Urban Renewal and Citizens' Groups in Middletown, Connecticut

The Taxpayers Association
The South End Family Association
The Greater Middletown Preservation Trust

Many American urban communities have undergone the process of urban renewal in the past fifty years. Urban renewal, part of a wider movement toward planned economic development in response to the economic stagnation of the 1930s, has resulted in the demolition and rebuilding of downtown business districts. The impact on the social fabric of the urban community has been great, and particular urban groups have suffered the most from this upheaval. Despite shifts in emphasis and structure, federal urban renewal policy consistently reflects patterns of bias against minorities, small merchants, and the poor. These patterns are echoed at the state and local levels, and are expressed by the flip side of urban renewal: neighborhood demolition and the relocation of "undesirables" through economic pressure or the more explicitly political tool of eminent domain.

Local conservatism often acts as a check to the "big plans" of unelected city agencies. In the case of urban renewal, however, the "big planners" have federal and state funds, powerful local support, and federal statutes to buy out and coerce opposition. Not surprisingly, groups composed of those displaced by urban renewal--small merchants, poor, and minorities--have not been able to successfully oppose the alliance of planners, developers, money and government agencies supporting urban renewal. The displaced lack political power...
and the reforms they achieve have historically tended to be minimal. More striking reforms are possible if the opposing groups is composed not of politically powerless dispossessed but of upper class professionals. The primary example of these more sweeping reforms is the shift in federal, state and local redevelopment policy that resulted from the advocacy of preservationists and reuse/gentrification advocates.

Federal urban renewal policy originated in the policies of the New Deal. The New Deal attempted to achieve certain social goals while contributing to the long-term aim of economic recovery. The Housing Act of 1937 was directed toward the improvement of housing. The act provided mortgage guarantees for those who could afford housing and authorized the construction of public housing for those who could not. The anticipated side effect was the stimulation of the construction industry. An actual side effect of the 1937 Act was an increased number of middle-class homeowners in the outer city, and slum clearance followed by the construction of slab towers for the lower class in the inner city.

The Housing Act of 1949 was a reaction to the post-depression and post-war housing shortage, and also a reaction to the perceived need for increased economic development. Like the Housing Act of 1937, the 1949 Act attempted to address social and economic issues. While the Act authorized an enlarged public housing program, it also included a section labelled Title I which established a federal urban
renewal program designed to combat "urban blight." Under Title I, local authorities used the power of eminent domain to acquire privately held land in blighted areas, aggregated and prepared the area for redevelopment, and then turned it over to a public agency or a private developer at federal expense. The schism between the Act's purported support for public housing and its actual effect upon low-income housing through Title I has remained a central theme of federal urban renewal policy. Although the act declared that redevelopment areas should be predominantly residential in character and that all displaced families should be relocated, it provided no mechanism to induce private developers to build housing for low-income households. The result of the 1949 Act was widespread demolition, the displacement of poor minority residents, and the reuse of land for commercial and high-rent residential uses. With fewer residents in the downtown business district and higher rents for commercial space, downtown businesses have increasingly tended to be on a larger scale, relying on customers from outside the immediate area. This non-residential city is markedly different from the city before industrialization, in which manufacturing, sales, and homes are intertwined. While the Housing Act of 1954 provided some incentives for rehabilitation rather than wholesale clearance, demolition remained the mainstay of the program, and the rehabilitation that did occur often did not insure low-income housing. The Highway Act of 1956 paralleled the housing acts in that it increased suburban growth, and promoted construction
which displaced households and neighborhoods.

While federal housing policy has ostensibly supported the construction of low-income housing, it has actually aggravated the housing problem by encouraging suburbanization in the outer city and demolition followed by high-rent construction in the inner city. Similarly, highway policy has encouraged the development of suburban shopping plazas, though it presumably provided commercial benefits to downtown areas by bringing in more shoppers. In the past fifty years, the economic strength of cities has been weakened by shopping plazas, which compete with downtown merchants, and suburban neighborhoods, which reduce the numbers of middle-income (taxpaying) city residents. The resulting need for increased property tax returns has often led to wholesale local city support for the demolition of properties assessed as low value followed by high-rent construction funded through federal urban renewal policy. This construction has occurred in conjunction with the displacement of needy residents who are thought to contribute little to the local tax base. In addition to the assumed economic benefits, renewal projects provide significant political benefits to city politicians and career opportunities to agency bureaucrats. City contracts are powerful political tools, and city posts are generally protected by those who fill them. The dominant role of big business and the construction industry in many of these local governments has strengthened support for renewal.
Consistently, then, urban renewal has favored the interests of the city budget, the planning bureaucracy, and big business over the social welfare of low-income residents. These biases against small merchants and poor residents operate despite the language of federal statute. Urban renewal policy is based on the belief that the economic development of an area demands "modernization" and an increased scale of business. Demolition and redevelopment are prerequisites to these processes of modernization. The policy lacks an understanding of community that consists of people in spaces, rather than structures alone. Even accepting the economic development needs of the government, the policy ignores the links between social and economic goals. The welfare of city residents is also the welfare of city consumers and the welfare of city workers.

