Redevelopment in Middletown: How It All Began

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REDEVELOPMENT IN MIDDLETOWN:

HOW IT ALL BEGAN

by

William J. Dillon

An Essay
Submitted to the Faculty of
Wesleyan University
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
MASTER OF ARTS IN LIBERAL STUDIES
19 May 1977

Faculty supervisor: Professor Dyson
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Middletown chose redevelopment as a way to solve several problems that it was faced with in the early 1950's. One was the desire to expand the existing commercial base of the city; the second was a need to find additional parking for Main Street shoppers; the third the necessity to build a new City Hall; and the fourth was the wish to rid the city of its' urban blight. Since all of these were of equal importance to the city's leaders at the time, I shall accord each one equal treatment in separate chapters.

The impact of the construction of Route 9 in Middletown in 1950 cannot be understated, for it, more than any other factor, determined where and when Middletown would begin the long, hard ride to the redevelopment of Main Street, a process that began in 1953 and which still has not been concluded. Because of its singular importance it will be treated in the first chapter.

The area that we will be examining is a ten-acre tract between Main Street and deKoven Drive from Washington Street to College Street that was officially called the Court-Place-Center Street Redevelopment Area. The Court-Place Project Area was redeveloped to make way for the present Municipal Building and Middlesex County Court House. The Center Street Project Area was redeveloped for commercial purposes and Riverview Center is the result of that effort.
The object of this essay is to examine the factors that led to Middletown's commitment to redevelop her Main Street. In other words, how it all began.

I want to thank everyone who assisted me with this essay. Particularly, I am grateful to the following people for making their resources available for my research: Helen Pribram and Phyllis Formica at the Russell Library; Joe Haze at the Redevelopment Agency; Elizabeth Swaim at Olin Library, Wesleyan University; Sherman Beinhorn at the Middletown Press; Ann Jane McCormack and Gerry Daley at City Hall.

The thoughtful suggestions of Professor Judd Kahn and Russell Murphy are also very much appreciated.

My gratitude to Professor Stephen Dyson goes wide and deep. He had been generous with his time, his patience, and wise with his counsel. Without him this thesis would never have been completed.

I am especially grateful to Joan Jurale, who had more faith in me than I had in myself, and to Tom Malefatto, who managed the Interlibrary Loan office while I researched and wrote this essay. I am also grateful to Lee Messina for an excellent typing job. And lastly, I wish to acknowledge the help of J. S. Bach and the Spinners for psyching me when my spirits sagged.

Any omissions or errors contained herein are my responsibility.
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

What is meant by redevelopment? I shall answer this first and then discuss the federal, state, and local legislation that provides for redevelopment projects.

Urban redevelopment in a simple definition is an attempt by cities, with the financial assistance of the federal government, to revitalize decaying neighborhoods. It involves property purchase, relocation of residents, building removal, site preparation, and the sale of the land to developers, all according to an overall plan for the development of the city.

The Housing Act of 1949 was the first legislation supporting redevelopment projects. It was the result of two decades of congressional effort to provide low-income housing for the poor and to assist the cities with the rehabilitation of their urban slums.

Due to a scarcity of materials, little housing had been developed during World War II. With the return of 13,000,000 men at the end of the war, the housing shortage became a fundamental principle of President Truman's Fair Deal.¹

The Housing Act was, in effect, a declaration of war by Congress on substandard housing and a noble gesture by the federal government at saving the American city. It opens with this statement:
The Congress hereby declares that the general welfare and security of the Nation and living standards of its people require housing production and related community development sufficient to remedy the serious housing shortage, the elimination of substandard and other inadequate housing through the clearance of slums and blighted areas, and the realization as soon as feasible of the goal of a decent home and a suitable living environment for every American family, thus contributing to the development and redevelopment of the communities and to the advancement of the growth, wealth, and security of the Nation.2

As the Housing Act relates to Middletown, it provided the opportunity for restoration and development of the downtown business district. Middletown, under the leadership of its Mayor Stephen K. Bailey, "Was one of the first small communities in the nation to take advantage of the urban redevelopment provisions of the Housing Act of 1949."3

Although the legislation was primarily aimed at clearing up residential slums, the urban renewal clause, or Title I, was used by cities to rid themselves of substandard housing and replace it with new business that would revive the economic life of the cities.

Title I made loans of $1,000,000,000 and grants of $500,000,000 for planning urban renewal projects4 available to the nations' cities. The federal funds are made available through the Housing and Home Finance Agency to a local redevelopment agency for a specific project. Because of the complexity of implementing the program and the involve-
ment of American forces in the Korean conflict, the Housing Act did not become truly effective until amendments to the legislation were enacted during the administration of Dwight Eisenhower.

The legislation as originally enacted contained a proviso that the redeveloped area be predominantly residential in character either before or after redevelopment. However, when the legislation was amended in 1954, the predominantly residential emphasis was softened. Ten percent of the funds made available could be used for non-residential projects. It was an attempt to give local communities the incentive to build greater tax producing properties than just housing.

Since the Housing Act of 1949 was enacted, the program has gone through a change in emphasis from slum clearance to slum renewal but essentially the legislation as it was originally enacted, remains the same. Under the procedures established by Title I, a community acquires and assembles properties in a blighted area, using its power of eminent domain where necessary. The procedure requires the local and Federal governments to pay the net cost of urban renewal, which is the difference between the cost of acquiring and clearing slum properties and the income received when the land is sold or leased for public and pri-
vate redevelopment. This difference, sometimes erroneously called a writedown is not a subsidy to the private developer, who must pay the fair value for the cleared land, but is a cost of achieving a public purpose -- the elimination of slums. 6

The authors of the 1949 Housing Act legislation had the entire community in mind when the legislation was written, thus stipulated that each community must plan its redevelopment program so that it would "conform to a general development plan for the locality as a whole, thus widening the import of the physical change from the neighborhood or block to the entire city." 7

When Middletown presented its redevelopment proposal in July of 1955, it complied with the federal mandate and developed a General Plan for the City of Middletown. The General Plan for the City of Middletown was written under the provisions of an act passed in the Connecticut General Assembly in 1931 granting Middletown the authority to develop a plan for its future growth. The provisions of the act that enabled Middletown to develop a city plan are:

TITLE 1

COMMISSION OF THE CITY PLAN

Sec. 2. Grant of power. The board of common council of the city of Middletown is authorized to make, adopt, amend, extend, add to or carry out a city plan as
provided in this act and to create by ordinance a planning commission to be known as "The Commission on the City Plan" with the powers and duties herein set forth.

Sec. 6. General powers and duties. The commission shall make and adopt a master plan for the physical development of the city. Such plan, with the accompanying maps, plates, charts and descriptive matter, shall show the commission's recommendations for the development of said territory, including among other things the general location, character and extent of streets, building lines, viaducts, subways, bridges, waterways, waterfronts, boulevards, parkways, playgrounds, squares, parks, aviation fields and other public ways, grounds and open spaces, the general location of public buildings and other public property and the general location and extent of public utilities and terminals, whether publicly or privately owned or operated, for water, light, sanitation, transportation, communication, power and other purposes; also for the removal, relocation, widening, narrowing, vacating, abandonment, change of use or extension of any of the foregoing ways, grounds, open spaces, buildings, property, utilities, or terminals, as well as a zoning plan. As the work of making the whole master plan shall progress, the commission may, from time to time,
adopt and publish a part or parts thereof, any such part to cover one or more major sections or divisions of the city or one or more of the aforesaid or other functional matters to be included in the plan. The commission may, from time to time, amend, extend or add to the plan.

