Urban Renewal and Model Cities: 
Historical Notes from Poughkeepsie’s Experience

This presentation was prepared for the November 1, 2011 conference entitled “Will Transit Oriented Development Save Our Cities?” It is not an academic paper, and for further development please refer to the references on the final page. The slides (black and white historic images and maps) and text from my presentation were integrated by the event organizer, Jolanda Jansen. She also took the liberty to add some more recent color photographs.

Harvey Flad

Illustrations from

Main Street to Mainframes: Landscape and Social Change in Poughkeepsie

by

Harvey K. Flad and Clyde Griffen (Albany: SUNY Press, 2009)
Introduction

Thank you to Jolanda Jansen for inviting me to be on this panel sponsored by the Hudson Valley Smart Growth Alliance to discuss “Will Transit Oriented Development Save Our Cities?”

In this presentation I will give a short history of urban renewal as it impacted cities in the mid-Hudson area.

My particular perspective is as a geographer interested in the landscape of change, particularly change to urban spatial structures as a result of both external and internal forces, over time. My colleague and co-author of Main Street to Mainframes: Landscape and Social Change in Poughkeepsie, Clyde Griffen, is a social historian whose interest is in changes to economic and social structures over time.

We studied the history of Poughkeepsie because, in large measure, we could get our arms around it; that is, the data, sources, and primary actors involved in decision-making were available. Plus, having both taught at Vassar College in the multidisciplinary program in Urban Studies, we were personally familiar with many of the events and could recognize many of the social, economic and physical results of the urban renewal period on the urban area.

Poughkeepsie is a small city, yet had a significant experience with urban renewal activities for three decades from the 1950s through the 1970s.

In this presentation, I offer some historical grounding to the discussion on “Transit Oriented Development” by considering the question: what was the experience of Urban Renewal in Poughkeepsie and what might be some of the lessons learned about large scale planning?

But first, I would like to review what was happening in cities around the nation in the decades following World War II in order to place the Poughkeepsie experience in historical context.
Some Notes on Urban History

In the 19th Century both industrialization and urbanization were the driving forces of economic and social change in America.

As the national economy evolved from primary production activities such as agriculture, forestry and mining to secondary and tertiary sector economies based on manufacturing and other commercial activities of industrialization, cities grew and became central to modernization.
Urban economic functions such as manufacturing, finance, government and commerce were located in cities - the latter in the commercial business district (CBD), or “Downtown”, and the former in immediately adjacent land use zones, such as along streams or water courses that had provided the water power for mills in the 17th and 18th centuries, or along the waterfront where the initial transportation routes by sail and steam or, by mid-19th century, by rail, were located.

Working class residential neighborhoods were located close to their jobs and were often quite densely populated with immigrant groups, such as the Irish and Germans in mid-19th century and Italians and eastern Europeans at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century.
A Short History of Poughkeepsie’s Growth

Poughkeepsie’s growth and land use character during the 19th century was similar to most of the cities of the north east: a busy waterfront of diverse heavy industries such as an iron foundry, glass factory, lumber yards, furniture manufacturing, and machine shops.

Two major manufacturers, employing over a thousand employees were Adriance-Platt Buckeye Mower (later to be Moline Plow) and De Laval Separator.

In the years after World War II, these waterfront industries had all closed or moved elsewhere and the waterfront was abandoned, the landscape derelict and hazardous.

Factories along the Fall Kill and elsewhere on the city’s north side similarly had closed, including the large shoe and underwear factories as well as Federal Bearings, due to such factors as labor and environmental costs and technological advances; no need for ball bearings in an increasingly electronic age.
Meanwhile, the central business district was also losing its importance as the “central place”. Governmental administration, including judicial courts, and finance (banking) continued to focus on Downtown, at the intersection of Main and Market streets, but Main Street itself had begun to lose its primary commercial function.