The progressive Wesleyan-associated reformers of Middletown promoted their program for redevelopment in this context of increasing suburbanization and the related concerns of city and business officials. The construction of Acason Drive along the waterfront in 1938 was the seed of Middletown's redevelopment. Dr. G. Albert Hill, State Highway Commissioner, Wesleyan professor, and Redevelopment Agency director-to-be, was responsible for the state's decision to direct Route 9 through Middletown. Highway access to Middletown would bring shoppers to Main Street, supporters hoped, and the highway plan would relieve rush hour commuter traffic. At the same time, the construction of Route 9 only encouraged the nationwide trend
toward suburban development and the associated patronage of shopping malls. Also, the construction of Acheson Drive displaced households and cut through a Middletown neighborhood called Duck Hollow. No low-income housing accompanied this demolition. More symbolically, the river cut the town off from the river, its traditional livelihood and orientation during the city's trading and then its manufacturing days. This break with history was of concern to an interest which later came to be known as preservation.

Steven K. Bailey, another Wesleyan professor, was elected mayor of Middletown in 1952. Bailey was a Harvard Ph.D., a Rhodes Scholar, and an army lieutenant, but in Middletown he is known for his early and inspired support for redevelopment. Bailey convinced many citizens and town officials that urban renewal was the key to renewed economic strength in Middletown. Bailey was supported and advised by many Wesleyan personalities, including Professor Victor Jones, Professor Herbert Bell, Professor William Kinnard, Professor Schattschneider, Dr. G. Albert Hill, President Butterfield, and Emilio Daddario, Wesleyan student and later mayor of Middletown. Universities were centers for post-war progressivism and the public policy theory that underlay urban renewal and the Wesleyan academics found in Middletown redevelopment a chance to put their ideas into practice.

Bailey's plans for Middletown consisted of expanding the commercial base of the downtown business district, building
parking lots to service Main Street shoppers, building a new city hall, and "ridding the city of urban blight." In 1933 Bailey established the Middletown Parking Authority, which published a report stating that Middletown might lose its "shopping supremacy" to the suburban malls and the downtown areas of Hartford and New Haven unless redevelopment occurred. Bailey's vision laid the groundwork for the Court Place project and the Center Street project, Middletown's first two urban renewal projects. The Court Place project area was used to build a new municipal building, parking to serve the building, and the Middlesex County Court House. The Center Street project area is now the site of Riverview Center (Sears).

The project areas covered a ten-acre tract between Main Street, de Koven, Washington, and College. The Preliminary Redevelopment Plan for the project areas pointed out that the tract was primarily residential, that the majority of the buildings and "dwelling units" were substandard, and that the area reflected an "unsound mixture of land uses." The Plan recommended complete clearance under Title I of the Housing Act of 1949. The proposal to clear the residential area was described as a logical extension of the central business district, and a means to eliminate an area of substandard housing whose "improvement is deemed to be beyond the power of ordinary enforcement and regulatory measures." Residential reuse was not considered because "sound planning is not served by placing residential uses in the midst of an intensively developed
commercial and public use area. Commercial use produces more tax revenues than does residential use." The projects displaced 215 families from the neighborhood which Bailey described as "cancerous" and characterized by "dismal overcrowding" and "drunks and derelicts." The residents gave a different, more positive description, and pointed out that many homes in the redevelopment area were superior to those of other areas. As the progressive attitude of urban renewal faced the Middletown slums, wrote Bailey in 1971, years after the construction of Sears, "there was really no way to contain the irrepressible impulses of beauty in the area."

The Court Place project illustrates the influence of Wesleyan. Wesleyan offered the city the corner of Pearl and Washington as a site for the new county court. President Butterfield then retracted, supporting Bailey's idea to place the court on the riverfront with a gift of $25,000. The Court Place project was otherwise funded entirely out of local taxes, for a total cost of $252,000. A referendum in January 1954 authorized this expenditure and the project. Bailey called an "urgent meeting" of local notables before the referendum to present his ideas and garner support. John Tynan, a powerful figure in the local Democratic Party and a man with strong ties to President Butterfield and Professor Schattschneider, assisted Bailey's redevelopment campaign by drawing support from his network of people and political influence. The Court Place redevelopment area included 44 families (145 people) and 3
because of the substandard conditions of the residential dwellings in the Center Street project area, the second project received federal funds under Title I and state funds under Connecticut statute. The federal government paid $1,380,000, and the state and Middletown each paid $458,000. Middletown's expenditure required approval by public referendum. The Center Street redevelopment area included 171 families (535 people) and 50 businesses. The Center Street project was hotly debated in Middletown during 1958 and 1959. The Redevelopment Agency, who designed and supported the project, had already applied for and received advance funding from the federal government, with the promise of further funding pending a favorable public response. The application for funding and the preliminary work on the project was not publicized. The Redevelopment Agency and the supporters of renewal claimed a la Bailey that the project was progressive and necessary to the continued economic prosperity of Middletown. In fact, Bailey actually wrote the town a letter from Europe in support of the project.

Opposition to the Center Street project was particularly strong from a group of local conservatives, small merchants, and residents called the Taxpayers Association. The Association summed up its position immediately before the referendum as follows:

"What possible progress can be made by our city because a fifty-room motel which will accommodate passers-by is
erected in an area where a large number of families now live? What possible progress can our city make because a number of new stores are to be created in a "captive shopping area" right smack in the center of our city with resulting dire consequences to merchants already doing business in the area and with a decrease in volume to every other merchant in the city? What possible progress can our city make when 171 families are to be uprooted and scattered?"13

The Association also questioned the city's claim that the Center Street project would not cost the taxpayers any money. Closely allied to this group were supporters of residential reuse. Particularly visible among the supporters of residential construction was Republican leader Max Corvo, publisher of the Italian newspaper The Bulletin.