Sec. 7. Purposes in view. In the preparation of such plan, the commission shall make careful and comprehensive surveys and studies of present conditions and future growth of the city, and with due regard to its relation to neighboring territory. The plan shall be made with the general purpose of guiding and accomplishing a coordinated, adjusted, and harmonious development of the city and its environs, which will, in accordance with present and future needs, best promote health, safety, morals, order, convenience, prosperity and general welfare as well as efficiency and economy in the process of development: including, among other things, adequate provision for traffic, the promotion of safety from fire and other dangers, adequate provision for light and air, the promotion of the healthful and convenient distribution of population, the promotion of good civic design and arrangements, wise and efficient expenditures of public funds and the adequate provision for public utilities and other public requirements.
The General Plan for the City of Middletown primarily concerned itself with the implementation of project plans that were simultaneously developed by the Redevelopment Agency. The Court-Place and Center Street Project Areas received the most detailed attention in the General Plan but the Plan did give its attention to every neighborhood of the city. The whole object was to provide for careful and judicious zoning to provide the community with an equitable balance of residential, business and industrial zones. The Commission on the City Plan and the Redevelopment Agency worked together to develop plans that would be compatible and hopefully serve the best interests of the citizens of Middletown.

The Redevelopment Agency is also required by Chapter 55 of the Connecticut General Statutes (1953 revision) to have the approval of the governing assembly of the community before it can proceed with its redevelopment plans. This means that the Redevelopment Agency acts only with the approval of the Common Council of the City of Middletown.

Professor Victor Jones, a metropolitan government specialist and colleague of Mayor Bailey at Wesleyan, was the first to alert him to what was emerging in legislation and in redevelopment projects around the nation.
All that federal, state and local legislation can do is provide the opportunity through funding for redevelopment projects. The planning has to be done by the local redevelopment agency. The Common Council for the City of Middletown can vote to hold a referendum on a redevelopment proposal or citizens can solicit signatures and petition the municipal government to hold one. This has happened several times over the years in Middletown. The Redevelopment Agency and the Commission on the City Plan can prepare a redevelopment plan but the ultimate judgment on the plan rests with the voters.
CHAPTER II
CAPSULE HISTORY OF MIDDLETOWN. 1650-1945

There are few cities in the nation that have as rich and varied a history as Middletown. The first settlers came in 1650 from Hartford, Wethersfield, and Windsor. They settled in the area around St. John's Square and named the town Mattabeseck after the Algonquin name for the area. The town was incorporated in 1654 and changed the name then to Middletown to better reflect its equidistant position between Hartford and Old Saybrook.

Before boundary changes occurred in the nineteenth century, Middletown included most of what is now Portland, Rocky Hill, Middlefield, East Hampton, Cobalt, the Haddams, and part of Berlin. Today, Middletown covers an area of 45 square miles.

The town turned to the river for its economic life. Trading and shipbuilding became the chief industry for the town, and because of its merchantile interests, Middletown was from 1750 to 1800 the largest and wealthiest town in the state. Middletown traded wheat, rye, barley, oats and lumber and imported rum, sugar, molasses, and salt.

During the American Revolution, Middletown was the chief supplier of provisions and ammunition to the Continental Army. The British blockade during the Revolution and later during the War of 1812 severely crippled Middletown's trading prospects and she then turned to manufacturing as the basis for its economic activity.
Middletown once again played a significant role in the nation's affairs when the Civil War broke out. Middletown supplied the Union Army with swords, pistols, and muskets that were manufactured locally. The later development of textile mills and the marine hardware industry helped to expand the industrial base of the city and make it one of the most economically diversified towns in the state.

Culturally, the town was enriched by the founding of Wesleyan University in 1831.

The population change since the town was first founded has dramatically changed the city's character. From its beginning as a Puritan settlement it is now an ethnically heterogeneous community with the predominant ethnic minority being the Italians. Middletown, and specifically the area that was redeveloped, saw different waves of immigrants come to settle in the city. The Scotch-Irish were the first to come just after the Civil War. Soon to follow were the Irish. Later the redevelopment area absorbed Poles, and finally the Italians who were still there when the area was developed.
The period from 1945-52 was one of political change in Middletown. The Republican Party was on the decline and the Democratic Party on the rise. The Republicans since the 1940's have been plagued with factionalism that has precluded its being a serious threat to the Democrats in the city elections. With the exception of the elections of the very popular, Anthony "Buddy" Sbona in the 1960's the Republicans have not held the mayor's office since 1950-52 when Salvatore Cubeta served his third and last term as mayor.

Salvatore Cubeta was first elected in 1942 and re-elected in 1944. He ran again in 1946 but was defeated by Emilio Daddario. He was again defeated by Dr. H. C. F. Bell, a retired Wesleyan history professor, but was elected again when he ran in 1950.

Out of this period in the late 1940's and early 1950's came two men who are probably the most distinguished mayors that Middletown has been fortunate to have -- Emilio Q. Daddario and Stephen K. Bailey.

The two have very similar backgrounds. Because Bailey is treated at length later in this essay, let us take a look at "Mim" Daddario as he was popularly called.

Daddario rode into the mayor's office in 1946 as a war hero. And a hero he was. Like Stephen Bailey, Daddario had been an O.S.S. officer during the war. The following, which described his O.S.S. activities, is taken from a cam-
paign ad that appeared in the Middletown Press in October 1946. It had been directly quoted from an article that had appeared in Collier's Magazine on 13 October 1945.

But it remained for a 26-year old O.S.S. captain who had infiltrated into Milan to top all these exploits by waging a brief but highly successful private war of his own. During the last five days of the Italian campaign, this one-man task force, Captain Emilio Q. Daddario, maneuvered single-handed the surrender of the Nazi S.S. Headquarters at Villa Locatelli in Cernobbio; arranged with the German general in command at Como to confine his troops to barracks and yield three-quarters of his arms, in exchange for a guarantee of protection from the aroused and blood-crazed Partisans; negotiated a similar truce between Germans and Partisans in Milan, under which thousands of Germans and Fascists surrendered unconditionally to our troops on their arrival without the loss of a single Allied soldier; and, as a climax to his personal invasion of Italy, made a prisoner of Marshall Graziani, Chief of the Italian Fascist Army, as well as Generals Bonomi and Sorrentino and other leaders who were to be turned over to Allied Intelligence.

War heroes make good political candidates. Both Dwight Eisenhower and John Kennedy were able to convert their military reputations to political advantage. Both Daddario and Bailey had admirably served their nation during World War II. And both were able to turn their military achievements into political success at the polls.

A common ground was also shared by the two men at Wesleyan University. Bailey was a professor and Daddario was
a football hero at Wesleyan and graduated in 1939. A year later he married a local girl and left town to attend law school. After the war he returned to Middletown and was welcomed as a "native son" even though he had been born in Massachusetts.

After one term as mayor he was appointed judge of the Middletown Municipal Court. He later served in the Korean conflict and upon returning from that war settled in Hartford where he resumed his law practice and political career.

