCLUDING
OBSERVATIONS

THE TASK



The RUDAT team was given the assignment of recommending ways to make the New Rochelle town center a healthy, viable area which would more effectively serve the residents of the City.

Inevitably the scope of such an assignment is altered in the process of doing. The RUDAT team did carry out the original assigned task. IN DOING SO IT FELT IT WOULD BE MOST USEFUL TO NEW ROCHELLE BY BEING AS SPECIFIC AND CONCRETE AS POSSIBLE, AND BY AVOIDING GENERALITIES WHICH DO NOT DIRECTLY HELP GENERATE ACTION.

In addition, the RUDAT team concluded that it would call attention to the process by which ideas are transformed into actions. Everyone is familiar with all too many examples of plans which are never realized, despite broad support and substantial resources allocated to the job: THE RUDAT TEAM THEREFORE HAS SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS ON HOW TO MAXIMIZE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PLANNING FOR ACTION.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

RUDAT began its work by analyzing the problems and deficiencies which presently affect New Rochelle. These areas were identified in discussions with City officials, citizens, spokespersons of various groups and organizations, and through direct observation and analysis by RUDAT team members.

Underlying the problems which face New Rochelle's Town Center and for which solutions should be sought are two basic determining conditions:

I - THE CITY'S POSITION IN THE REGIONAL URBAN FABRIC

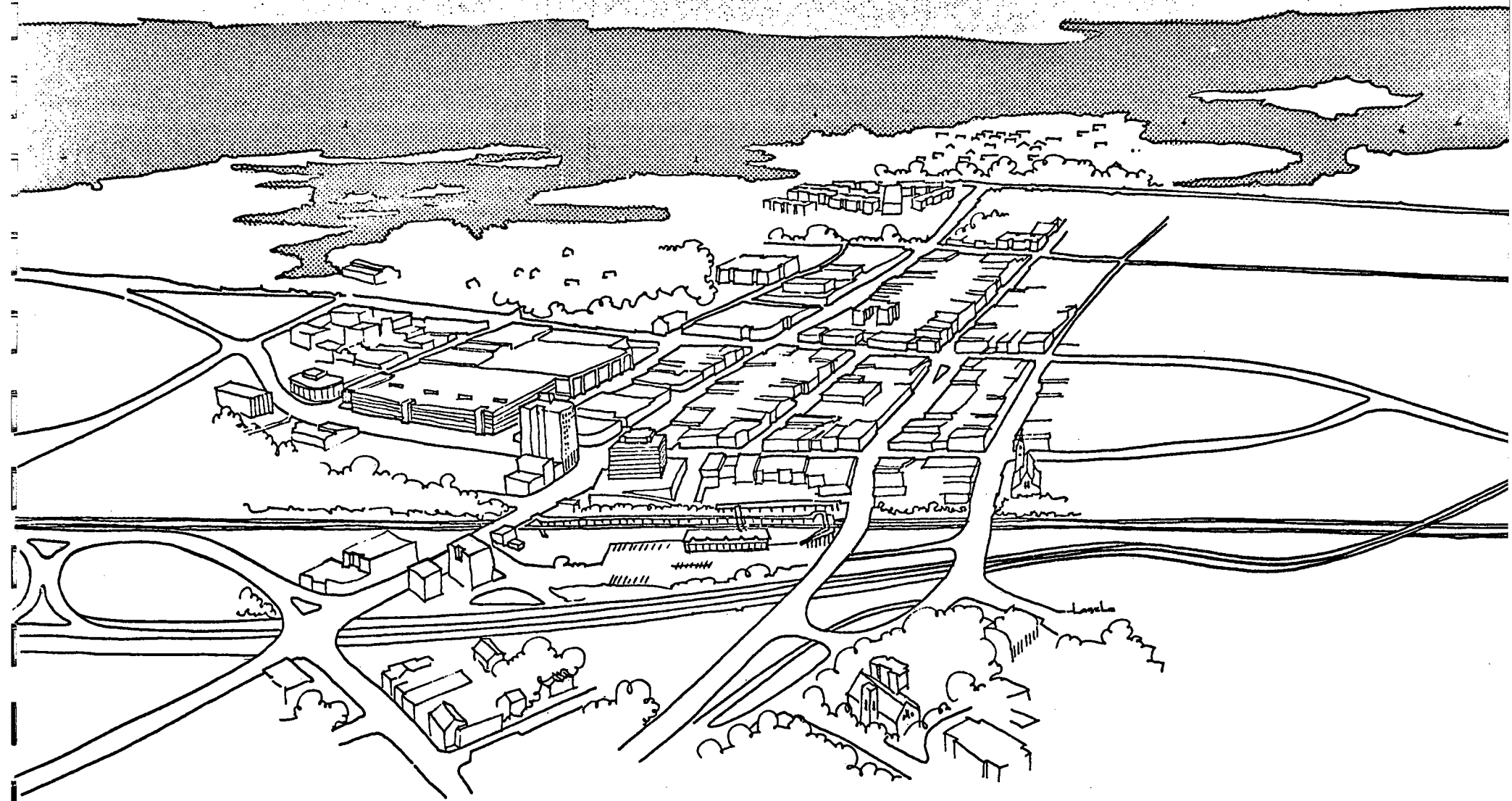
New Rochelle is not a self-contained entity. Its citizens work, shop, play and socialize almost totally independent of the City's boundaries. In addition, regional forces such as population movements and pressures, transportation networks, housing opportunities and economic conditions impinge on the City in critical ways without the City in turn being able to affect or alter these forces in any significant way.

II - NEW ROCHELLE IS A MIDDLE AGED COMMUNITY

The land area within the City's boundaries is almost all developed with structures and facilities which were created to serve conditions and needs, many of which have substantially changed. As a result, a substantial number of buildings and facilities are in various stages of obsolescence and are becoming more so with the passage of time. In order to meet changing conditions the City must revise and redo what is already in place. Meeting needs in this manner is difficult and traumatic. There are always people and groups who feel they are not benefiting by the changes being proposed. Nevertheless, changes in response to new conditions will inevitably take place. In order to maximize the benefits which can be derived and minimize the undesirable consequences of these changes, New Rochelle must recognize that change is and will take place, and deal with it in a conscious and purposeful manner.