Private renewal supporters included the League of Women Voters, the Chamber of Commerce, and, most powerful, the Middletown Press. The Middletown Press came out officially in favor of the Center Street project on May 27, 1958, stating, "The alternative to progress is stagnation." On June 20th, the League of Women Voters sponsored a half-page advertisement in the Press which declared, "Opportunity knocks but once. This is Middletown's golden opportunity. Remember what Mayor Stephen K. Bailey said, 'A community cannot stand still; it either goes forward or it dies.' Vote yes because you care about your city. Don't let a small group of self-interested men mislead you and thus deprive our city of a wonderful future. Don't let them make Main Street a ghost town."

Mayor Harry Clew also campaigned heavily for the project, denying the claim that renewal would raise taxes:
What tax rise we may get in coming years will not be due to redevelopment but rather to lack of redevelopment. These properties which we hope to remove are not paying their freight in Middletown and there are a lot more like them. ... Middletown faces a dismal future if we do not rebuild. There is presently nothing of attractiveness about a large part of our shopping center, which is Main Street. ... Merchants may believe now that they are doing a satisfactory business, but do they really believe they will continue to do so if we are to have a modern, look alive shopping center constructed on the outskirts, or even worse, in a neighboring town? ... Every merchant will have the first priority of occupying one of the new store buildings that will rise. Perhaps their rent will be higher, perhaps it will not, but in any case, the nearness of a parking lot for 500 cars, and their location in an up-to-the-minute building is certain to increase their business so that any rent increase will not materially affect them." 22

In the referendum held on June 23, 1958, the project was voted down 2,721 to 3,333. Turnout for the vote was heavier than expected. A good vote for a Middletown referendum is 5,000; 23 6,318 voted in the June referendum. Mayor Clew publicly upheld the vote in August before his re-election, calling the Center Street program a "dead duck," while holding out the possibility that other renewal programs might be proposed. 24

Despite the returns from the June referendum and the mayor's public promise to uphold the vote, the renewal advocates of Middletown engineered a media blitz and scheduled a second referendum for the same renewal project in January 1959. In addition to those who officially supported the project in the first referendum was the Democratic Party, which officially came out in favor of redevelopment on January 8th. Lester M. Gowin, president of the Taxpayers Association, protested the second referendum, saying, "On June 23rd, 1958, the voters of Middletown
expressed the views of the majority in a referendum vote on the proposed Center Street redevelopment plan. In complete disregard of the results of this referendum vote the Redevelopment Agency is ignoring the decision of nearly 4,000 citizens who voted against it and another referendum date has been set."

The Taxpayers Association attempted to attain a court injunction against the second referendum. The case against the city claimed that setting a date for a second referendum was illegal, and that certain taxpayers would be irreparably damaged were redevelopment adopted. A secondary question involved the legality of the Redevelopment Agency's hiring of a public relations firm to sell the Center Street program. Superior Court Judge John C. Cotter, a Democratic appointee, waited a number of weeks before issuing his opinion. He finally denied the injunction. Wrote the judge:

"The Redevelopment Act has been declared constitutional and the city of Middletown may acquire by eminent domain all property which the agency has determined to complete the acquisition and development of the area in question, including vacant and unimproved land and structures not in themselves substandard... (Economic hardship) is inherent in any substantial public project... The exercise of legislative power cannot be limited by an assertion of economic hardship... The determination of when the public mandate is to be invited is within the discretion of the Legislative agency."

Mr. Corvo noted that Judge Cotter was later promoted. The second referendum was held on January 26, 1959, and the project was voted through by a small margin.

A voting scandal associated with the second referendum only added to the opposition's sense that the renewal campaign was.
something less than democratic. Attorney A. Robert Gordon, counsel for the Middletown Taxpayers Association charged that a discrepancy of 405 votes existed between the number tallied by the electronic counter on the voting machine and the number of yes and no votes counted by the checkers. The Association asked Chief Moderator A. Harold Campbell to order a recanvass of the vote on the Center Street project. The scandal was the second voting problem in two months. During the city elections in November 1958 Republicans challenged a number of absentee ballots cast by Democratic workers.

The request to examine the machines was denied by Campbell, who said, "I have no legal authority to unlock the voting and counting mechanism of the voting machines or to examine or test them. The referendum stands." The Association then asked Mayor Clew for an "independent, impartial examination of the machines." Although the mayor agreed that 7 percent of the total vote did not register on the voting machines, he also contended that he had no authority to examine the machines without a court order. The Association along with Max Corvo called for a third referendum, pointing to the small margin by which the project passed. Finally, First Selectman John C. O'Brien, official custodian of the machines, agreed to an examination of the machines. The examination was made possible by Elmer S. Hubbell, Middletown Press Publisher, who paid for the expense of examination. Two weeks later the machines were tested by a representative of the Automatic Voting Machines company. "Votes
that were lost on these machines were lost solely because of lack of knowledge or inattention on the part of the voters,” the representative declared. The second referendum was proclaimed legitimate, and the Center Street development project was thus authorized.

The displaced residents and businesses of the Center Street project area met with different fates depending on their resources. No housing was built to replace the demolished structures; but some of the homeowners were upwardly mobile Italians able to buy houses further out in the South Farms end of town. Some welcomed the opportunity to “get out” of the buildings which represented their initial poverty upon immigration to Middletown; others, especially older residents, resented the disruption of their lives. Compensation money was relatively generous for homeowners, and the increasing political power of Italians in the town likely ensured fair compensation. In addition, the construction for the project held the promise of employment and contracts for local Italian developers, builders, architects, and workers. Less fortunate were the lower-income black renters who lived in the area. The black population in the downtown area increased in the post-war period as the the Polish and Italians residents began to move to the suburbs, renting out their previous homes. Low income housing and rent assistance money were not available to these renters. Redevelopment Agency Director Hill's solution to the crisis was to erect a settlement which came to be known as "Tent City" near the South End dump.
Late fall arrived. One night the settlement was dismantled in protest. Black families found refuge with friends or in black church buildings until army barracks-styled housing was constructed by the town.