Whereas the four department stores along Main Street had been the shopping “mecca” for the mid-Hudson area, especially in the 1930s through the 1960s, after street lighting made window shopping in the evenings a safe pleasure especially for women and when “you had to dress up to go downtown shopping on Thursday nights” and Lucky-Platt department store advertised all the way east to western Connecticut on signs stating how many miles to Lucky Platt, by the 1960s all four had closed as well as most of the national chain stores such as Woolworths and Grants.
Poughkeepsie Neighbors, Nineteenth Century

Flanagans’ Saloon, c. 1890
267 Main Street

Reynolds’ Mansion, 1881
229 Mill Street
Transportation Early 20th Century: Auto and Trolley

South Road (Albany Post Road - Route 9)
Poughkeepsie Rural Cemetery, ca. 1919

Main Street, ca. 1940
Main Street Retail 1950s and 1960s
Main Street Retail, ca. 1960

Wallace’s Department Store, Poughkeepsie
Opening of a new window display to a large crowd of onlookers
Suburbanization and IBM

When the troops returned from overseas at the end of World War II, suburban subdivisions sprang up outside of older, dense cities across the nation. Poughkeepsie followed the national trend.

A major cause of suburbanization in Dutchess County was the growth of IBM, its prime economic engine. IBM arrived in the town of Poughkeepsie, south of the city on South Road, in 1941 as a munitions manufacturer. Tom Watson, Sr. had been contacted in Elmira, NY and encouraged to move to the Hudson valley to be part of the war effort.

He purchased the abandoned Delepenha tomato canning plant and began producing various arms for the military such as carbines.

As the war began to come to a close he asked permission to return to manufacturing business machines, such as calculators, card sorters and typewriters.

By 1943 the business had grown. Watson recruited engineers from all over the country. However, housing these new, highly educated, well-paid employees was a problem.

The city of Poughkeepsie was fairly well built up and a majority of the structures were over 50 years old.

To alleviate this shortage, Watson purchased over 400 acres across South Road from the IBM plant and created a subdivision called Spackenkill Heights where he offered individual building lots to IBM employees for $450.
Impact on City and Town of Poughkeepsie

Purchasers then had a choice of three grades of homes. The basic house with carport cost $8,500, an upgrade required $10,500, and, largest of all, a four-bedroom house with garage went for $15,000.

The result: 93 percent of the residents of Spackenkill Heights worked for the company.

Similar subdivisions sprouted up throughout the Town of Poughkeepsie and other nearby towns of Wappingers Falls, Fishkill and East Fishkill that also became IBM-enclaves.

As IBM grew to become the largest employer in the county, indeed making Dutchess County virtually a one-company town with over 35,000 employees, or one-third of the active occupational workforce.

The greatest population growth was in the suburban towns, not in the cities of Poughkeepsie or Beacon.

Indeed, the City of Poughkeepsie leveled out at 41,000 in 1950 and declined thereafter for the rest of the 20th century, only reviving in 2010 to a bit over 30,000.

Meanwhile the Town of Poughkeepsie grew by 38 percent between 1940 and 1950 and another 61 percent to 1960, while the county also grew dramatically during these decades by adding 16,500 from 1940 to 1950 and another 40,000 to a total of 176,000 in 1960.
## 20th C. Population Change in Dutchess County, City and Town of Poughkeepsie

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IBM families were young, had children, and were middle class; they had, on average, much higher incomes than workers at other businesses, and lived in newer homes on larger lots with two cars.

White, middle class households in the city also began to move out to new housing in nearby towns, bringing their wealth and purchasing power with them and lowering the property values in the city.

White flight, combined with the immigration of persons of color and lower socio-economic status changed the social makeup of both the city and the county.

Shoppers no longer sought out stores on Main Street, as parking became a problem, so suburban shoppers drove to the parking lots of shopping centers located along highways in the towns.

By the mid-1950s three shopping plazas had been built outside the city in the town, including both Hudson Plaza and Poughkeepsie Plaza on South Road, which was widened to a four lane Route 9, and 44- Plaza on route 44/55.

South Hills Mall and the Galleria would be built in the 1970s and 80s.
IBM supplied new employees with this sketch map that focused on the areas outside the City of Poughkeepsie.
Meanwhile, on Main Street, frequent traffic jams and limited parking caused problems for downtown merchants. Poughkeepsie, like cities throughout the northeast, was losing sales taxes, property taxes, population and manufacturing all at the same time.