Having pointed out the underlying dynamics, let us proceed to list some of the specific facts and problem areas which have been identified in connection with the Town Center. They are:

- * The Town Center conveys an unattractive and deteriorating image.
- * Many stores are vacant and will probably not be re-rented.
- * Visitors using the Town Center are often concerned about their physical safety. This concern keeps some people away altogether.
- * Traffic problems in and around the Town Center discourage people from using it.
- * Access to the Town Center is poor and congested.
- * Parking facilities serving the Town Center are insufficient and poorly related to usage patterns.
- * The Town Center is too diffuse to be served effectively by bus transit.
- * The Town Center is too big to be traversable on foot.
- * Housing adjoining the Town Center is declining, which in turn is a blighting influence on the Town Center.
- * People who should be using the Town Center are going elsewhere because they cannot find the goods, services and activities they are looking for.



GOALS

In order to begin finding solutions to the problems that exist in New Rochelle's Central Business District, the RUDAT team had to identify and make explicit a set of goals that the Town Center was to fulfill. The goals had to be specific enough to act as guides for generating and evaluating proposed solutions, yet general enough to permit the development of alternative solutions.

As a result of the public hearing and the RUDAT team's conversations with residents, businessmen, government officials, and representatives of interest groups, we have developed a list of goals. Many were spelled out explicitly for us; others are our interpretation of the intent of comments made by many people.

This set of goals is only a first approximation. It may be either incomplete or contain irrelevant elements, or require additional elaboration. This can be determined when it is subjected to examination by all interested parties. Nonetheless, it is the basis for the observations and analyses which follow in subsequent sections.

Many of the goals conflict with one another, to some degree, suggesting that some "trade-offs" between conflicting ends may be required in order to reach a decision on a specific project proposal for implementation. Moreover, the goals themselves deal with a rather wide range of activities and place demands for a very high level of performance by every project.

- * Provide a multi-purpose Town Center.
- * Provide a mix of goods and services to fulfill the desires of all residents.
- * Create a real estate tax base that is a net contributor to the City.
- * Create an economically viable retail and commercial area.
- * Create a physical and social environment on the streets of the Town Center and in The Mall where people feel comfortable.
- * Provide a Town Center with which all residents are proud to identify.
- * Recognize and draw upon existing physical resources.
- * Maintain a high level of environmental quality.
- * Provide an adequate quantity and variety of public space.
- * Create easy, attractive pedestrian access to stores.
- * Provide an environment where people are physically safe.
- * Permit a smooth, more rapid flow of traffic.
- * Provide faster bus service to the Town Center and Railroad Station.
- * Provide for safe traffic movement.
- * Provide adequate parking for the Town Center.
- * Preserve and improve the housing stock in the Town Center.
- * Introduce continuity into the development process.
- * Create a partnership between the City, residents, business community and private developers.
- * Demonstrate the ability of the community to achieve its goals.

MARKET DEFINITION

A central element of the examination of New Rochelle's present Town Center is the definition of the markets to be served by retail and commercial enterprises, as well as other activities located in the Center. Studies of commercial market areas, particularly those done from a broad perspective typically focus on the potential dollar volume of sales available to merchants. However, given the quantitative and qualitative character of the enterprises currently located in the Center, and the nature of the planning decisions to be made on the basis of market analyses, it is clear that some different foci must be generated by any studies undertaken for New Rochelle. Moreover, these studies must recognize that spending and all other activities are human activities, undertaken by people; thus to understand the activity, we must be able to understand the people.

We can identify several different questions that should be addressed by market studies:

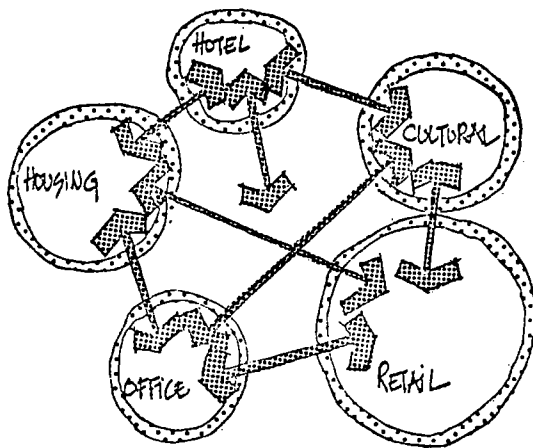
1. What are the geographic market areas to be served by the Town Center?
2. Given that there may be several geographic areas that are to be served, what are the distinctive economic and taste characteristics of each?
3. What is the range of goods and services that the Center can feasibly offer?
4. What are the space requirements implied by geographic and feasibility studies?
5. Will the structures enclosing this space generate a level of property tax revenue consistent with the City's needs?
6. Is the level of city services that the community desires consistent with the ability of its non-residential property to generate tax revenue?
7. Is the volume and scale of feasible non-residential development consistent with the desired quality of residential living?

When the problem of defining the market is approached in this manner, the inter-relatedness between business activity, space, scale of constructed environment, municipal finance, quality of life, and a host of other factors becomes both apparent and more manageable. When studies such as these are combined with the more traditional market study, whether for the entire Center or a particular enterprise, the information more usefully meets the decision making needs of developers, businesses, the City, and its residents.

DEVELOPMENT CONCEPTS

Having examined existing conditions and -- through listening to the statements of citizens at a public hearing on April 26th -- obtained a clear idea of what the important goals of New Rochelle are regarding its Town Center, the RUDAT developed a series of basic concepts related to the planning of the Town Center. Each concept is intended to highlight a particular quality or idea of what is desired for the Town Center.

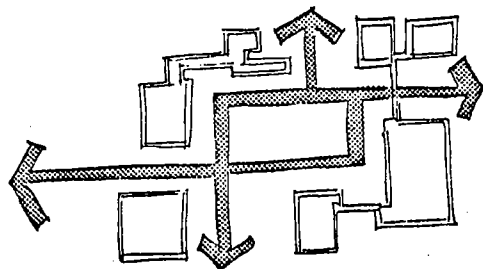
These concepts are briefly described below and, where appropriate, are illustrated by sketches.



1. MIXED USE DEVELOPMENT IN THE TOWN CENTER.

Mixed land uses (residential, commercial, office, civic, cultural, governmental) will keep a more constant presence of people in New Rochelle's Town Center -- a livelier, safer situation than having a deserted area from 5 P.M. to 8 A.M. Also, by mixing uses, people will be able to walk to shop, to work, and to the railroad station, thus reducing demand for automobile travel.