In the late 1960s, another renewal project was begun in Middletown. Metro South was initially funded through the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) under Title I. Federal funding covered 75% of the project, and state funding another 12 1/2%. Middletown's share was also 12 1/2%. Through a non-cash credit system, however, the expenditures made by major institutions within a certain distance from the redevelopment area to improve publically related facilities could be applied toward the local share. Wesleyan and Middlesex Hospital expansion reduced Middletown's share to nothing. The lack of public expenditure suspended the referendum requirement for much of the Metro South development, although certain structures involving city spending were debated and voted on in public referendum.

The initial federal commitment of money in 1969 totaled 10 million. In 1974 an amendatory 4 million was authorized. After the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974, however, the mode of federal funding switched from allocations based on project applications to allocations to all cities determined by a formula based on population size and poverty. The formula-based allocation was called a Community Development Block Grant, or revenue sharing. The original funding system favored Middletown, as the town had successfully applied for funding for
a large redevelopment project. The revised system reduced the amount of federal funds Middletown could potentially receive. Financial problems since 1974 slowed the rate of Metro South. Funding in part explains the lack of adequate low-income housing. More generally, demolition, delays, and difficulties in finding private developers increased skepticism among citizens. The predicted tax benefits of redevelopment were not realized.

Problems with private developers and finances were foreshadowed by the Center Street project. The first Center Street developer defaulted, and could not pay the taxes on the property. Simon Conover took over the project and its obligations from the Hartford National Bank. A string of developers and financial crises characterize the Metro South chronology. In 1972 Carabetta Enterprises was named for the 25 million dollar project. Mr. Corvo, who worked with Carabetta, described the Carabetta plan as based on a "concept." Drawing on Corvo's experience with urban planning in Europe, the Carabetta plan proposed a mix in the downtown business district of business, residential structures, a motel, and a civic center. The plan called for 800 units of housing downtown, including middle- and low-income housing and condominiums.

The Carabetta plan was increasingly opposed by George Achenbach, the chairman of the Redevelopment Agency. Achenbach opposed the parking formula used by Carabetta, holding that more parking was necessary than provided for. At the time, Mr. Achenbach was himself the developer of West Lake, a Westfield
housing development with a design for 3100 units of housing. Mr. Corvo noted that Achenbach had a personal interest in opposing the 800 units of Carabetta housing. Influenced by Achenbach, the Zoning Board voted down part of the Carabetta plan. In response, Carabetta Enterprises pulled out of Metro South in March of 1974.

The Redevelopment Agency was forced to seek other developers. ARCO Corporation, headed by Prevedini, was named developer. Prevedini had little experience, a terrible reputation in Willimantic, and insufficient financial backing. Prevedini had been granted a city contract in Willimantic, and had not fulfilled his responsibilities there adequately. In less than a year, Prevedini pulled out. Desperate, the Redevelopment Agency began to parcel out the project area to various developers piecemeal. Bronson received a contract for the Metro Square area, though he too had little experience and insufficient financial backing. Finally, the mayor gave Bronson the deed to the area without receiving payment. Bronson then used the deed to acquire the necessary financing. Bronson ultimately constructed Metro Square as it now exists. Opponents including Corvo submitted a dossier to HUD listing infractions of federal law by the Redevelopment Agency and the mayor, including the mayor's action regarding the deed. HUD acknowledged the infractions but did not firmly oppose the city's actions.

The Metro South project displaced a neighborhood of at least 200 black families. Former residents bitterly recounted the
treatment they received. Originally, development plans for the area contained provisions for residential construction. Residents of the run-down South End neighborhood were excited by the prospect of receiving money for their dilapidated properties and using the money to buy into the new housing constructed on the site. Eventually, the idea of residential reuse was abandoned for high-rent, completely commercial construction. Residents were relocated to Maplewood Terrace, Traverse Square and Long River Village, three low-income projects. "I seen it as if they thought that blacks needed someplace by themselves but not too close to Main Street," said 98 former resident Icella Howell about the projects. Owners of black businesses, including the popular Joe and Kitty's grill and Burr's barber shop, were compensated financially, but relocation was not an option. The businesses required the patronage of the black community and the low rents of the South End.

The turnaround on the issue of residential reuse angered residents, particularly in the context of black-white relations in Middletown in the late 1960s and early 1970s. These years were characterized by race riots; high school boycotts, first by blacks and then by whites; incidents of white police brutality against black teenagers; and a heightened police presence in the black South End neighborhood, particularly around the office of a radical community organization for black youth called T.O.P.S. (Teens Organized in Productive Service). Former resident Rebe
Moses recounted the time she accompanied her son and his friend down to the police station. They had been summoned and she knew her presence would provide protection from the police. Unfortunately, the police did not notice Mrs. Moses, and upon the entrance of the black youths into the station two officers started a brawl in which Mrs. Moses herself was maced. While Mrs. Moses received an apology from the station, she said, "the point is that no one should have been getting maced. No one should have been macing those kids."

Some residents thus perceived the decision to use the redevelopment area for commercial purposes as racist. "There was the feeling," said Mrs. Howell, "that redevelopment only happened in black areas." Moreover, it was difficult at that time for black families to find rentals outside of the South End; many whites would not rent to blacks. Redevelopment promised to better the lives of all through the elimination of slums, the construction of low-income housing, and the revitalization of business. But for blacks in the South End, redevelopment meant reduced options for housing and an end to black businesses.

Throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s, Idella Howell, Rosalie Rolle, and Rebe Moses attempted to negotiate with the Redevelopment Agency. Mrs. Rolle was the president of the South End Family Association, and all three women served on an ad hoc committee called P.A.C.T., which brought representatives from different groups together to review redevelopment policy and procedure. They argued for residential reuse, more relocation
money, property compensation done by a formula rather than on a case basis, better information regarding the Agency's plans, later eviction dates, and scattered low-income housing instead of projects. Property compensation proceeded on a case by case basis and was accompanied by notes threatening eviction. Some residents were intimidated, and moved out before housing was ready, sometimes without the relocation money allocated to them or a fair property compensation. The greatest frustration, according to Mrs. Howell, was a lack of knowledge. The residents wanted to know what was going to replace the houses that were being torn down, and they wanted to know why new houses could not replace the old ones.

All three agreed that throughout the redevelopment years their demands were ignored and by-passed. Mrs. Howell described how Agency members would promise to look into an issue, for example scattered housing, and then go ahead to authorize the construction of project housing. The women were eventually removed from P.A.C.T. on a technicality. Moreover, despite representation on the P.A.C.T., and black representation on the Redevelopment Agency, the black interest could always be outvoted. This lack of influence was aggravated by a lack of political experience and organization. Mrs. Howell now regrets the fact that the Family Association did not keep records, and the fact that when she got mad in meetings she reacted by walking out.

Most disturbing to the community leaders was a 1969 meeting
in New York with HUD. A federal statute required community participation in urban renewal decisions on a particular area. A group from Middletown including Redevelopment Agency Director Joseph Haze, other officials, and the three women attended a meeting in New York. The women believed they would have an opportunity to voice their concerns. Instead, meetings and speakers and luncheon meat went by, and the women were not encouraged to give their opinions. According to Mrs. Moses, they were used by Director Haze and HUD to fulfill a federal requirement for redevelopment. No one was interested in their concerns.

The women also expressed frustration with Maplewood Terrace, a 50 unit project, and Traverse Square, a 60 unit project. First and foremost, scattered housing was preferred by most South End residents to project housing. Moreover, Maplewood created problems for residents without cars, as the project was a distance from downtown. The Maplewood apartments were described as having too many rooms for most South End households, and the rec room and play area were described as poorly equipped and too small. Mrs. Moses wondered why the dumpsters were placed in the front yard. According to Mrs. Howell, the South End Family Association had asked the Redevelopment Agency to notify them several days in advance when the Maplewood Terrace apartments would be ready for tenants. The Association wanted notice in order to get all the furniture coming from the South End sprayed for roaches. Roaches were a great problem in the South End.
because of the nearby city dump. Despite the Association's request, keys to Maplewood were dropped off in the South End at 4:00 pm on a Friday. The Association was not able to control the flow of residents and their furniture, and the roach problem was transported to the new buildings.

Traverse Square was also the subject of criticism. The original design for the project won an architectural prize, and the original building material was to be brick. Because of funding difficulties, Housing Authority officials approved a revised plan which included the existing shingled facade. Traverse Square was nicknamed "Roach Village" as a result. The women stressed that the flaws of Traverse Square were in their eyes the fault of the city, not of Carabetta who fulfilled the contract.

The annual report of 1955 under Mayor Sbona states, "In furtherance of this administration's policy to recognize the aspirations and needs of minority groups, the membership to the Redevelopment Agency Board was increased and two representatives were appointed to the policy-making level." John "Buck" Davis and William Sneed, Sr. were the blacks chosen as Agency members. Mrs. Moses downplayed the significance of this reform, claiming that neither member was able to adequately represent the concerns of the black community. Mr. Sneed made headlines in April of 1974, when he started a campaign to ensure proper payment of relocation and rent assistance to displaced blacks. Many former residents had not realized that they were entitled to rent
differential assistance that often ran as high as $4,000. Redevelopment Director Mize blamed the problem on bureaucratic confusion concerning regulations and that during a long period of unsettlement residents moved away unaware of their rights. Sneed rejected this explanation, and charged the agency outright with deception and with cheating blacks. A further issue was the eligibility of sub-tenants to rent assistance money. The Middletown Redevelopment Agency held that sub-tenants were not eligible, but HUD regulations held otherwise. Sneed's complaints prompted a reprisant from HUD to the Redevelopment Agency. The Agency was eventually cleared of all charges of improper actions.

The lack of articulation that characterized the efforts of the South End residents to influence redevelopment contrasts sharply with the efforts of a very different group that opposed the Redevelopment Agency several years later. The Greater Middletown Preservation Trust and its offspring, the Committee to Save the South Green, were created in 1972 to oppose the demolition of historically significant spaces. John Reynolds III, a former banker, was the president of the Trust, and the major force behind the preservation movement in Middletown. While members of the South End Family Association were always black and usually poor, the Preservation Trust was composed mainly of professional people. Moreover, like the original redevelopment advocates, many preservationists had close ties to Wesleyan. These links are not surprising as preservationists
and university people tend to appreciate history. While Wesleyan
as an institution has not always acted in the interests of
preservation, members of the Wesleyan community including
Professor Steven Dyson and Mrs. Nancy Campbell have been active
in the Trust. Mr. Reynolds was himself a graduate of Wesleyan.