Daddario's election paved the way for Bailey's later election as mayor. Bailey was an unknown when he ran for mayor in 1952 but his background and achievements were similar to Daddario's so the people took a chance and voted him into office. An election result with ramifications that we can easily see today if we drive down Main Street.
CHAPTER IV

THE CONSTRUCTION OF ACHESON DRIVE

The construction of Acheson Drive along Middletown's waterfront was the seed from which the redevelopment effort grew. Dr. G. Albert Hill was responsible for the construction of the highway and thus he played a crucial role in the years preceding Middletown's decision to redevelop.

Dr. Hill had been a professor of chemistry at Wesleyan University for thirty-two years when his friend, James L. McConaughy, President of Wesleyan University was elected Governor in 1946. Despite stiff opposition from his Democratic opponents, McConaughy appointed Dr. Hill as State Highway Commissioner on April 29, 1947, a position that he held for eight years. The opposition voiced against his appointment as commissioner was that he was a chemist and not a highway engineer. This was an extremely fortuitous appointment for Middletown. It not only had a Governor from Middletown but a State Highway Commissioner who would begin a building program that would play a role in the decision by Middletown to redevelop its downtown commercial district.

Before becoming State Highway Commissioner Hill had served as president of the Connecticut State Highway Safety Association from 1941 until his appointment as Commissioner and since 1942 he had been a member of the State Water Commission. In city affairs he had been Chairman of the Tax
Revision and Charter Review Committee. During the Second World War he was a consulting chemist of the National Defense Research Commission. He would later serve Middletown as its Director of Redevelopment.

Preliminary work on a highway along the river had been going on for years. The original plan to divert traffic from Main Street to a route along the river had begun during the administration of Mayor Charles A. Schaefer in 1939 and continued under that of Mayor Salvatore A. Cubeta, who served from 1942 to 1946.

Before Hill's tenure as State Highway Commissioner, all traffic to and from New Britain and Hartford had to pass through Middletown's Main Street. On Sunday evenings during the summer months it was a popular pastime for Middletown residents to park along Main Street and try to count the thousands of cars that were returning from Hammonasset Beach and heading for New Britain and Hartford points. On Monday, the Middletown Press would publish its own estimate of the traffic that had passed through Main Street over the weekend. Middletown residents could then compare their results with those of the Press' estimate.

After two years of planning among Commissioner Hill, City officials, and Mayor Daddario, who had defeated Salvatore Cubeta in the 1946 mayoral election, the State Highway Commission opened bids and construction began soon there-
after. Governor McConaughy and Commissioner Hill had worked closely with the Connecticut General Assembly to see that the appropriate highway legislation was passed and the funding assured.

The highway, which was named Acheson Drive after Middletown native and secretary of State Dean Acheson, was completed in two stages. The first section was opened in 1950. Dedication ceremonies were held on 15 September 1950, culminating a week of activities celebrating Middletown's Tercentenary. Secretary of State Dean Acheson was on hand to cut the ribbon officially opening the new highway. The entire project was finished in the fall of 1951.

Acheson Drive was the very first section of Route 9 that was built in the State and was the beginning of a state building program that eventually led to the north-south and east-west interstate systems that we now have. Acheson Drive runs from a point just under the Middletown-Portland Bridge to the Sumner Creek overpass.

An attempt to alleviate the traffic congestion on Main Street was not the only concern of Dr. Hill and the Middletown officials. Commercial factors played a significant role in the determination of where and when the road would be built. Just three months after he was appointed Commissioner, Hill married Nora Evans Lucas, a widow and member of the wealthy and influential Bunce family. Bunce's
Department Store, now Shapiro's, was the leading retail outlet for both Middletown and the County of Middlesex. The Bunce family had long dominated commercial interests along Main Street. It was chiefly his marriage to a Bunce that led Commissioner Hill to seek a solution to the traffic flow problem. A solution which would in turn benefit the Main Street merchants who were clammering for a new highway that would give county shoppers easier access to their stores.14

But this new highway which ran along the shore of the river had mixed blessings. It effectively cut off direct access for Middletown to the river, once the source of Middletown's very existence. And despite the construction of two exit ramps, one at Washington Street and one at William Street, Acheson Drive effectively cut off access to Main Street. Since once Route 9 was further developed it gave shoppers easier and quicker access to shopping centers away from the center of the city. Shoppers would eventually be able to speed right by our congested Main Street and go to more attractive shopping complexes in the suburbs where there would be adequate and free parking. The highway, which was supposed to bring shoppers to Main Street actually drove them away.

A few homes and small businesses were razed to put the highway through but the new highway passed by the most de-
pressed section of the city. As travellers moved through the state they saw the beautiful river on one side and the slums on the other. This was a considerable embarrassment to the city and it was under Mayor Bailey that attempts were made to cure this eyesore and restore the city's pride.

Commissioner G. Albert Hill's contribution towards redevelopment is nowhere more adequately expressed than in Stephen Bailey's address before the Middletown Chamber of Commerce where he says:

In one sense, G. Albert Hill had started it all when as Highway Commissioner of the State, he had designed Acheson Drive. For that was the beginning of the demolition of Middletown's small, but depressing East Side slum. A lot of the slum remained by 1952, but after the construction of the Drive and the lovely reconstruction of DeKoven House, there was really no way to contain the irrepressible impulses of beauty in the area."15
CHAPTER V
COMMERCIAL EXPANSION

The prime consideration behind redevelopment in Middletown was an attempt to provide for commercial expansion in the downtown business district.

Middletown was anticipating the development of shopping centers away from the center of the city as was happening around the country in the late 1940's and early 1950's. Being adjacent to the most highly developed commercial district in the city, the Court-Place and Center Street Project Areas were convenient and strategically located areas for businesses to expand and new ones to be developed.

Middletown's effort to redevelop the central business district of Main Street began shortly after the end of World War II. The Commission on the City Plan began then to assess the health of the central business district and to provide through careful zoning the future development of the city. In a blueprint for community action called Post War Zoning for Middletown, written by the Commission on the City Plan in September 1945, we see the first evidence of concern for the condition of the Main Street area. Middletown was identified as the commercial center of the region and its continued leadership was questioned by the Commission members as rapid highway development was decentralizing the traditional commercial areas in the cities.
The plan called for the development of small shopping malls, zoned for rural business but not too large to detract from the central business area. Furthermore, the Commission on the City Plan felt as early as 1945 that the central business area had to be revitalized.

Middletown's preeminent position as the commercial center for a geographic region that covered a radius of thirty miles to the south and east of the city was recognized. The population of the city in 1954 was approximately 30,000 but she served a population of approximately 75,000.16

"Middletown . . . is the center of business for the region. So we must provide enough room for business in the center of town . . . . And sometime a new civic center will be needed to provide up-to-date facilities for the government both of the city and the county."17

This emphasis on the necessity for commercial expansion of the downtown area remained a primary concern, when in 1954, the Commission on the City Plan made its recommendations for the future growth in the city. "The position of the downtown district as the shopping center for the city and surrounding area should be retained. Development of large-scale commercial centers in other areas of the city should not be fostered."18

The General Plan and the redevelopment proposals for the Court-Place and Center Street Project Areas were de-
signed to contain future commercial development within the heart of the business district. Before 1954 there had not been any significant commercial development outside of this region. In fact, all business and industry was concentrated within a radius of one mile of the central business area.¹⁹

The expansion of existing commerce on Main Street can be seen as an attempt to prevent the development of outlying shopping malls by developing the one commercial area that already existed. The growth of the Washington Street shopping plazas and the rise of strip developments along Washington and South Main Streets was just the thing that Mayor Bailey was hoping to arrest by the development of the downtown shopping district.²⁰ However, it was a vain attempt to make any significant commercial development in the outlying areas of the city unnecessary.