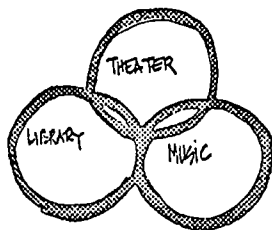
PEDESTRIAN MALL AS AN ORGANIZING ELEMENT



2. USE A PEDESTRIAN MALL AS AN ORGANIZING ELEMENT.

The Town Center is transitioning from old-style ribbon development alongside arterial streets to the newer Mall form; Malls are superior in the way they handle the parking problem. To effectuate this transition, a pedestrian Mall or Malls should be used as an organizing element -- providing double access to stores and making the shopping experience more pleasant. (The word "mall" is used here to mean a pedestrian way that is much more intensive than that contained in Macy's Mall.)

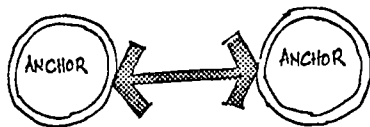
CULTURAL ACTIVITIES



3. EMERGE CULTURAL ACTIVITIES IN THE TOWN CENTER.

This concept is consistent with New Rochelle's initiatives in planning a library and theater in the core. Music, literature, the theater, and the other arts will draw different groups, many times at off peak hours, and will enhance the desired quality of life in the Town Center.

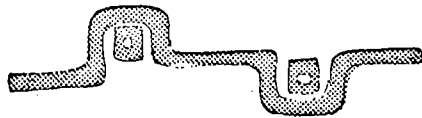
"DOUBLE ANCHOR" STRATEGY



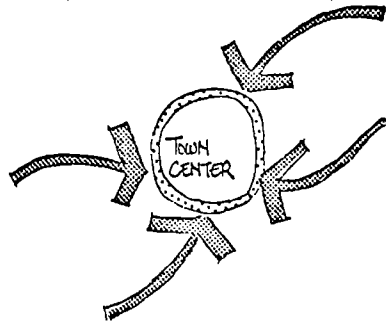
4. CREATE A "DOUBLE ANCHOR" STRATEGY FOR RETAILING.

Major retail centers need at least two "anchor" generators (commonly department stores) at opposite ends of a pedestrian mall. These anchors complement the specialty shops lying between them.

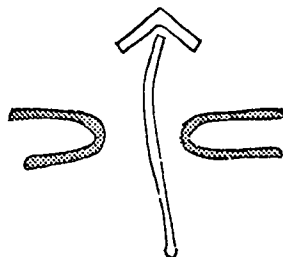
CONTINUOUS, RATHER THAN DISCRETE FORMS



INCREASE TOTAL ACCESSIBILITY



GATEWAYS



5. DESIGN IN CONTINUOUS RATHER THAN DISCRETE FORMS.

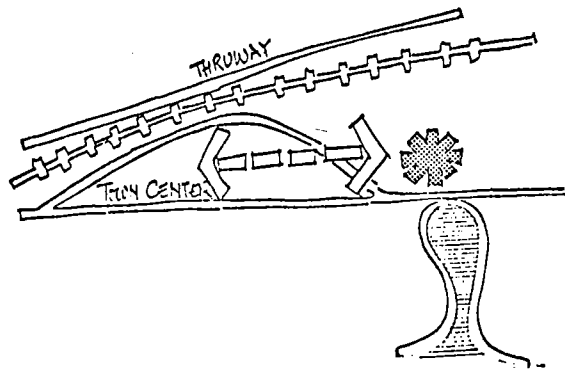
The pedestrian in central business district needs continuity of shops, or exhibits, or restaurants, or other things to do or see. Breaks in continuity, such as large parking lots, are harmful. The Town Center, therefore, should be designed to provide this continuity and to avoid the separate, scattered buildings surrounded by parking lots that characterize too many downtown areas.

6. INCREASE TOTAL ACCESSIBILITY OF THE TOWN CENTER.

Central areas prosper if they are accessible -- and die if they are inaccessible. Accessibility must be by all modes -- automobile, bus and rail, and it includes the parking and walking components of the trip. New Rochelle's Center must be made more accessible by taking many different kinds of actions -- reducing congestion on North Avenue, Huguenot Street, and Main Street, and improving access to and egress from parking lots.

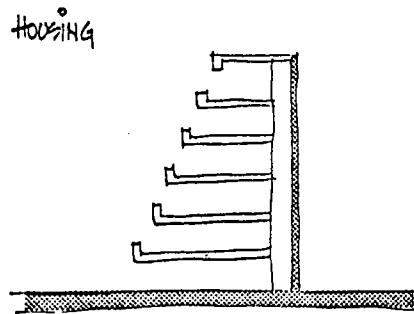
7. MARK THE GATEWAYS TO THE CENTER.

Persons driving or riding in buses entering the Town Center by way of four or five main routes should be able to recognize that they have reached a unique place -- the heart of New Rochelle. How these gateways should be marked is not specified here.



8. OPEN UP WATERFRONT TO EAST END OF TOWN CENTER.

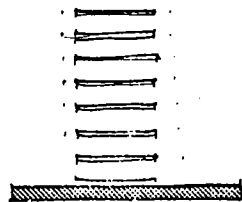
The waterfront is a prime asset of New Rochelle, and should be as accessible to the Town Center as it was in the 18th Century. Pedestrians at the eastern end of the Town Center should have ready access to enlarged recreation areas on Echo Bay.



9. ADD MORE HOUSING TO THE TOWN CENTER.

More housing, for a mixture of incomes, should be added to the Town Center. The Town Center is close to things -- the commuter station, the waterfront, and of course, work and shopping opportunities. More housing will also mean an increase in purchasing power that should benefit local merchants.

BALANCE :



FLOOR SPACE

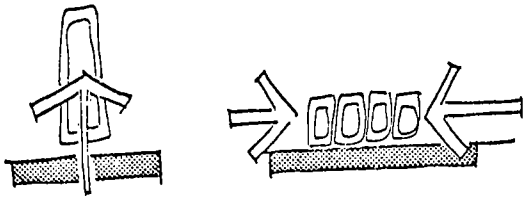


STREET CAPACITY

10. BALANCE FLOOR SPACE AND STREET CAPACITY.

Buildings generate traffic and traffic must flow over a street system which has a finite capacity. New Rochelle should seek a total level of Town Center development, in terms of floor space, that will be exactly in balance with street capacity. To seek more floor space would be self-defeating because increased congestion would result.