On the national level, preservationist advocates included
such prestigious figures as Lady Bird Johnson and the
Rockefeller family. In 1955 Mrs. Johnson co-ordinated a White
House "conference on beauty." This conference led to the
creation of the Special Committee on Historical Preservation.
The recommendations of this committee were incorporated into the
National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, the statutory basis
for the actions taken in the 1970s by the Middletown Trust
against the Redevelopment Agency. This act established a
national register of significant historical properties and
thereby committed the federal government to the identification of
all such properties in the country. Moreover, the act
established a system of matching grants to preservation projects
undertaken by states and the National Preservation Trust.

The Greater Middletown Preservation Trust opposed demolition
renewal that raised everything to make room for the "new and
shiny." They supported rehabilitation of the historically
significant eighteenth century houses of Middletown.
Rehabilitation conflicted with the official plan of the city,
which called for demolition, and with the interests of developers
such as Bronson, who had contracted with the city for certain
sections of Metro South. Rehabilitation for commercial uses was also illegal because of fire code requirements. Moreover, many citizens, particularly the new immigrants who had worked so hard to move out of the eighteenth century buildings/tenements could not see the value of restoration. At the same time, these conflicts were not beyond resolution. As early as June 1972, the Redevelopment Agency adopted a declaration to focus more closely on reuse development. In April 1974, City Planner George Reif came out in favor of the creation of historical zones in which restrictive code requirements would be relaxed. The overall objective, Reif said, would be to encourage private developers to restore historically valuable buildings for self-sustaining commercial uses. Careful restoration not only restores the quality of environment, said Reif, but it also makes a town more attractive for tourists.

John Reynolds was himself the developer for the historic wooden structures now at the corner of Church and Main. These buildings were moved from their original sites at other places in the Metro South area. Reynolds was accepted in 1974 as a Metro South developer, pending resolution of the fire code issue. In May of the same year, Redevelopment Director Haze spoke out in favor of the plan in an attempt to convince the City Planning and Zoning Commission to relax the fire code, illustrating the potential for a preservation/redevelopment alliance. Reynolds planned to move a house at 49 Union Street, built in the late 1700s in the Georgian style, two William Street homes, and the
White Eagle Cafe on Main Street. On the night of August 28, 1975, some unknown party set fire to the Reynolds house on Union Street. Accusations as to the arsonist or arsonists flew, but the investigation was inconclusive. Though the fire destroyed the best of the structures Reynolds had hoped to preserve, it also mobilized those who supported historical restoration.

Reynolds' development project was finally granted exemption from the fire code by the Council in August of 1976. Building Inspector Theodor Reneson insisted that the Common Council require sprinklers on both the outside and inside of the three wooden structures. Reynolds claimed that outdoor sprinklers were not necessary, but finally conceded in order to obtain his building permits. Financial problems and difficulties in finding tenants followed the resolution of the fire code issue, but in June of 1977 the houses were moved, marking the end of a four-year effort.

A second rallying point for the preservationists was the South Green. The Committee to Save the South Green mobilized support not only among the historically-minded, but among a wide spectrum of citizens. The Metro South project included plans to realign the South Main-Church Street crossroads by linking Church directly to Union Street and South Main directly to Broad Street. The goals was improved traffic flow in the Metro South renewal area. The South Green area would be reshaped, and the Mather-Douglas house would be moved. Local preservationists under the banner of the Preservation Trust were opposed to this.
realignment and the destruction of the house, claiming the project would destroy a valuable historic district.

The South Green was first placed on the National Register of Historic Places in August 1973. According to the Historic Commission, the inclusion of the area on the federal register prohibited federal money from being used to destroy the buildings or their aesthetic environment. HUD and Director Haze countered that renewal plans take precedence over preservation awards. A state law, Public Act 75-534, also provided statutory ammunition to the preservationists. This law required that any taking of park or recreation land for other purposes must be accompanied by comparable replacement land. Mayor Marino countered that the state law did not apply to the South Green situation because it was passed after the remodeling was planned and adopted.

In response to the opponents of the road realignment, however, Mayor Marino scheduled a Common Council public hearing regarding the issue on July 19, 1976. Preservationists testified against the plan, yet failed to sway city officials backing the road project. Several days later, council members sympathetic to the Save the Green movement forced a special Council meeting to consider the claims of the public hearing. Four of the five council members supporting the Green movement were Republican, giving the issue a political coloration. The Council voted on July 26 to request that the Redevelopment Agency delay the signing of contracts for reconstruction of the historic area.
until September 7, but this motion lacked force, as the decision to go forward with the South Green rebuilding plan rested with the Agency. The Agency decided on July 27 to delay the decision in the interests of working towards a compromise. Mayor Marino, displeased with the delay, convened a meeting of those Council and Agency members he thought "open-minded on the subject." As a result of the mayor's action, the Council Democrats voted on August 2 to support the Agency's signing of the contract for the road project. Opponents were furious, claiming that in a "despotic abuse of power" the mayor had unfairly reversed the previous agreements supporting compromise. On August 3 the Agency signed a contract with the J. Arrigoni Co. This action was followed by compromise talks in the hope of averting a lawsuit.