Cities were no longer central to their region’s economy or society, and had in fact become a national problem.

Common images of the city focused on the “Inner City” as location of high rates of poverty and crime, poor schools, as well as deteriorated housing stock and environmental wastelands.

Stereotypes of race and class also colored the images as urban decline worsened into the mid-twentieth century.

**National Urban Decline**

Turmoil and civil unrest in the decade of the sixties not only involved the Civil Rights movement and discontent about waging a war in Vietnam, it also manifested itself in the social and economic effects of urban decline. Cities were both exploding and imploding; suburbanization sucked out wealth and civil discourse from the urban core while economic and social issues of poverty and crime increased.

To address many of these urban issues President Lyndon Johnson created the War on Poverty that had among its mandates to renew cities and urban society.

The focus of Urban Renewal was primarily to rebuild deteriorated, antiquated, and abandoned infrastructure such as housing, water and sewer lines, and transportation, as well as abandoned industrial wastelands, while Model Cities programs focused on social and economic needs such as health, education and welfare.

Policies and programs were to intertwine both economic and social development.

It was a tall task that would ultimately come up upon the hard realities of politics, economics, cultural values and scale.
The City of Poughkeepsie met all of the social, economic and land use criteria for federal Urban Renewal and Model Cities funding.

The spatial arrangement of roads and land uses was that of a 19th century city, which, unfortunately, constrained the transportation and housing needs of the twentieth century.

**Highways**

The city was located at the hub of a highway system that branched out in all directions.

However, the city itself had a spatial arrangement of roads that was more reflective of its 19th century heritage as a human-scale, pedestrian-oriented, and trolley line network than the so-called “needs” of the automobile age.

North-south traffic on Route 9 became constricted by having to go through the center of downtown on Market Street that had been the major north-south route since Albany Post Road days in the 18th century.

Meanwhile, east-west traffic was similarly congested, especially along Main Street.

In 1953 the City, along with the State of New York, began plans for a north-south arterial to bypass the center of downtown.

It would be one of the first major physical changes wrought by external forces that would come to dominate the changing face of the city in the next two decades.
It was massive in scale, would rip apart existing human scale neighborhoods, decimate ethnic social networks, and change the nature of the relationship of city to hinterland.

The city would no longer be a place where one went to or through but now one went around it, skirting the governmental core of the county.

In fact, it has been observed that when traveling north on Route 9 towards the city, the speed through the Town is 40 mph, but upon entering the city, the speed is increased to 55 mph – completely the reverse of what is normal in almost every other urban area in the nation!

The North-South arterial highway got underway in 1959, although construction did not actually begin until 1963 due to delays in rights-of-way arrangements.

Upon completion in 1966 the total cost had risen to $14 million and a part of the city’s historic and social landscape, including blocks housing Irish and Italian immigrant families and the heart of the German-speaking community, were eliminated.
In 1966, the same year that the North-South Arterial was completed, the city planning board presented a second proposal for an East-West Arterial to run from Routes 44 and 55 to the Mid-Hudson Bridge. Not only would it act to relieve congestion for through traffic, but it was seen – and here I quote their optimistic language – as “a convenient and efficient way to bring City and area residents from their homes to Downtown.”

Here, in the planning blinders of the day, we see one of the fallacies of Robert Moses-style macro-and auto-centered highway planning.

Arterials such as the North-South and East-West Arterials do not bring the suburban population into a city’s downtown, rather they hasten them through or around the urban core, and equally allow the city’s residents easier access to shopping and businesses, such as IBM, located outside the city’s boundaries.

Their alignments also can destroy viable human-scale neighborhoods, or at least create boundaries in formerly cohesive neighborhoods.

For example, the East-West Arterial created a “hardscape” concrete boundary of very fast moving vehicles resulting in many houses without their former welcoming front yards, and make for a dangerous walk for school children to three elementary schools.

Construction of the East West Arterial along former Church Street, diminished front yards, creating a very sterile streetscape.
RETAIL SHOPPING & the MAIN MALL

Poughkeepsie’s central business district (CBD) continued to decline throughout the 1960s into the 1970s and 80s.