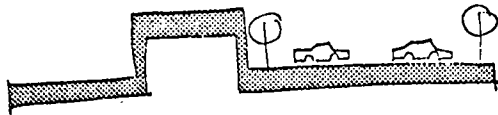
INCREASE DENSITY



11. INCREASE TOWN CENTER DENSITY AND COMPACTNESS.

Within the limits set by the street system's capacity, the Town Center should be made as dense and compact as possible. Compactness can be either in space or time: in other words, a jitney system (if found feasible) could make a linear Town Center "work" more compactly. The reason for density and compactness is to bring more people closer together, and to make it easier for pedestrians to shop the whole Center without unparking and reparking their automobiles.

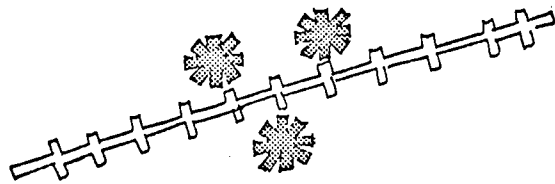
PARKING: ADEQUATE / WELL PLACED



12. PARKING: ADEQUATE AND WELL PLACED.

Parking is of vital importance to the Town Center, but it must be properly located. Parking should be removed progressively from all arterials where it impedes circulation. Off-street parking, in the right quantity, should be located very near the stores and other places where people want to go. But the design of off-street parking areas and buildings must be handled very carefully, so that it does not break up the continuity of the shopper's pedestrian trips.

RAILROAD STATION AS A TRANSPORTATION CENTER



13. ORGANIZE THE RAILROAD STATION AS A TRANSPORTATION CENTER.

To the extent possible, the railroad station should be made the hub and connecting point for several modes of transportation: trains, local buses, perhaps inter-city express buses, cars, and pedestrians.

PLANNED ACTIONS

In order to illustrate how the preceding concepts might be applied in the New Rochelle Town Center, RUDAT has sketched out, in a very general and diagrammatic way, a composite of these concepts. This should not be taken as a plan for the City Center. It is simply an attempt to show how the different concepts can be made to work together, reinforcing each other to achieve the goals that are sought by the people of New Rochelle.

The composite is not intended and should not be interpreted, as a commentary upon any existing or proposed project. What follows highlights a group of related actions that embody the development concepts described earlier in this report.

THE VEHICULAR CIRCULATION SYSTEM

The elements of the vehicular circulation system are (a) the principal arterials and collectors, (b) the bus lines, and (c) the regional services -- the railroad and the New England Thruway. This circulation system, provided that TOPICS recommendations are carried out, should serve New Rochelle well. It is necessary, however, that parking be eliminated progressively from arterial streets and that the off-street parking supply be increased correspondingly. Parking lots must be located carefully so as not to break the continuity of shopping.

COMPOSITE OF SYSTEM AND CONCEPTS

The composite of the preceding systems and concepts is shown on the final map. The key elements are the anchor concept, the pedestrian way, and the mixed uses in the Town Center. The principal pedestrian way running parallel to and between Huguenot Street and Main Street may have to be elevated in some places to pass over busy roads.

COMPLEMENTARY ACTIVITY GENERATORS

RUDAT's recommendations on land use for the Center call for a deliberate mix of different uses - residential, retail, service, office, civic, cultural, and governmental. This mix is designed to keep the Center "alive" most of the day, to increase purchasing power right at the core itself, and to decrease demand for vehicular travel.

THE ANCHOR CONCEPT

The need for a double anchor for the Town Center-- probably in the form of one major department store at each end-- is critically important. If three anchors can be obtained, so much the better. But these anchors must be spaced correctly, and connected by a pedestrian way, so that they give form to the whole center.

THE PEDESTRIAN SYSTEM

The pedestrian system that RUDAT proposes does three things. It connects the two major anchors and along the way provides access to specialty stores, apartments, the library, and other activities such as restaurants, snack bars, and cultural activities. Secondly, it provides connecting ways into the Center from peripheral parking lots and stores. Finally, it provides a way to get from the Town Center to the Echo Bay area.

These ways should be designed so that the pedestrian can experience people, variety, beauty, and the opportunities to shop. There should be a minimum of dead spaces.