Dissatisfied with the idea of post-contract signing "compromise" talks, the Committee to Save the South Green and the Preservation Trust, represented by Atty. William Howard, took the city and HUD to court. On August 25, 1976, Judge M. Joseph Blumenfeld of the Hartford Federal District Court issued a temporary restraining order against the highway reconstruction and the demolition of the Douglas-Mather House. Two days later HUD capitulated, ordering city officials to execute environmental studies of "all remaining activities in Metro South" with special emphasis on the South Green reconstruction. The HUD move was a surprise; until that point HUD had routinely cleared all local decisions regarding the South Green project.
The Preservation Trust offered their own solution to the South Green controversy on September 2. Their proposal recommended skirting the Green, saving the two old trees, and relocating the Douglas-Mather House at a minimum cost of $50,000. The Redevelopment Agency made a counter-offer, which preserved the Green but eliminated the two trees and omitted any saving of the Douglas-Mather House. The preservationists rejected the counter-offer. After a year of debate, the Redevelopment Agency agreed on July 6, 1977 to another plan which saved the trees and the Douglas-Mather House. Disagreements over a parking lot included in this plan delayed compromise between the opposing local parties until May 30, 1978, however. Final federal approval of the South Green road work did not come until January 31, 1979.

The preservationists also worked to save "Mansion Block." This conflict paralleled the South Green controversy in that both pitted local control of redevelopment against local preservationists armed with the National Historic Preservation Act and state historic commissions. John Reynolds called in state preservation regulators to assess uncompleted Metro South blocks. Citing conflict of interest, city officials put developer/preservationist Reynolds under pressure to withdraw his request for an historic study. Reynolds did withdraw his request, but the historic review continued. In much of the Metro South area the review was cursory, but the Mansion Block between College and William Street, five buildings dating back to the
19th century, created more of a controversy. The property was nominated to the national Register of Historic Places. After agreeing to accept renovation of the Mansion Block as part of his shopping center, developer Bronson then decided that he could not build around the structures. After Mayor Marino and Director Haze agreed to save the structure housing the New York Bakery, the most desirable building in the Mansion Block row, local preservationists and city development interests compromised by agreeing to the demolition of the other four buildings following historic documentation. On November 10, 1977 the National Register of Historic Places accepted the Mansion Block as eligible for a register listing. The following February, a tentative agreement was reached between federal preservation officials and the city similar to the compromise made on the local level. In exchange for leaving the Federalist-style building housing the New York Bakery in its original position "if at all feasible" and increasing the height of the facades facing Main Street in order to fit into the rest of the historic area, the National Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, HUD, and the Connecticut Preservation Commission agreed to allow demolition of the other four structures. Ultimately structural weakness led to a decision to demolish the fifth building, but this does not diminish the force of the preservationist opposition.

The preservationists were aided in their struggle to bring
restoration to Middletown by federal statute and federal funding, and by state statute. On the local level, they were professionals with money and political experience accustomed to the use of legal avenues to promote particular ends. On both the local and the federal levels, preservation and redevelopment were ultimately able to co-exist because preservation did not preclude commercial usage. The extent to which preservation was able to merge with the redevelopment image of community is illustrated by former Mayor Marino. Once the arch enemy of the preservationists and a strong advocate of demolition, Marino is now president of the Preservation Trust. He admits that the education provided by the struggle against the preservationists comprised a conversionary experience undergone by many citizens. Middletown residents are now proud of preservation efforts, and have a greater appreciation of the history of their community and the way it is embodied in particular structures. When asked if citizens also have a greater appreciation of the social impact of relocation, Marino said, "No, no, unfortunately that's more difficult for people to understand."

Issues of preservation and residential structures take an ironic twist in a recent controversy involving Wesleyan University's plans to site a sports complex on Knowles Avenue. Atty. Howard who battled the demolition renewal is now going to court for his neighborhood, which is to be torn down for the Wesleyan expansion project. City zoning regulations now allow institutions like the university and the hospital to develop in
their spheres of influence. The debate illustrates the importance of statutory tools for the protection of residential property; even the political acumen of Atty Howard may not be enough to stop the project. Said Howard about the preservation battles of the 1970s: "You had a hell of a lot of good federal law to deal with." Howard's strategy is to change the zoning law itself through a review and a public hearing. Preservation necessarily merged with commercial interest in the 1970s; John Reynolds was able to four structures only by making them into professional offices from residential buildings. A similar commercial interest is dominant in the Wesleyan Sports Complex project. Planned economic development, whether through demolition or preservation, requires social sacrifices for unprotected groups.

Conclusions:

The Middletown redevelopment projects have displaced Italian and Black neighborhoods, and have created new, non-residential commercial spaces too expensive for small merchants and poor residents. Community organizations such as the Taxpayers Association and the South End Family Association opposed the urban renewal alliance, but these groups had little impact on the ultimate reality of renewal and displacement. At best, they negotiated better terms for eviction dates, property compensation, or relocation assistance money. At worst, they failed in even these areas.
A strikingly more successful opponent to demolition renewal was the Committee to Save the South Green and its parent organization, the Preservation Trust. As urban renewal effected the destruction of many eighteenth century houses, citizens who valued the architectural and historical heritage of the town became disturbed and demanded that historically significant sites be saved. The preservationists offered a counter-vision of community to that of the progressive reformers who preached demolition renewal. Moreover, like the demolition developers, they had federal regulations and funding to strengthen their case. Ultimately, the preservationists' vision of community was merged with that of the demolition renewers. This merger was possible because of federal statute and because preservation did not challenge the development process, only its style. Although the preservationists pride themselves on saving the "essence" of Middletown as a community by preserving its historical spaces, the preservationist opposition did not challenge the systemic bias against the poor and politically powerless reflected by the federal, state and local renewal policies.

Afterword:

The greatest problem with my research is that it became too broad. I found it difficult to include all the information I collected, and I excluded a lot of detail. Any one of a number of topics mentioned briefly in this paper would have made a great research project all by itself: T.O.P.S., the South End Family
Association, the construction of Acheson Drive, Stephen Bailey, Middletown race relations, the South Green controversy, the Center Street project, etc.