In 1954 the city, with over 70 percent of the commercial space of the county accounted for 58 percent of all sales volume; in 1961 sales volume had slipped to 47 percent and rapidly decreased to 38 percent by 1966.

By 1980 the city only accounted for 28 percent of the county’s commercial space.

In an attempt to answer the rise in competition the city responded in three ways: by increasing available parking; by building up its employment base by creating a coherent plan for the downtown as the center for financial and governmental activity in the county; and by constructing a downtown pedestrian shopping area.

Various plans to increase parking were developed in an effort to adjust to the increasing demands of space caused by the use of the automobile.

The city’s “first urban renewal project” creating a large parking lot at the corner of Catherine Street and Mill Street (the Westbound Arterial).
The project displaced 20 families and left a bare macadamized parking lot, behind shops on Main Street, which still today is only used in a limited way by some employees of those businesses, and hardly at all by shoppers.

A food market is currently being planned at this site, a half-century after the empty lot was created.

In 1961 the General Neighborhood Renewal Plan encompassed 500 acres from the Hudson River east to the CBD.

It focused on four main areas: waterfront, neighborhoods in the lower Main Street area, civic core along Market Street, and Main Street from Market east to Catherine and Hamilton streets.

The latter was the main shopping center, where all four department stores were located, and where the other commercial enterprises were both locally owned and interspersed with national chains.

To maintain its retail function in the face of increasing development of shopping centers located on highways outside the city, plans were made to develop a pedestrian shopping area along three blocks of Main Street, to be known as Main Mall.
Urban Renewal: Main Mall, Poughkeepsie - 1970s-1980s

The idea of a central city pedestrian shopping mall emerged during the late 1950s and early 1960s in many medium-sized cities throughout the nation.

In Poughkeepsie, initial plans developed in 1960 were revamped at the end of the decade, and finally instituted in 1972, with construction completed by 1974.

Originally conceived as a moderately expensive renovation to be funded by local merchants themselves, the mall, when dedicated in the fall of 1974, cost ten times more than anticipated and was completely federally financed.

Its cost of approximately $4 million, however, was only one-tenth the total of federal funds allocated to the City of Poughkeepsie during this period. Poughkeepsie became “famous” as one of the highest federally-funded cities per capita in the nation.

Most of this money went into the demolition and rehabilitation of the housing stock in the city.

Nonetheless, the failure of Main Mall to stop the hemorrhaging of retail sales, and hence sales and property taxes, from the center of the city remains as one of the perceptions of the failure of Urban Renewal projects.
What were some of the reasons why Main Mall failed to revitalize the city’s center?

First, it has already been noted that most retail for food, hard and soft goods had left for suburban shopping plazas.

Second, potential shoppers had a very difficult time reaching Main Street because the East-West arterials were also under construction, and when completed they simply acted as through-routes without any signage or easy access route to Main Mall.

Third, parking remained a problem, and even when parking lots were constructed behind the Main Mall shops, a lack of clear and safe passageways deterred shoppers from walking onto the mall.

Fourth, the design of Main Mall lacked the welcoming sense of other examples, such as in Ithaca, as it did not have a great deal of variety, street furniture, and shade trees and decorative landscaping; it was a wide expanse with extensive sightlines rather than intimate spaces with interesting texture at a human-scale.

Fifth, the city itself, and Main Mall in particular, had an image problem as a “dumping ground” for inmates who had been let out of Hudson River Psychiatric Hospital and other similar institutions due to new mental health policies mandated by New York State.

And the city, like all American central cities, was perceived through the lens of poverty, crime and racism.
Civic Space

Urban renewal projects to revitalize the city’s civic core also seemed to stumble as a result of external factors.

For example, a new county office building first proposed in 1955, was constructed as the county’s first modern high-rise on Market Street and dedicated ten years later in 1965 by Robert C. Weaver, the federal secretary of HUD (Housing and Urban Development Agency).

In his remarks, he posited that rational planning for urban growth was a serious issue for the nation.

Central cities, he noted, were deteriorating and being torn apart by suburban development: “And, as most of this growth shows no coherent pattern, we have come to refer to it as urban sprawl.

Coupled with central city blight, this constitutes the core of our urban problem today.”