But the City of Middletown was bucking an inexorable trend by population, trade and industry to the suburbs. As overcrowding in the central cities occurred, it was a natural thing to abandon the city for the open spaces in the outlying regions of the cities. A trend that was first noticeable when the 1930 census was taken. And the period between 1940 and 1950 showed the largest population increase in the nation's history with the suburbs accounting for nearly half of the growth.²¹
As the population centers shifted to the suburbs so did business to be closer to the consumers. Retail sales in the central cities of the nation reflected this population shift. Between 1939-48 retail sales rose in the central cities by 180 percent but in the suburbs the percentage increase was 225 percent.22

In the late 1940's and early 1950's the growth and development of shopping centers began to take hold. Shopping centers sprang up in the areas where the population had shifted and were closer to the new highway systems that were being built to accommodate the rise in the number of cars.

Between 1940 and 1950 a jump in motor vehicle registrations from 32 million to 50 million occurred.23

Middletown, like every other city and town in the nation, was unable to prevent the exodus of city dwellers to the suburbs. And with them went business.

Another major determinant in the decision to redevelop the central business district was a desire by the city to create a better balance in the tax structure through the development of new business and industry. The tax base was heavily dependent on the home owner. Through redevelopment it was hoped that the tax burden would be shifted from the home owner to new commercial interests that would be developed in the redevelopment area. This would not only
help alleviate the inequities that existed for the home owner but would provide new sources of revenue for the city.

However, in the battle to maintain its commercial supremacy in the region, Middletown could not even hope to win. Shoppers will not be inconvenienced. They would sooner travel twice the distance to shop than to have to contend with parking meters, traffic jams, and walking great distances to reach a shop.

And furthermore, Middletown could not begin to compete with New Haven and Hartford once the new highways made them so accessible and parking so easy. With both cities redeveloping on a scale far grander than anything Middletown could even consider, there was no hope that Middletown could compete with such giant urban retailers. Downtown Middletown was caught inbetween the small shopping centers in the suburbs and the big city redevelopers.
CHAPTER VI

PARKING FOR DOWNTOWN MIDDLETOWN

The lack of adequate parking in the central business zone also led to the commitment by Middletown to redevelop. A study, done in 1971 by the Middletown Municipal Development Commission on parking, takes a retrospective look at what concerned merchants and shoppers alike in 1953. The original survey done in 1953 by Ramp Buildings Corporation of New York City was not available for me to read. However, portions of the original study of parking in the downtown area are quoted in the 1971 study by the Middletown Municipal Development Commission.

In 1971, as in 1953, the availability of adequate parking for shoppers was considered vital to the health of the central business area of the City. The concerns that were voiced by Mayor Bailey, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Main Street merchants have a prophetic ring when you read that: "Parking enhances the downtown economic base, placing the downtown in a more competitive position with other local shopping centers; such as on Washington Street and South Main Street, and neighboring communities, including Hartford and Meriden, in terms of shopper attraction and new capital investment. Convenient, efficient parking, therefore, is a necessary ingredient for the livelihood for downtown Middletown."24
The impetus for providing off-street public parking in Middletown began in 1953 with the urging of Mayor Bailey that a Parking Authority for Middletown be established. Special Act No. 158 providing for Middletown Parking Authority was brought before the Connecticut General Assembly and approved on May 7, 1953.

The combined actions of the Mayor, the Chamber of Commerce, and the merchants, to see this legislation passed was none too soon as the city was faced with a critical situation that required immediate attention. The Ramp Report was but one of many to come on parking in Middletown. Its 1953 assessment of the situation claimed that there was a parking deficit of over 2000 spaces in the central business district alone. 25

The report gave a stern warning to the city to act now on the problem of Main Street parking or be willing to live with the consequences of Middletown losing its supremacy as the shopping area for the central part of the state. Shoppers did not want to be inconvenienced with time spent locating a parking space and having to walk a distance to reach the stores that they wished to frequent. With the development of shopping centers in rural areas and new highways to make the centers more accessible, Middletown would surely decline as a major retail center. The Ramp Report states the problem clearly:
"If the City recognizes the importance of automobile transportation and provides sufficient parking facilities, retail business activity will continue to prosper in the central business district. If, on the other hand, the City fails to meet the problems of providing adequate off-street parking facilities, it is our belief that business activity will decline steadily as highway facilities are improved and it becomes progressively easier for shoppers to go to other areas."  

The only available land for parking expansion on Main Street was in the blocks between Main Street and DeKoven Drive and Court Street to William Street -- the Court-Place-Center Street Project area.  

Thus when Mayor Bailey called for the area to be redeveloped, the Main Street merchants heartily endorsed the plan which they saw as a solution to the critical problem of finding new parking for expanding business.  

Mayor Bailey in a statement presented to the citizens of Middletown at an open hearing on redevelopment held on 5 August 1954 offers his position on the parking question and gives the reasons for his belief that increased parking for downtown Middletown was so essential. He says that "the provision of municipal parking facilities invariably results in an increase in both retail sales and the taxable assessed values of business properties in areas surrounding the parking development. The experiences of several cities in the North Eastern United States has shown that such developments more than pay for themselves in a relatively short
Providing off-street parking for Main Street shoppers was not enough of a solution to the problem. As long as shoppers have to contend with parking meters, traffic congestion, and stop signs and stop lights along Main Street, shoppers will continue to drive great distances rather than hassle with those problems that are encountered on Main Street and its tributary streets.
CHAPTER VII

MUNICIPAL BUILDING AND COUNTY COURT SITE

The desire by the City of Middletown to find a new location for its Municipal Hall and by the Middlesex County Commissioners in the Connecticut legislature to seek a new site for the County Court House was yet another factor that propelled Middletown towards the redevelopment of its Main Street business district.

There appears to be a paucity of material on the old City Hall. I could not turn up much useful information on the handsome brownstone building that once stood where the Connecticut Bank and Trust Company parking lot now stands. Having grown up in Middletown I have childhood memories of the old City Hall that was torn down in 1958 to provide more adequate parking for the bank's customers. I remember particularly the wide sagging floors, the musty smell of the old building, and the dark atmosphere inside. I also remember climbing, what seemed to me then to be an interminable number of stairs, as I stood in line with my father while he waited to vote. The fine old building, with a clock in its tower, lacked the elevators that I enjoyed riding on in newer buildings. My childhood observations were apparently perceptive as the building was condemned as being unsafe in 1953. The Municipal Building Committee which had been formed in the late 1940's to develop a master plan for a new building would now begin to see action.
taken on their plans. By July of 1954, the Municipal Building Committee, with the assistance of the Redevelopment Agency, the Commission on the City Plan, and Mayor Bailey, agreed on a site in the Court Place Project Area for the new City Hall. 29

When the old City Hall was built in 1893, the Middlesex County Court House had been merged with it. Thus, any change in the Municipal Building would affect the location of the County Court House.

The County Courts were one aspect of a much-misunderstood county system of government that existed in Connecticut until abolished by the General Assembly in 1960.