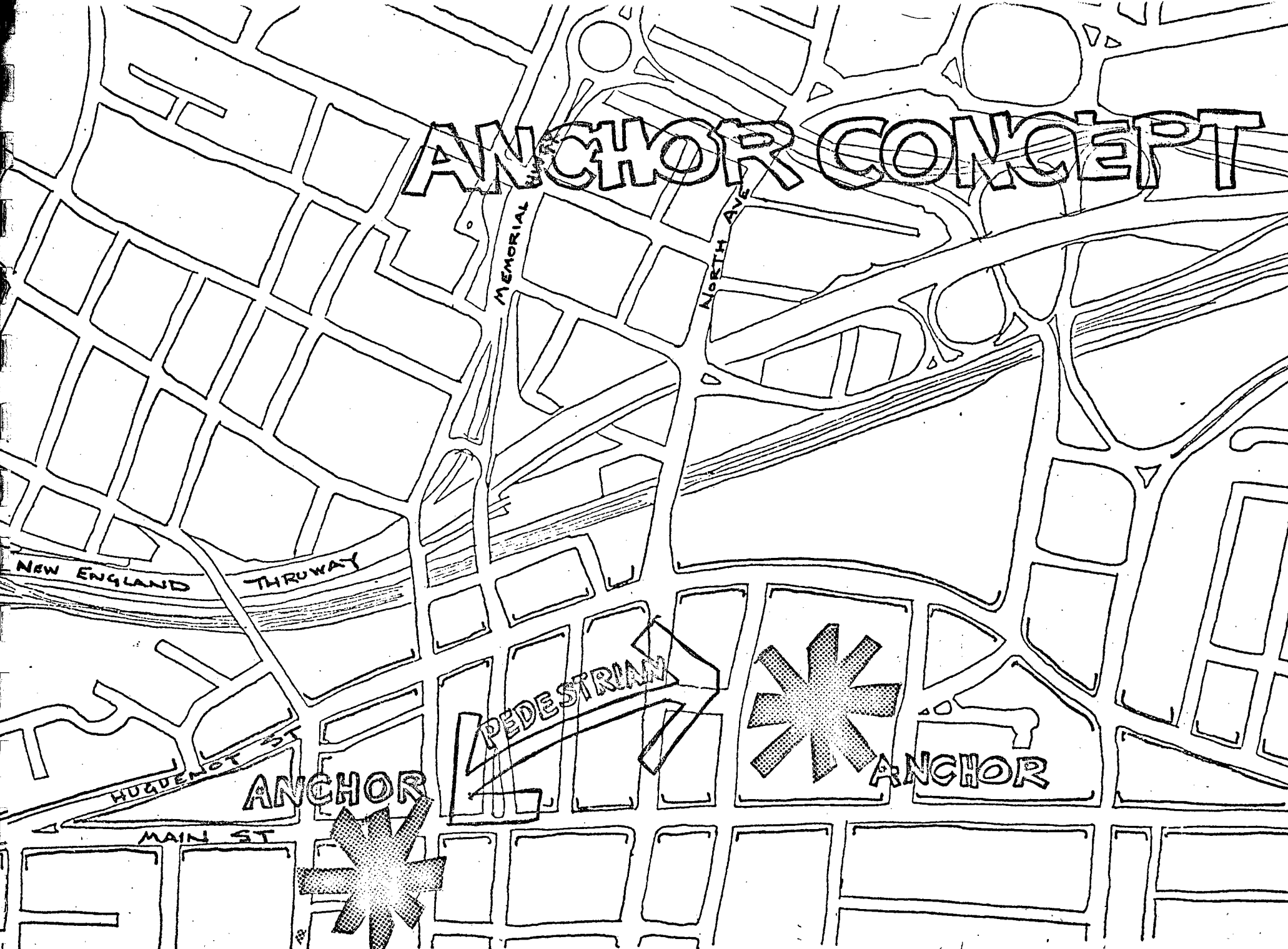
GATEWAY AREA

GATEWAY AREA

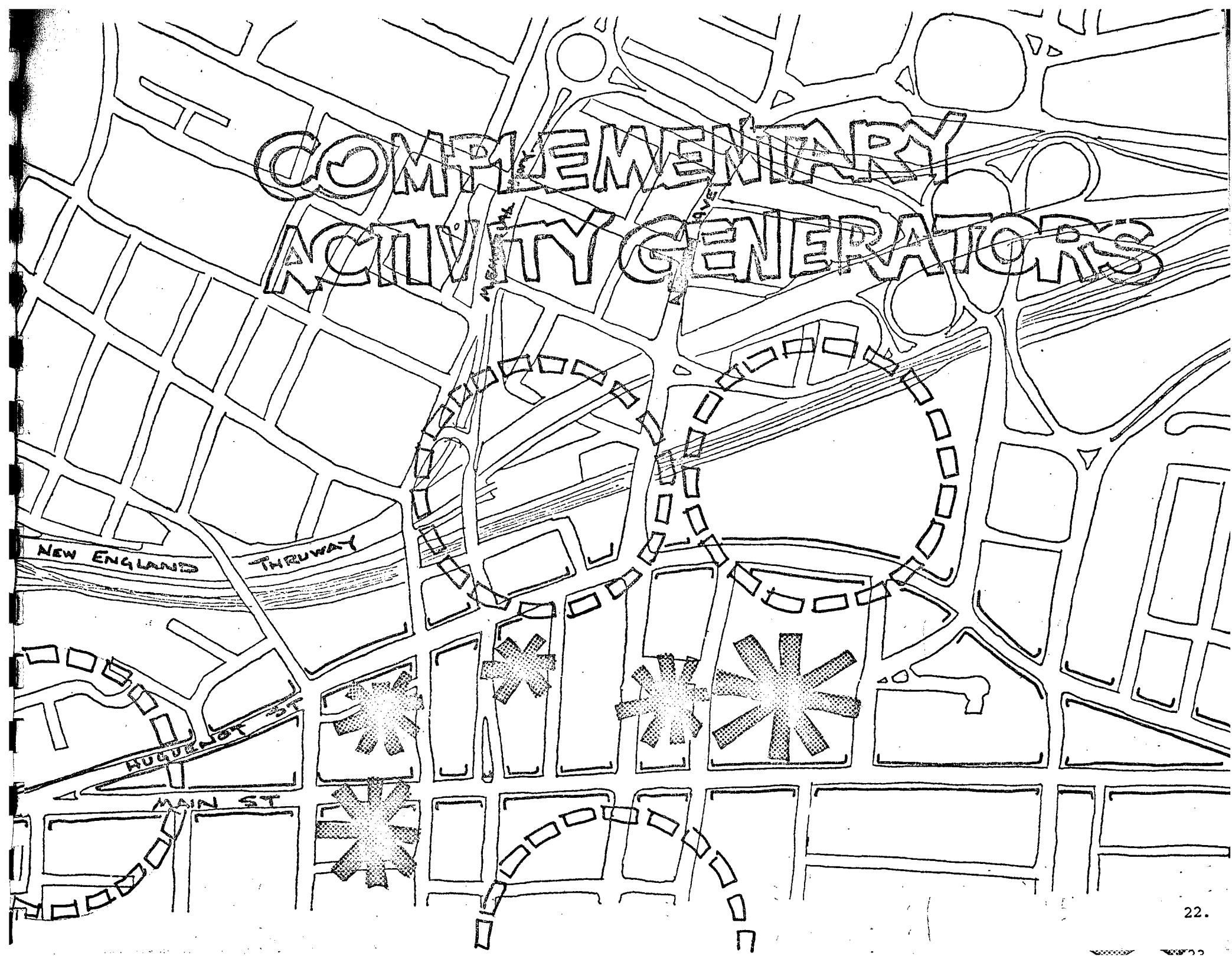
LINKAGE TO WATERFRONT

REGIONAL ACCESS

ANCHOR CONCEPT



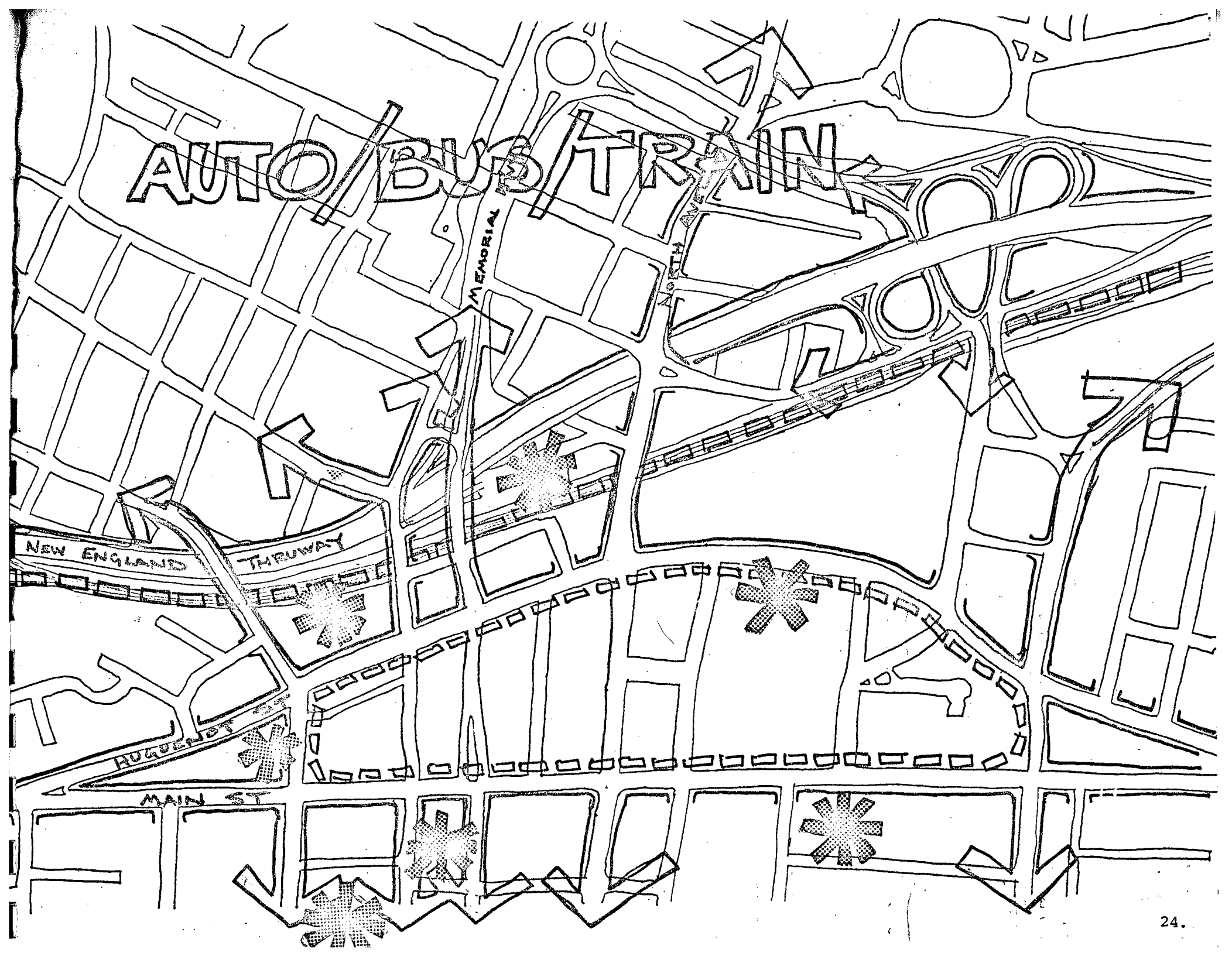
COMPLEMENTARY ACTIVITY GENERATORS



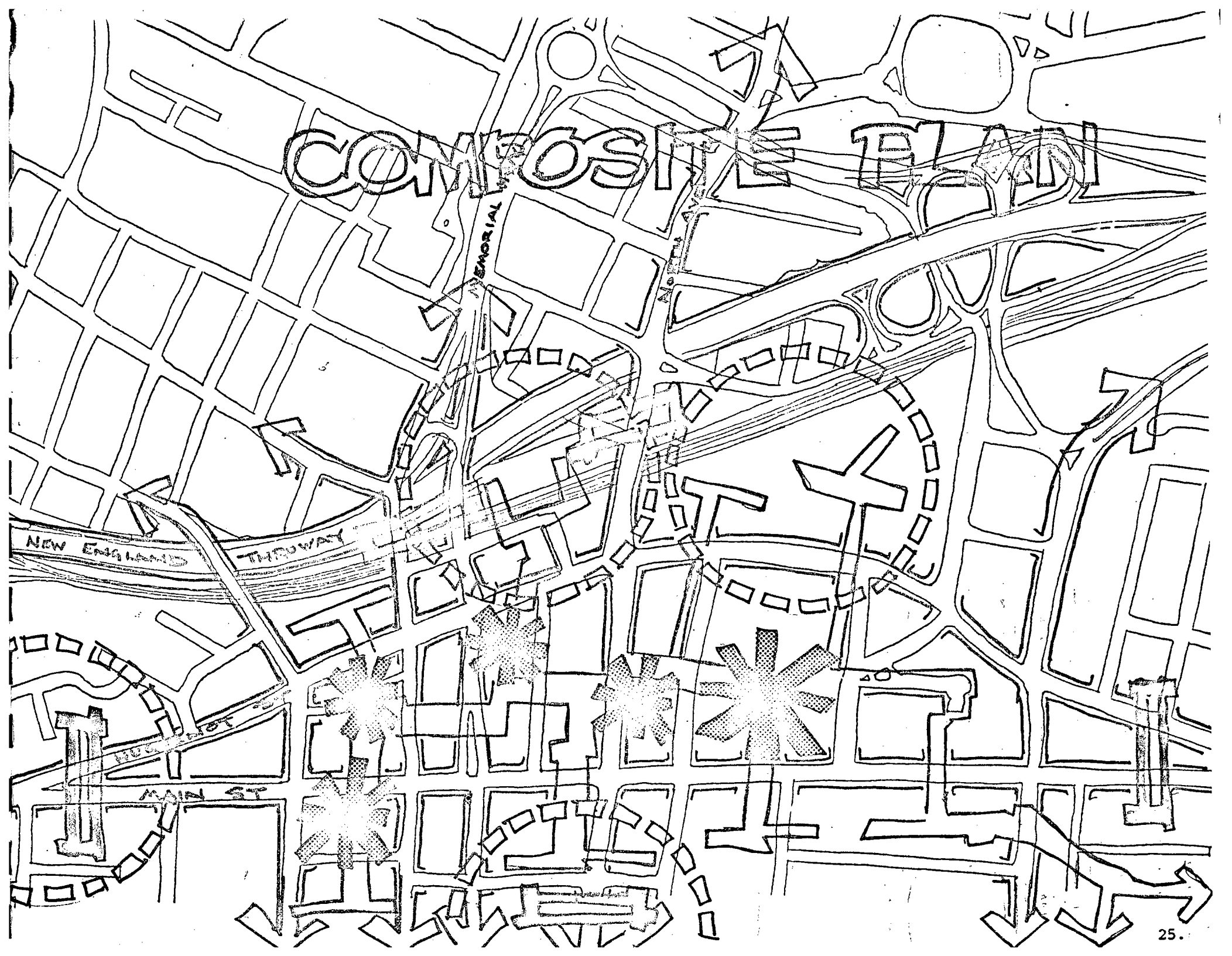
PEDESTRIAN SYSTEM



AUTO / BUS / TRAIN



COMPOSITE PLAN



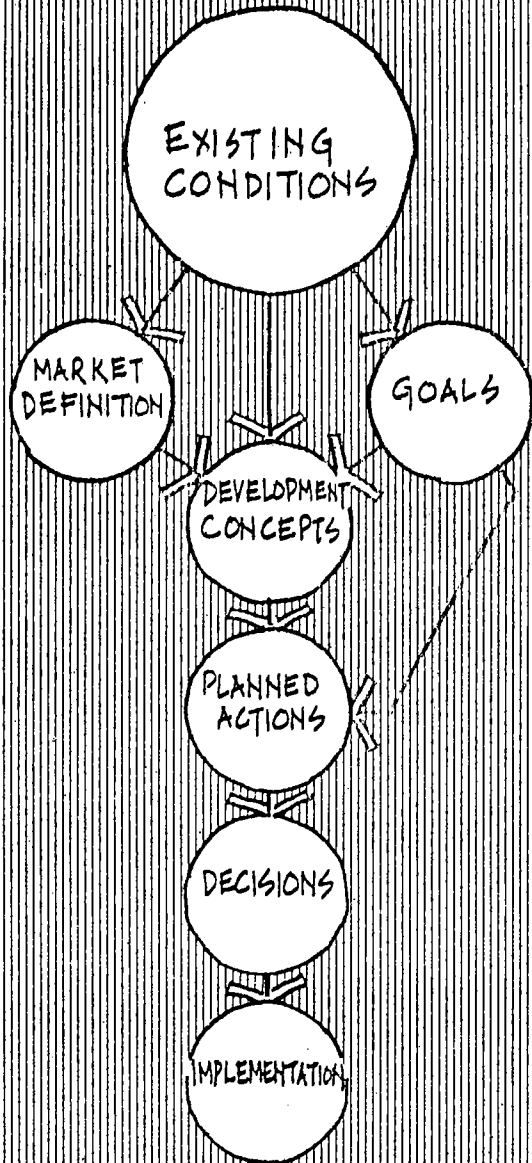
NEW ENGLAND

THRUWAY

MEMORIAL

MAIN ST

A PLAN FOR PLANNING