According to the secretary, the containment of urban sprawl through “comprehensive area-wide planning” and the rebuilding of central cities through urban renewal projects needed to work together to advance President Johnson’s thrust to enhance “quality of life” for Americans.
Designs for a new city hall were first proposed in 1967, and five years later a new municipal building was dedicated in 1972.

Although the dedication ceremony was planned as a celebration of “community spirit” as the “key ingredient in any lasting urban renewal,” the keynote speaker, John V. Lindsay, mayor of New York City, struck a more somber note.

Urban America was in crisis he pointed out: “There is no urban need that is not a national need…There is no urban crisis that is not a national crisis…The future of America will be determined by what becomes of its cities, for in our urban areas are the symptoms of what all Americans suffer.”

He argued that the war in Vietnam was one of the most important reasons why America’s cities were in such dire straits.

“That war is hell on cities, not only Hanoi or Haiphong, Hue or An Loc…We’ve got war-torn cities all across America.

All the cities and towns from Poughkeepsie to Pasadena that have ancient schools, crowded hospitals, abandoned buildings and inadequate transportation.”
The war, he asserted, was taking resources away from America’s urban populations. “Isn’t it time Americans said ‘Enough’? Isn’t it ever going to be our turn in urban America?” he wondered.

[Personal interjection: “Doesn’t this ring a bell for us today?”]

“The decline and fall of cities,” Lindsay stated, was a precursor to a nation’s disintegration.

City Hall itself would later emulate Lindsay’s comments.

Built with limited funds that removed some of the originally designed aesthetic features in a modernist design with a flat roof, it would have to be vacated in the 1980s due to severe engineering problems, to be reoccupied at great cost in 2000.

A civic center complex, proposed in 1973 and opened in 1977, was erected on New Market Street at the intersection of Main Street between the county office building and the new city hall.

Across the street a three-story parking garage attached to a modern office building, now housing the Chamber of Commerce, completed a central core of urban functions in finance, culture, and governmental administration.
Housing
Residential housing has always been the primary land use in the City of Poughkeepsie.
By 1958 about 45 percent of the city’s 13,000 units had been constructed prior to the turn of the century.
These structures became the focus of attention in efforts to revitalize the housing stock; they were seen as both assets and problems by various residents, city administrators, and planners.
As one planning consultant wrote: “Although the charm and character of these older homes is an important aesthetic asset to the City, they represent problems both in terms of maintenance and in compliance with today’s plumbing, electrical and fire regulatory standards.”
In the General Development Plan of 1960 planners opined that the city’s housing stock was aging rapidly and much of it was deteriorated: 4,390 units, or 33 per cent of all dwelling units in the city were located in structures showing signs of needing major repairs.
“In terms of land area, roughly 260 acres, or 14 per cent of the total built up areas of the city, excluding streets, are taken up by blocks in which over 60 per cent of the units are rated as deteriorated.”

City of Poughkeepsie
Housing Conditions - 1960

Source: Candeub and Fleissig, Master Plan Report No 3:
Housing, Neighborhood and Urban Renewal Plan
(January, 1960)
The report continued: “These largely deteriorated blocks virtually encircle the central business district. They also cover a large concentrated area in the west central sections of the city on the lower slope down to the river.”

The planning consultants proposed a three-fold strategy of urban renewal, using federal funds, to supply better housing as well as “preserve and strengthen the neighborhood.”

The greatest efforts in terms of acreage and funds were on redevelopment projects, which included total clearance through the demolition of structures and the relocation of families.

Smaller efforts were on rehabilitation projects that included some spot clearance, as well as a “conservation” strategy that was directed at “blight prevention” and consisted largely of enforcement of zoning regulations and building and housing codes.” Urban renewal’s greatest impact on the urban fabric – its physical and social landscape – was from the redevelopment projects.

Poughkeepsie’s “General Neighborhood Renewal Plan” was an example of the type of wholesale clearance that urban planners imposed on cities throughout the nation.

Urban Renewal Plan
Future Project Areas

In many cities the destruction of whole blocks destroyed neighborhoods and communities and had a profound effect on the lives of millions, particularly minorities. Not only were families uprooted from their neighborhoods, but often many were never relocated into better housing, as promised. The landscape of empty, brick-strewn and weed-infested lots became an image of American cities at mid-century.