The county system of government had little effect on the average citizen except for his being asked to vote for a county sheriff every four years. 30

As the system existed in 1953, the county government was responsible for the "management of county property, maintenance of county jails and custody of prisoners, care of neglected and uncared for children, and provision of suitable quarters for the state courts meeting in the county." 31

The Connecticut General Assembly appointed a three-member Commission for four-year terms from among the county legislators to administer the County's affairs.
The system had no judicial or legislative authority of its own and in effect was a separate agency of the state government.\(^{32}\)

Because its responsibilities were nebulous and often conflicted with town and city authority, it eventually became too costly and cumbersome to sustain.

As early as 1939 the Middlesex County Commissioners had voted to separate the County Court House from the Municipal Building and had accepted land in Portland for a new structure. With the coming of World War II, all building plans were held in abeyance until after the end of the war.\(^{33}\)

However, the issue lay dormant until the Municipal Building was condemned during the administration of Mayor Bailey who despared at the condition of the building. He graphically and humorously described the conditions as they existed then: "I could not be unaware of the physical condition of the old City Hall. Large chunks of plaster used to fall on the heads of the just and the unjust alike."\(^{34}\)

After the building was condemned in spring 1953, several bills were introduced in the State Legislature by the County Commissioners proposing new locations to the south and east of the city for a new County Court House. Bailey immediately offered the County property along the river that he had been eyeing for redevelopment, so that Middletown would not lose its status as the county seat.\(^{35}\)
When the County refused Bailey's offer he appealed to President Butterfield of Wesleyan University who took the initiative and in March of 1953 offered property at the corner of Pearl and Washington Streets for the construction of both a new City Hall for Middletown and a Court House for the County. The land was to be provided without any cost to the City or County.

Much discussion ensued between Mayor Bailey and the Democratic Commissioners who favored a waterfront setting for the Court House and the Republicans who preferred the Wesleyan site. Mayor Bailey was unable to convince the County Commissioners to opt for a downtown Middletown location for the new Court House. From March until November, when Wesleyan retracted its original offer, several other sites, as well as the Wesleyan offer, were considered. However, the County Commissioners, who were predominantly Republicans, emphatically refused throughout 1953-54 to consider a Main Street, Middletown setting. "The county building should be located in Middletown near the center of the population for the whole county but not in the congested down-town area."38

There was only one voice heard during this time that advocated restoration of the old City Hall. It came from Ferdinand Arrigoni, a Middletown Representative in the General Assembly. Arrigoni, one of the city's leading
contractors, estimated that it would cost $300,000 to re-
store the City Hall, and this, he said, could be much
cheaper than building two separate structures to house the
City Hall and County Court House.

By November of 1953 the County Commissioners had
firmly committed themselves to the Wesleyan site but by
then Wesleyan made a counter offer to the City and the
County. The change of attitude by President Butterfield
was due to the university's desire to create a Center for
Advanced Studies and Wesleyan intended to use the property,
originally offered to the City and County, for a building
to house the new center. This, coupled with persuasion
from Mayor Bailey to change their offer and support the
riverfront project, led to Wesleyan withdrawing its first
offer. In a letter sent by President Butterfield to Repre-
sentative Watrous, Chairman of the Middlesex County Com-
mission, the university offered its full support of Mayor
Bailey's redevelopment project and went so far as to offer
$25,000 over a five-year period to assist with development
of a civic center. Since President Butterfield's letter
explains the university's position as of November 1953, and
the reasons for the original offer of the land in back of
Honors College, I have quoted it at length. This is Presi-
dent Butterfield's letter:

I am writing this letter to you and your fellow Commissioners to outline Wesleyan's position in regard to the most recent developments concerning the County Court
House and the Municipal Building, and to submit a proposal that I think would prove of the greatest future benefit to Middletown in particular and to Middlesex County generally. Wesleyan's original offer of a parcel of land at the corner of Pearl and Washington Streets was to the City and County jointly. It was felt that immediate proximity of the two buildings would prove of maximum convenience to both the City and the County, that the development would provide a worthy architectural addition to Wesleyan and the larger community, and that the joint building would constitute a symbol of friendship, mutual interest and cooperation of the City and County. Wesleyan was delighted for these reasons to make the offer.

Wesleyan continues to want to be of maximum help to both the City and the County in encouraging their mutual growth and development. It of course feels morally bound to stand by its original offer should the original proposal by chance recur. It also feels morally bound to grant up to one-half of the original plot if the county wishes to build its courthouse on the Wesleyan site.

As things have now developed, however, the college would like to encourage and to support tangibly the currently proposed plan for a joint, even if separate, construction of the County Court House and Municipal building on the river front, between Center and College Streets. There are several reasons for Wesleyan's position. First, Middletown's citizens appear to be overwhelmingly in favor of this solution and the college would like to support his sentiment. Also the college feels that with county cooperation the development of this river-front site as a civic center would encourage the growth of a commercial area that should prove of increasing economic importance to both the city and county. It does not take much imagination to envisage for the long future the development around the civic center of a shopping and commercial center of such convenience as to mean much to both the county and city. Finally,
Wesleyan feels that whatever helps create a feeling of mutual cooperation and pride in the growing economy and beauty of both city and county should be encouraged.

It is our hope, therefore, that the County Commissioners may favorably consider the river-front site which, I understand, has been offered to the county free of charge. We feel this possibility is of such great potential value to the whole community, both City and County, that Wesleyan Board of Trustees has authorized a grant of 5,000 a year for five years to be given to the city and county jointly to aid in the development of this common civic center, provided the County Commissioners and Legislators find this plan acceptable....

Let me assure you, however, that if the County Commissioners find it unwise to accept the proposal, Wesleyan will fulfill its pledge to give the land as outlined above. ....

Bailey was able to convince Butterfield, who had close personal relationships with the Democratic Party organization. But Butterfield wasn't able to convince the county commissioners that the riverfront site was preferable to the Wesleyan one. They rejected Butterfield's offer, although they highly praised its generosity. A year later they were no nearer to a consensus than when Wesleyan first made the offer, the division always going down on party lines. The County refused Mayor Bailey's offer and they could not even agree on whether to continue with the original Wesleyan proposal. Mayor Bailey,
meanwhile, had the endorsement of the people of Middletown
to move ahead with plans for the construction of the Muni-
cipal Building along the river front in the redevelopment
area. It remained for a change in legislative representa-
tion from the county before the matter was settled and the
Municipal Building and County Court House were built side
by side overlooking the river.
CHAPTER VIII

SUBSTANDARD HOUSING

The fourth motivating factor behind the city's decision to redevelop was the desire by the city to rid itself of its urban blight.

The most severely blighted area had been beyond the railroad tracks in an area known locally as "Duck hollow." Most of the homes in this area were no more than shacks and they stood side by side with shipping docks and two coal depots.41 This area had been cleared when Acheson Drive was built. Substandard building conditions definitely did exist in the Court-Place and Center Street Project Areas and these are the areas that the Redevelopment Agency hoped to reclaim.

The standards that were used to determine what constituted a substandard dwelling were those employed by the American Public Health Association. If after a field survey was taken and a structure exhibited two or more basic deficiencies such as an absence of central heating, lack of baths or toilets, it was declared to be substandard. The Redevelopment Agency used the criteria set by the American Public Health Association and found the majority of homes to be substandard. Even after the Redevelopment Agency relaxed the criteria to make a home substandard if it was deficient by three standards, the majority of homes were still substandard.42 There can be no denying that
the area could be considered a slum.