The diagram on this page illustrates the total planning process used by the RUDAT team. The process which will be described is generally accepted and has been used in many planning situations. RUDAT RECOMMENDS THAT THE CITY EXAMINE ITS PROCEDURES AND ASSURE ITSELF THAT THIS PLANNING PROCESS IS BEING FULLY AND EFFECTIVELY USED.

A short description of each step follows:

* **EXISTING CONDITIONS:** What are the relevant facts and how do they relate to each other. Trends and projections. Definition of the problems in these terms. How effective are the City's actions in achieving its objectives.
EXAMPLE: Streets in the Town Center are congested.

* **GOALS:** The state or condition to be achieved. Attainment of the desired state or conditions should remove the problem.

Differing needs can sometimes be satisfied and accommodated within a single goal. At other times trade-offs and compromises are necessary when more than one need is addressed by a particular goal.

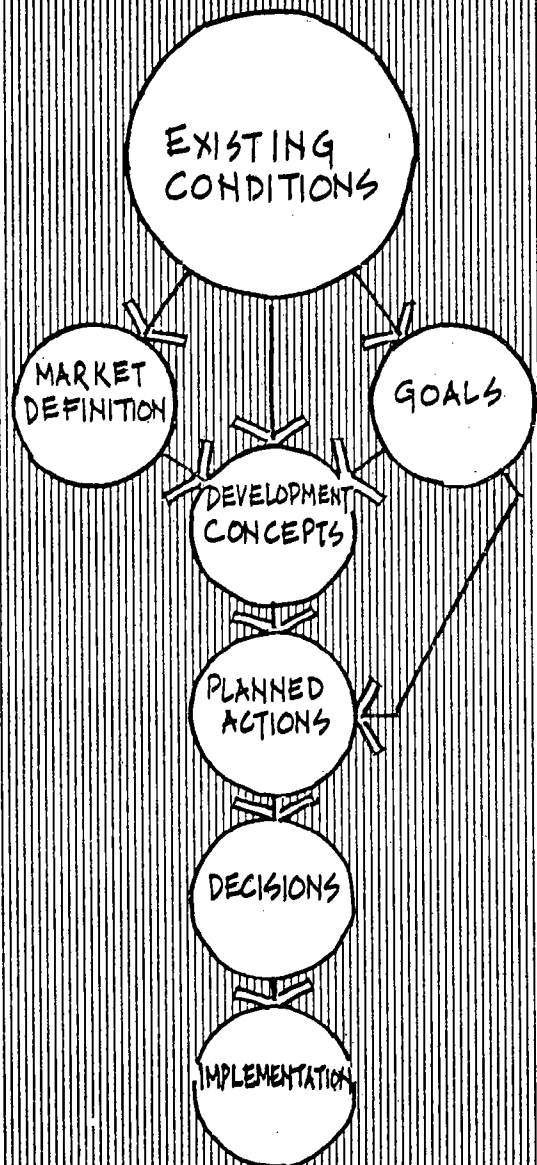
EXAMPLE: Provide a multi-purpose Town Center which meets shopping, residential, recreational and tax base needs.