“Urban Removal”

In many ways, Poughkeepsie’s story was similar to the national narrative of urban renewal, sometimes known as “urban removal.” The general area covered was approximately 500 acres, from the Hudson River to the CBD. The “Plan” described the area as containing “most of our serious land and human problems. Most of our low income families live here. Almost 30 per cent of our senior citizens live in this area. The lower part of Main Street has become a Negro ghetto.” The first projects cleared the abandoned factories along the waterfront.

Initial renewal plans included a minimum of open space and a major housing development.

Roger H. Corbetta, a builder from Millbrook, proposed a massive project on 73 acres at the foot of Main Street of more than one thousand dwellings of “moderate” housing, 500 of “middle income” housing and 100 town houses for “upper middle” housing, as well as a medical complex on the abandoned De Laval Separator site.

After clearance of the entire area by spring 1969 Corbetta declared that his proposal, called “Riverview” would provide: “the kind of home environment that modern families want, but usually can’t find.

It will combine features characteristic of suburban living, with an in-town location and many community services.

It will offer more recreational facilities than many resorts or private clubs….Spacious house and apartment designs will appeal to families used to country living…[they] will enjoy country living advantages with city conveniences.”

At the ground-breaking ceremony a slick brochure declared: “It is planned to phase out poverty and unwarranted misery.”
The brochure noted that the 18-story building was named “Rip Van Winkle” because it signified that the city had “awakened from a long slumber;” it never fulfilled its promise.

The 179 units quickly became Section 8 as subsidized housing, isolated from the rest of the city by the railroad tracks and the North-South arterial, and often cited as a problem living area by city agencies.

The rest of the waterfront property lay vacant as an underutilized public space to be rehabilitated as a useable park half a decade later and renamed Waryas Park, while Kaal Rock Park, created south of Kaal Rock and the Mid-Hudson Bridge, would quickly fall into disuse due to limited access and therefore poor security.
Other major projects in the lower slope area included wholesale removal of structures along lower Main Street and dozens of residential blocks.

Some neighborhoods fought the bulldozer.

Homeowners in the Gate Street neighborhood were unable to get city rehabilitation funds so seven houses were demolished and the remaining 13 sold to a developer for resale.

Their social network now totally destroyed, it would not longer be a neighborhood.

Homeowners on Union Street were a bit more successful as an Historic District was designated through the efforts of local preservationists and a façade easement program that rebuilt buildings and sidewalks and added new street lighting.
Housing Conditions: City of Poughkeepsie, 1967
Source: Poughkeepsie Model Cities Proposal (April 1967)

Model Cities

Urban Renewal projects focused on the physical infrastructure: housing, streets (and traffic), lighting, sidewalks, water and sewer, while President Johnson’s “Great Society” agencies directed federal funds toward antipoverty and community development programs.

In Poughkeepsie, as in hundreds of other American cities, city administrations, neighborhoods, and community activists vied with one another for access to those funds.

As certain critics observed: “At issue are those who seek to commodify place versus those who try to protect suitable qualities of life.”

In 1967 Poughkeepsie became one of 63 cities in the nation to become a Model City under the federal administration’s “War on Poverty.”

The city declared its north side as its “target area”: its 14,298 people having a “disproportionate share of our social problems and substandard housing...It includes 98 per cent of the City’s welfare cases, 95.6 percent of the City’s families earning less than $2,000, 92 percent of the City’s unemployed, as well as 78 percent of the City’s deteriorated housing units.”

For example, on Pershing Avenue “about half of the dwelling units” were without indoor plumbing.

Not only was there a socio-economic and racial divide between the city and the county, within the city there was also a spatial separation between the neighborhoods north or south of Main Street.
For example, the population of the Model City target area constituted 99 percent of the black population while also including 37 percent of the city’s white population, most of whom were recently arrived rural poor.

Within this area of the city, urban renewal activities focused on housing, streets and other infrastructure while Model Cities anti-poverty funds focused on social programs.

Public housing projects were built on both the north side and on the west side from Market Street to the Hudson River.