The survey conducted by the Redevelopment Agency revealed that 74.9 percent of the homes were without central heat; 56.2 percent had no hot water; 27.4 percent had no private bath; and 12.3 percent had no toilets; and 35.2 percent showed serious structural deterioration.43

Mayor Bailey recalled in 1971 just how he had viewed this broad urban slum right in the heart of Main Street with these words: "The scene was a daily depressant, for I connected what I saw with what I had experienced. I had made fire inspections in the area with Frank Dunn (Fire Chief) and had seen and smelled the dismal overcrowding. I had cruised the area at 2:00 a.m. with Johnny Pomfret (Chief of Police) or one of his staff, and had seen and had picked up derelicts and drunks. I knew the addresses on the police blotter, and I knew that the concentration of our urban pathology was within the four blocks that I could see from my office window. I knew that slums were cancerous."44

Most of what Bailey said can be substantiated by looking at the record. The average age of the residential structures was 95 years.45 There was very little open space except for two playgrounds and the area as a whole, although primarily residential, was a mixture of industry, business and
residences. The population density clearly shows the overcrowding. There were over 70.1 persons per acre in the two project areas. I got a somewhat different impression of the area from a former resident that I interviewed. This is not intended to be a verbatim transcript of everything that she said but it is her recollection of the areas stated in her own words. She acknowledged that there was overcrowding. "But the overcrowding was of buildings not of families doubling up in one apartment. Mayor Bailey was impressed by the cleanliness of the homes when he toured the area. The area was predominantly Italian with a couple of black families. It was an ethnic neighborhood and there was a lot of sharing when one was in need. It was true that some homes didn't have bath tubs but those who had them shared them with those who didn't. The outside of the buildings did need some repairing but it was for lack of money that they weren't painted and repaired, not out of neglect. There were several taverns in the area that were frequented by outsiders and these may have given the area the reputation for being a crime area. But drunkenness was all that there was. There weren't any murders or robberies. No one ever locked their doors because everyone knew each other and no one was afraid."47

The original thrust of the Housing Act of 1949 was to clean up the urban slums such as existed in the Court-
Place Center Street Project Areas but the legislation did not provide any relocation allowance to assist families who were displaced by redevelopment to locate suitable new housing. Congress did recognize, however, that slum clearance in itself was no solution to the problem. It thus made funds available in Title III for local communities to construct decent, low-rent housing. Families who were displaced by redevelopment projects were given priority for occupancy in such housing, assuming that they fell within a low-income level.

In the Court-Place and Center Street Project areas there were 183 families and 28 businesses that were displaced by redevelopment.

The Redevelopment Agency had the power of eminent domain if a homeowner or business refused what the Agency considered to be a reasonable offer for the property and land. The owner's only recourse was to take the matter to the courts.

Once a family moved from the redevelopment area, there was no chance for them to return. Because of the prime location of the land within the business district, residential reuse was never considered. It was felt that sound planning mitigated only commercial uses and off-street parking for the project areas.
The Court-Place-Center Street Project Areas contained a fair number of eighteenth century homes that might have been saved in a time of more enlightened leadership. With the destruction of this area, one of the oldest settled areas of the city, went a large part of the city's history.
CHAPTER IX

THE ELECTION OF MAYOR STEPHEN K. BAILEY, 1952

Steve Bailey was the man on the spot at the time who made the difference between redevelopment now or later. Redevelopment in Middletown was inevitable. As we have seen, the conditions that existed in 1954 clearly spoke for the need of community rehabilitation of some sort. The election of Stephen Bailey made the difference as to when it would happen and what character it would take.

He was a highly unusual man to be serving as Mayor of Middletown. He came into the office of mayor with impressive credentials, perhaps the most impressive that any mayor of Middletown has ever had.

Stephen Kemp Bailey was born in Massachusetts on 14 May, 1916, so that he was thirty-seven when elected mayor. He received a B.A. from Hiram College in Ohio and an M.A. from Oxford University where he was a Rhodes Scholar from 1937-39. He later received an M.A. and Ph.D. from Harvard University in political science. From 1942-45 he served in the United States Navy as a Lieutenant. He was Chief of the Maritime Unit, Office of Strategic Services, in the Middle East from 1943-45, as Reports Officer, O.S.S. Middle East, 1944, as Reports Officer and Acting Chief of Secret Intelligence, in Greece in 1944 and as Chief of Intelligence
for the Balkans, O.S.S. for the last year of the war. As supervisor of Balkan intelligence he was responsible for smuggling 1000 Allied agents and 1,000 tons of supplies to partisans in a fleet of Greek fishing boats.

Before he was elected mayor, Bailey was already well known as a national expert on governmental administration. In addition to the publication of articles and books he authored Congress Makes a Law for which he earned in 1950 the Woodrow Wilson Foundation Award for the best publication of the year in government and democracy. From 1946 until 1951 he was a professor of government at Wesleyan University and in 1951 served as an administrative assistant to Senator William Benton (Dem.-Ct.).

He was also a staff associate with the Hoover Commission which was charged with the job of reorganizing the federal government with more efficiency and economy. On the state level he was Project Director for the Connecticut Commission on State Organization and was Chairman of the Platform Committee for the state Democratic Party.

Just how did Stephen Bailey get elected to the office of mayor? When you consider the present breach between town and gown, it would seem inconceivable for a Wesleyan personality to be elected mayor. But Bailey did not set a precedent. He followed a tradition set by Herbert Bell, who served as mayor, and "Mim" Daddario, a Wesleyan
graduate, who also served as mayor. William Kinnard, an economics professor, G. Albert Hill, and Wilbert Snow all served the city in various commissions and elective positions. The heavy involvement by Wesleyan in the city's affairs can be seen in the annual reports of the mayors who acknowledge the help of professor so and so and his class for their studies of various aspects of municipal government. The fundamental reason why Wesleyan and the City had such close ties back in the forties and fifties is that the party organization, under John Tynan, had close contacts with President Butterfield, Professor Schattschneider, and other Wesleyan faculty and administrators. Bailey was himself a member of the Democratic Town Committee for four years before he ran for mayor.

Bailey was elected on 6 October 1952 and sworn in on October 9 as the city's 54th Mayor. The entire Democratic ticket was elected that year. Bailey ran up a total of 4,924 votes and led his Republican opponent, Clarence C. Lincoln, by 943 votes. The incumbent mayor, Lester Gowin, who was denied the nomination by his Republican party, ran as an independent and totalled 3,038 votes. Gowin came in 943 votes behind Lincoln who lost to Bailey by the same number of votes.50
Bailey himself offers as clear an answer as to how he got elected as anything else: "When asked, for example, how I happened to be elected Mayor of Middletown in the first place, I frequently note with pride, first, my winning personality, and second my remarkable intellectual powers. Only if pressed do I add that I was running against two opposition candidates rather than one."  

When I asked Bailey how redevelopment began in Middletown and who was the catalyst behind it, his response was "that he was." In retrospect we all assume a greater role in an event that we wish to be a part of. However, Bailey's egoistical assessment of his role is an accurate assessment of the role that he did play in Middletown's initial effort to redevelop. When I posed the same question to John Tynan, I got the same answer. And John Tynan, more than any other man, was in a position to know. Tynan is former State Motor Vehicles Commissioner and a long-time power in the state Democratic Party. John Tynan has been the most powerful figure in the Democratic Party in Middletown since the 1930's and the role that he played in the decision by Middletown to redevelop was critical. Steve Bailey was a consummate political salesman who convinced this town that redevelopment was good but John Tynan knew the people who Bailey would have to convince. Bailey provided the conceptual model for redevelopment and John
Tynan introduced Bailey to the people who would be buying the proposal.