* **MARKET DEFINITION:** Relating the potentials, capabilities and limits of the existing situation to development concepts. The relationships should be expressed in objective, quantifiable terms.

EXAMPLE: 17,000 people will patronize a gift shop in the Town Center. This number will support \$60,000 in sales which would support a 1200 square foot shop.

* **DEVELOPMENT CONCEPTS:** Development concepts should be formulated in objective, measurable terms so as to be understood and applicable by all interested parties. Afterwards, a simple measure of the success in implementation should be possible. Development objectives and policies can be applied on all levels of size from the city down through the neighborhood, area and block to the individual parcel.

EXAMPLE: 500 units of housing should be renewed or replaced in New Rochelle every year.



* **PLANNED ACTIONS:** A particular, specific project which carries out a development concept.

Before proposals are prepared, plans are drawn, and financial commitments are made by the sponsor, mutually satisfactory development parameters should be accepted by all interested parties.

EXAMPLE: A particular housing development should contain:
 280 units.
 20% 3½ room units, 65% 4½ room units, 15% 5½ room units.
 A monthly rent of \$105 per room.
 A 1.25 parking ratio.
 12,000 square feet of commercial space.
 Etc.

The City should have independently prepared economic and market feasibility reports for each proposed development in order to be better able to negotiate with the developer to achieve stated development objectives and policies.

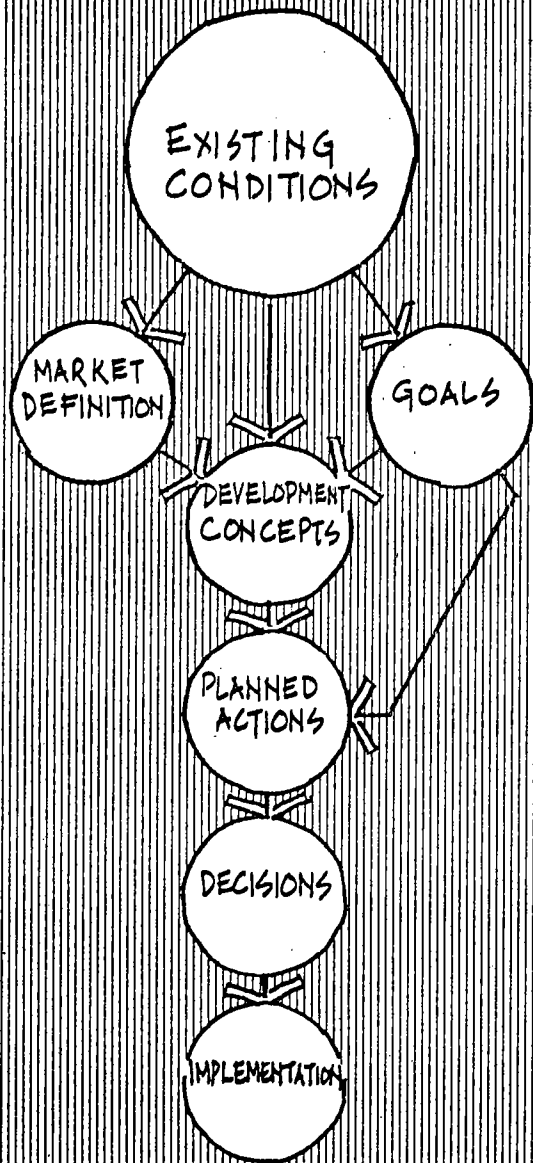
EXAMPLE: Developer claims that he cannot afford to provide a specified parking ratio. The City can evaluate this claim on the basis of its own economic analysis.

* **DECISIONS:** Check back to Market Definition and Goals to uncover feasibility problems or inconsistencies with Goals. If the check is favorable, a decision to proceed can take place.

EXAMPLE: City Council accepts and approves a development proposal to construct an apartment development on a particular site.

* **IMPLEMENTATION:** Each interested party takes the necessary steps to carry out a specific project.

EXAMPLE: City sells an urban renewal site to the sponsor of an office building development.



In addition to emphasizing the importance of using a carefully structured planning process, the RUDAT team has two other points to make about planning for planning.

1. Establish effective communication and participation between all interested parties from the beginning of the planning process. Since the consent of the affected groups and individuals is ultimately necessary it is most effectively attained by early and continuous interaction. A recent vigorous reaction by community participants in the preparation of a neighborhood plan emphasizes the need for continuing work and interaction.
2. The City should either acquire or assure itself that it has financial and development consultants to help reach intelligent decisions. Consultants with this type of expertise augment the planning specialists usually engaged by cities or available in house.

Experts with knowledge of the development field gained thru extensive work with developers are indispensable to avoid relying on developers for information with which to react to their own proposals.

Financial consultants who can price out the financial and economic consequences of development for the many parties, including the City, affected by such activities are also necessary to properly plan.

Fortunately such consultants are available. Like all such services, they should be carefully chosen and given clearly defined and structured assignments.

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

The reconstruction of an entire Town Center is a massive undertaking that may require ten years or more to accomplish. Yet it is a necessary and, in fact, inevitable undertaking. Piece by piece, building by building, the present business district will change to accommodate the new forces of population, changing business organization, and transportation that are at work.

The major question is: Will the resulting new form be one in which the forces of separation predominate, or will it be one in which there is an integration towards a whole that will be more successful than the sum of its parts? Will there be individual buildings, surrounded by parking, guarded by police, deserted at night -- or will there be a unified Town Center, populated at all times, and with activities mutually reinforcing one another? The second alternative is the more pleasant to think about, and the safer, more economical, and profitable one.

To achieve such an objective, New Rochelle must:

1. Establish and maintain a long term commitment to a few key development concepts for the Town Center.
2. Recognize that no single program or action will achieve the desired results; many actions must be taken and coordinated.
3. Examine each proposal to see that its consequences contribute to the implementation of the desired long-term development concepts.