Were I to be in Middletown for another year, this project would be the basis for a senior thesis. I would encourage anyone interested in the topic of urban renewal to continue research into the case of Middletown. I was not able to interview certain key players: William Howard, William Sneed, Sr., Joseph Haze, Carabetta, John Davis. Max Corvo was a particularly helpful informant; he has his own files on the renewal controversies and should be contacted by anyone researching this topic. Idella Howell was also especially helpful. She may be found through Community Action for Greater Middletown (CAGM). Professor Dyson has a lot of insight into issues of development.

The topic is exciting because it is complex and it has changed the lives of so many in this town. Opinions are strong, and most actors and anxious to give their views.
Footnotes

1. Harrigan, p. 6
2. Fainstein, p. 15
3. Harrigan, p. 16-17
4. Dillon, p. 38
5. Dyson Interview
6. Dillon, p. 13-15
7. Dillon, p. 27
9. Bailey, p. 4
10. Dillon, p. 57; Corvo Interview
11. Bailey, p. 3
12. Dillon, p. 35; Corvo Interview
13. Preliminary Redevelopment Report, p. 19, Table 8
14. Kuehn Interview
15. Preliminary Redevelopment Report, p. 19, Table 8
16. Middletown Press, May 6, 1958, p. 4
17. ibid, May 19, 1958, p. 1 (cont. p. 5)
18. ibid, June 21, 1958, p. 1 (cont. p. 12)
19. ibid, May 5, 1958, p. 1 (cont. p. 5); Corvo Interview
20. ibid, May 27, 1958, p. 4
21. ibid, June 23, 1958, p. 3
22. ibid, June 11, 1958, p. 3
23. ibid, June 23, 1958, p. 1 (cont. p. 5)
24. ibid, June 26, 1959, p. 1
25. ibid, January 2, 1959, p. 1 (cont. p. 5); Corvo Interview
26. ibid, January 9, 1959, p. 1
27. ibid, January 12, 1959, p. 1 (cont. p. 12)
28. Corvo Interview
30. Corvo Interview
32. ibid, January 28, 1959, p. 1 (cont. p. 6)
33. ibid, January 29, 1959, p. 1
34. ibid, January 30, 1959, p. 1
35. ibid, February 3, 1959, p. 5
36. ibid, February 4, 1959, p. 1
37. ibid, February 14, 1959, p. 12
38. Dyson Interview
39. Corvo Interview
40. Corvo Interview; South End Family Association members Interview
41. Kuehn Interview
42. Kuehn Interview
43. Fainstein, p. 18
44. Corvo Interview
45. Corvo Interview; Middletown Press, April 10, 1974, p. 1
46. Corvo Interview
47. Corvo Interview
48. South End Family Association members Interview
49. South End Family Association members Interview
50. South End Family Association members Interview
51. ibid
52. ibid
53. ibid
54. ibid
55. ibid
56. Kuehn Interview
57. South End Family Association members Interview, Sneed, Jr. Interview
59. South End Family Association members Interview
60. Middletown Press, April 10, 1947, p. 1 (cont. p. 5)
61. Ibid, April 10, 1974, p. 1 (cont. p. 5)
63. Ibid, June 12, 1974, p. 1 (cont. p. 5)
64. Corvo Interview
65. Reynolds Interview
67. Ibid, April 10, 1974, p. 1 (cont. p. 5)
68. Ibid, April 13, 1974, p. 1 (cont. p. 5)
69. Ibid, May 9, 1974, p. 1 (cont. p. 5)
70. Ibid, August 29, 1975, p. 1
71. Ibid, August 2, 1976, p. 6
72. Ibid, June 23, 1977, p. 1
73. Ibid, August 15, 1975, p. 1 (cont. p. 5)
74. Ibid, July 1, 1975, p. 26
75. Ibid, July 1, 1975, p. 26
76. Ibid, July 20, 1976, p. 1 (cont. p. 5)
77. Ibid, July 22, 1976, p. 1 (cont. p. 6)
78. Ibid, July 17, 1976, p. 1
79. Ibid, July 28, 1976, p. 1
81. Ibid, August 3, 1976, p. 1
82. Ibid, August 4, 1976, p. 1 (cont. p. 6)
83. Ibid, August 13, 1976, p. 1 (cont. p. 5)
85. Ibid, August 27, 1976, p. 1 (cont. p. 5)
86. Ibid, September 9, 1975, p. 15
88. ibid, September 23, 1977, p. 1 (cont. p. 5)
89. ibid, July 7, 1977, p. 1 (cont. p. 5)
90. ibid, June 1, 1978, p. 1 (cont. p. 5)
91. ibid, January 10, 1979, p. 1 (cont. p. 5)
93. ibid, March 9, 1977, p. 1 (cont. p. 5)
94. ibid, March 9, 1977, p. 1 (cont. p. 5)
95. ibid, June 16, 1977, p. 1 (cont. p. 5)
96. ibid, August 25, 1977, p. 5
97. ibid, November 12, 1977, p. 1
98. ibid, February 24, 1978, p. 1 (cont. p. 5)
99. Marino Interview
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Former Mayor Tony Marino, April 18, 1987

Former Resident/South End Family Association member Rebe Moses
John Reynolds III, April 14, 1987

Former Resident/South End Family Association member Rosalie Rolle

Former Mayor Anthony Sbona, April 1, 1987

Human Relations Committee Director William Sneed, Jr.

Professor Robert Wood, April 13, 1987

also Housing Authority clerks