According to Bailey, he and John Tynan went through a list of 15,000 names one by one and from that massive list chose 200 who Tynan identified as the community leaders who would have to be convinced. They were the heads of fraternal orders, prominent businessmen, and anyone else who was in a position of leadership. Bailey had the ideas but it could only become a reality with Tynan's help.

As soon as the process of selection was completed, Bailey invited each one to a meeting by sending a police cruiser to each home with the invitation hand delivered by a cop. One-hundred and ninety-six showed for the meeting that was held in the old Middletown High School auditorium on Tuesday, 15 December 1953. Bailey explained to these leaders what redevelopment was. They all backed the plan and the redevelopment process began. The text of the letter sent by Bailey follows:

"A Message from the Mayor"

I hope that you will forgive this impersonal note. The urgency of this message necessitates speedy communication. A matter of vital importance is now before the citizens of Middletown and must be decided with the utmost dispatch.
I am inviting a number of Middletown's leading citizens to a meeting in the Middletown High School Auditorium Tuesday evening, December 15, at 7:00.

The purpose of this meeting is to discuss the re-development of Middletown's central waterfront area as a civic-county center, and apartment district.

Your presence at this meeting is urgently needed, and will be deeply appreciated.

Stephen K. Bailey
Mayor

Middletown, Conn.
December 12, 1953

There was always a certain immediacy or urgency in everything that he said and did. This perhaps is what provoked the citizenry to react as they did to Bailey's proposals. After he unveiled his plan to the two hundred leaders, he called for a referendum to get a firm commitment from the community for his plan, although it was not required by federal, state, or city statute.

Once he got the endorsement of the local leaders, he prepared for the referendum to be held on 11 January 1954. Bailey went on the radio, television, promoted his plan at neighborhood gatherings, in firehouses, school auditoriums, and made himself available every evening during the week before the election to answer questions from the public. In a statement to the Middletown Press
on 7 January 1954 Bailey had this to say about the redevelopment project:

Middletown has an opportunity next Monday to vote for its own future. Specifically, Middletown citizens will vote on a new memorial Civic Center, which will redevelop and beautify our riverfront and provide sites for parking areas, new apartment houses, a new city hall, and hopefully, a new County Court House.

At the present time, the area under consideration looks like this. It is made up of old houses, tenements, a few commercial and fraternal buildings, and the City Water Works. These are squeezed in between our wide and handsome Main Street and the magnificence of the Connecticut River which is presently bordered by a modern four-lane highway.

... Middletown because of the natural beauty of its location, on the wide bend of the Connecticut River, would have the most beautiful Civic Center in America.

But more than beauty is involved here. From an economic point of view, Middletown, is at the crossroads. Unless we stabilize and improve our position as a merchant-trading center for central and southern Connecticut, gigantic rural shopping centers will be created outside of Middletown.57

It should be pointed out that Bailey's concept of a Civic Center is somewhat different from what we are accustomed to thinking such a thing to be. His concept did not envision a structure that would serve as a Civic Center. He saw the completed project in toto to be the center of all civic activities for Middletown and the County.
The referendum result was a sound affirmation of the voters' faith in Mayor Bailey. The Hartford Courant reported the election results in this way:

Snow, cold and adverse travelling conditions put the Middletown's sentiment for Mayor Bailey's Memorial Civic Center and East Side Development plans to the test yesterday, and the city was not found wanting. A total of 2,081 electors braved the elements. The vote was a substantial vote of confidence in the Mayor's plan for a bigger and better Middletown. The program won through by a margin of 659 votes.58

The vote by the citizens of Middletown was not for any specific redevelopment proposal, rather it was for a conceptual model of what could be done to improve the waterfront. However, there were specific plans such as the construction of a new municipal building and a county court house. The probable costs for these were presented to the voters as well as the cost for acquisition of the property and land in the area under consideration. But the specific plans remained to be developed later.

The plan was presented by Bailey at the December 15, 1953 session of the Common Council for the City of Middletown. Councilman Clew, who would succeed Bailey as Mayor, presented the resolution:

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE COMMON COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF MIDDLETOWN: That the sum of $800. be and is hereby approved for the purpose of conducting a public poll among the electors of the City of Middletown to determine the following:
1) Do the electors of the City of Middletown favor the establishment of a Middletown Memorial Civic Center between DeKoven Drive, said Civic Center to include:

a) A site for the new Municipal Building.

b) An improved site to be deeded in fee simple to Middlesex County for a new County Court House Building.

c) A Memorial Drive parallel to Main Street to be located approximately equi-distant from Main Street and DeKoven Drive, running between Washington Street and College Street.

d) Sites for commercial, apartment and/or other civic structures within or in the immediate vicinity of said civic center.

e) Necessary landscaping, parking areas, monuments, parks, and associated projects for the beautification, redevelopment and improvement of the Civic Center and its surroundings.

f) Said Civic Center, if approved by the electors of the City of Middletown, shall be financed by the levy upon all taxpayers of the City of Middletown of a tax not to exceed one mill per annum for a period of not more than twenty-five years.

2) That said public poll shall be held on January 11, 1954, and shall be conducted in the same manner as any election, as set forth in Section 36 of the Charter of the City of Middletown concerning Referendums."

(Minutes of Common Council, December 15, 1953.)

A resolution by Councilman Clew was introduced and passed that created the Redevelopment Agency. The resolution reads:

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE COMMON COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF MIDDLETOWN: That there be established for the City of Middletown a Redevelopment Agency in accordance with the provisions of Chapter 55, Section
AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED: That the Mayor be and is hereby authorized to appoint five (5) persons, subject to the approval of the Common Council, who shall constitute said Redevelopment Agency for the City of Middletown,

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED: That the first appointed shall be designated to serve for one, two, three, four and five years respectively, and that thereafter members shall be appointed annually to serve for five years, except that any vacancy shall be filled for the unexpired term."


An amendment was presented to make Stephen Bailey an ex-officio member of the Redevelopment Agency with the power to vote in case of a tie. The amendment was passed unanimously.

Bailey saw the cost of the project to be about $2,000,000, with the cost to the taxpayer of about one mill a year over a twenty-year period. The major costs were for site acquisition, area improvements, the building of the new City Hall, and Middletown's share in the construction of a new County Court House.

In a press release issued during the referendum campaign, Bailey underscored his deep concern that Middletown would have to act immediately if Main Street was to be saved as the principle shopping area.

Unless Middletown undertakes to increase the values and facilities of its down-town shopping area, new, convenient, rural shopping centers will be created outside the center of our City. Hamden is already planning
a seven million dollar shopping center providing for more than 2,300 cars.

With Acheson Drive, Middletown is in a wonderful position to develop the finest down-town and shopping center in Connecticut--tied in with a beautiful civic center.