Known everywhere in the nation’s central cities as “the projects,” and so too in Poughkeepsie, many became unsafe spaces and pockets of poverty.

They were examples of Urban Renewal projects that, in smaller scale but similarly as homogeneous macro-housing units, were similar to other cities in their social results.

A North Perry Street vista – an owner was ordered to demolish a dilapidated structure and lift his neighbor’s house looking like this.
Conclusion

Across America, and especially in the northeast and mid-west, federal policies in physical and social planning from the 1950s to the 1980s had a profound effect on the physical and social landscape of the nation’s cities.

Top-down planning promoted mega-scale projects that destroyed working neighborhoods and many economic and social functions of central cities.

Many focused on transportation issues, especially the problems associated with the dominance of the automobile; highways slashed through cities to accommodate through traffic while sterile parking lots left gaping holes in the urban fabric.

Many housing problems were addressed by removal rather than rehabilitation or renovation.

Questions

Will current interest in transit-oriented development be different? Have we learned anything from the urban renewal planning approach that may suggest more moderate and human-scale development?
Lessons Learned

The history of Urban Renewal in Poughkeepsie offers some insights into how we might approach future urban revitalization planning efforts.

1. Perhaps the most obvious is that of **SCALE**.
   a. Wholesale demolition of housing destroyed neighborhoods; when social networks that constitute community as well as the historical fabric, both architectural and familial are lost.
   b. Housing that is constructed for the displaced are large-scale projects, rentals not owned, with limited open space for children to play.
   c. Constructing high-speed 3-lane highways through neighborhoods also destroys them as social communities. They are no longer safe, pedestrian or human-scale, shaded as more intimate walk-able streets where one might take the children Halloween trick-or-treating, nor do the houses facing the highway remain as single-family homeowner homes but rather as rental, often transient, units.

   A lesson learned:
   a. Rehabilitation of existing older housing and sale for homeowner ownership by Hudson River Housing has revitalized **Garden Street**, a block north of Main Street that would have been slated for removal under Urban Renewal plans.
   b. Historic preservation and adaptive reuse of industrial buildings like the **Piano Factory** or **Pelton’s Mill**, both along the Fall Kill, into upscale condo’s as middle class housing has been successful on a limited scale.
Lessons Learned

2. Another concern relates to **DESIGN**.

   a. The Soviet-bloc style design of many public housing developments, whether high-rise or not, projects a sense of anonymity rather than homeliness to the residents, lessening the chance for neighborly social interaction.

   b. Lack of variety and human-scale urban amenities in the design of Main Mall lessened the pedestrian-friendly concept of the space.

   c. Demolition of many historic structures was a great loss to the city’s sense of place, both its public as well as private histories. The historical narrative is composed of thousands of stories that constitute the community’s memories.

   d. Removing aesthetic design features, such as stone facing that would have integrated the new **City Hall** into the existing historical fabric of the **Post Office** and **Poughkeepsie Journal** buildings at Civic Center plaza was an example of how boorish financial decisions can undermine a project.
A lesson learned:

a. By contrast, re-visiting the initial designs for the Railroad parking garage from its concrete block industrial look to one that included brick facing and small historic-seeming towers has fit the large-scale structure into the waterfront as part of the city’s “front porch”.

b. Re-design of the backyards of Smith Street projects to safe, children-friendly spaces of the rehabilitated Hudson Gardens has brought community and neighborhood together.

A lesson still to be learned:

What will happen to the Hoffman and Reynolds houses, the last remaining urban waterfront pre-revolutionary structures in Poughkeepsie?

Place has meaning and a city’s spaces articulate its sense of itself.
Conclusion
Perception leads to Behavior that leads to Action

“[S] story is at the heart of history…stories have consequences.
If cities are seen as treasures of civilization, they will be made treasures through cultivation.
If cities are seen as degraded, they will be made so through neglect.”

1 Anne Whiston Spirn, professor of landscape architecture at MIT whose work on the revitalization of West Philadelphia is a national model of both physical and community renewal.

Poughkeepsie Train Station, Waryas Park and Rip van Winkle, seen from the Walkway Over the Hudson
Selected References