It is in a position to replace low value property with high value property... On January eleventh you are being asked to vote 'yes' on Middletown's future--not in terms of a vague dream but in terms of practical necessity for beautifying our City, saving its economic resources, and promoting its long-range prosperity.61

Steve Bailey was a curious combination of liberal social reformer and conservative Democrat who strongly believed that reform could only come from within the existing party organization. In a memo sent to the Police and Fire Departments in June 1953 he says:

Almost any form of governmental organization can work moderately well if governmental offices are staffed with men of reasonable intelligence, integrity, and good-will. There is no point in change simply for the sake of change. Temperamentally, I am a conservative in the sense that I believe that existing institutions and practices should not be unduly tampered with if they are fulfilling human needs and expectations to a reasonable degree.62

Bailey's political philosophy was compatible with the existing Democratic Party philosophy in Middletown at the time.
Steve Bailey was both a political theoretician and pragmatic politician. He determined the goals but he also understood and used the political realities that make government work. In just two years Bailey was responsible for not just getting redevelopment started. He also began a "new school building program, a revitalized park and playground system, a revision of the city's charter and more efficient planning."\(^{63}\)

Stephen Bailey, who is now vice-president of the American Council on Education, was an ambitious man who aspired to the presidency.\(^{64}\) And had he been a wealthy man when he first held elective office, he might just have pursued that end. John Tynan tried to persuade him to remain in Connecticut and enter the race for the U.S. Senate. With Tynan's support, he would have been assured the nomination. However, Bailey had financial commitments that precluded any attempt to enter the race. At the time it was estimated that $100,000 would be needed to finance a campaign against a Republican senatorial opponent. Tynan assured Bailey that the party could raise the necessary money but Bailey refused citing personal financial concerns as the reasons and in a short while he left Middletown for Princeton.\(^{65}\)

Steve Bailey's political ambition may have been a motivating factor behind his proposal to redevelop the
east side of Main Street. But it seems apparent from an examination of his public addresses and correspondence that his intentions were of an altruistic nature. It would, of course, be to his credit if Middletown successfully redeveloped its Main Street, but I believe, he had the betterment of Middletown in mind rather than some political advantage that might be gained through redevelopment. In a letter to Jack Paton, Bailey candidly expresses his sentiments for John Tynan who worked so closely with Bailey during his administration. What Bailey says about Tynan could easily be applicable to himself:

He (Tynan) never pressed me to do anything which was not, in my estimation, in the interests of Middletown. On a number of issues he was frank about political risks to the Democratic Party in program and policies under consideration, but his inevitable conclusion was, 'If it is right for Middletown, we must be for it--regardless of political costs.' ... in my experience with him he never allowed his personal interests to get in the way of his concern for the community."

Had Stephen Bailey not been elected Mayor, I doubt if Middletown would have made the commitment to redevelop as early as it did. Bailey can rightly be called the father of redevelopment in Middletown. The direction towards redevelopment had been building for years but it was this one man who took the giant step.
CHAPTER X
CONCLUSION

With the trend already evident to city planners that the shift in the 1950's was from the city to the suburbs, a primary goal should have been to catch some of these people before they left the community altogether. Relocating residents in the same neighborhoods that they were driven from would have helped to maintain a fundamental ingredient of a city's economic base -- its people. A grand shopping center in the central city does the community no good if there are no consumers around. If you take people from the heart of the city, you take the life of the city away. Our cities will remain characterless and faceless unless we invite people back in them to live. Only then will redevelopment projects be successful.

Urban renewal has been a failure in Middletown partly because it did not concern itself with human considerations. Urban renewal projects fail when they do not relate to housing and services for the citizens of the community. The tragic flaw in Middletown's effort to redevelop its Main Street has been the absence right from the start of any concern for the restoration of housing downtown. It is unfortunate too, that Middletown wasn't perceptive enough to see that placing a post office in the redevelopment area would be in the best interest of the
community and would serve as a magnet to attract people downtown. Sure, a post office doesn't produce any revenue for the city, but when money starts taking precedence over services then something has gone radically wrong in our thinking.

The breaking up of the Court-Place=Center Street Italian neighborhood was one of the tragedies of redevelopment in Middletown. Their proud ethnic identity was fragmented when they were scattered to all corners of the city. With the dispersion of this ethnic neighborhood went something very basic to a community's identity -- its neighborhood cohesiveness.

One measure of a city's character is the strength of its neighborhoods and the cohesive identity that they exhibit. What is Boston without its Irish neighborhoods and New York without its lower East Side? Middletown loses some of its individuality and special character when it loses its ethnic neighborhoods.

Phyllis Sienna spoke with great feeling when she looked back to the years when she lived in the redevelopment blocks. It was not a slum to her at all. It was a neighborhood where there was a great deal of sharing and caring.
It is unfortunate that Mayor Bailey spent such a short time in elective office. His life since he left Middletown has been spent in teaching and in educational administration. Middletown should be grateful that the short period of his life that was spent in public office was here in town. However, his vision, that saw beyond the immediate, is still alive here today. His plan to turn us back towards the river, where so much of our heritage lies, enters a new phase this summer. The Harbor Improvement Agency project to develop the river front is in part the fulfillment of Bailey's original concept for the East Side of town.

The river is our greatest natural resource. It will no longer ever sustain us economically, but it can become for us a source of pleasure and pride.
FOOTNOTES


7The Central City Problem and Urban Renewal Policy, p. 43.


9Stephen K. Bailey, interviewed April 1977.

10The Middletown Press, 2 October 1946, p. 4.


12Thomas Dillon, interviewed April 1977.


14Dillon, interviewed April 1977.

15Stephen K. Bailey, Urban Renewal: Then and Now, address before the Greater Middletown Chamber of Commerce (21 June 1971), p. 3.

17 Preliminary Redevelopment Plan, Center Street-Court Place Redevelopment Area, Middletown, Conn. (July 1964), ii.


19 Preliminary Redevelopment Plan, Center Street-Court Place Redevelopment Area, Middletown, Conn. (July 1954), 1.

20 Marion Newberg, interviewed May 1977. Marion Newberg is State Central Committee woman for the Democratic Party in Connecticut. She was a close confidant of Stephen Bailey both when he was a member of the Middletown Democratic Town Committee and later as Mayor.

21 Miles Colean, Renewing Our Cities (New York: Twentieth Century Fund, 1953), 17.

22 Ibid., 21.


25 Ibid., p. 3.


30 "County Government is Mystery to Many Citizens," The Hartford Courant, 1 November, 1953, 1.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.

34 Bailey, Stephen K., Urban Renewal Then and Now, Address before the Middletown Chamber of Commerce, 21 June 1971, 4.


36 Sherman Beinhorn, interviewed May 1977.


39 John Tynan, interviewed April 1977.

40 The Middletown Press, 2 November 1953, pp. 1, 16.

41 Thomas Dillon, interview April 1977.

42 Court Place-Center Street Project Plan (Middletown, Connecticut, n.d.) 9.

43 Ibid., 12.


45 Court Place-Center Street Project Plan (Middletown, Connecticut, n.d.) 9.

46 Ibid., 13.

47 Phyllis Sienna, former resident of Center Street, interviewed May 1977.

48 Data taken from speech nominating Bailey to the Office of Mayor in September 1945, 11.

49 Terry Ferrer, "Dr. Bailey, Mayor," Newsweek (5 October 1953), 82.

50 The Hartford Courant (7 October 1952), 1.


John Tynan, interviewed April 1977.


Ibid.


The Hartford Courant, (12 January 1954), 5.


Ibid.

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