

GRAND FORKS URBAN RENEWAL PROGRAM

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Introduction

In the mid-20th century, Grand Forks, North Dakota, experienced a rapid population boom that strained its aging infrastructure and housing stock. In response to these challenges, the city embarked on a comprehensive and ambitious plan to modernize its downtown core and surrounding neighborhoods. This local initiative was a direct manifestation of a broader federal urban renewal program. The rationale behind urban renewal was to mobilize federal resources to help cities combat "blight" and adapt their downtown to the changing economic and social nature of American urbanism. As with similar projects across the country, Grand Forks used federal funding and oversight to clear what the city considered substandard areas, with the goal of stimulating economic growth and providing modern housing and civic facilities. The story of Grand Forks' urban renewal is therefore not just a local one; it is a case study of how a small city navigated the complex and often controversial principles of a national program to reshape its own destiny.

The Federal Urban Renewal Program

The federal government has been addressing issues of low-income housing and urban development since 1932 when Congress passed two pieces of legislation, the Emergency Relief and Construction Act and the Federal Home Loan Bank Act. The subsequent Housing Act of 1949 was designed to stimulate post-war housing construction to prepare for the anticipated population growth in towns and cities across the country.¹ The 1954 version of the Housing Act introduced a requirement for communities that sought federal funding to have a Workable Program with the goal of preventing urban decay and eliminating blight. By the 1960s, the federal Urban Renewal program was introduced as a major initiative aimed at revitalizing cities throughout the United States that had fallen into economic and physical decline.

Two world wars and an economic depression had stunted investment in new construction and urban growth. Returning servicemen at the end of World War II made obvious the need for new housing especially in cities where many hoped to start their new lives. New housing developments, schools, civic and commercial buildings addressed needs for growing families, and those seeking new employment, training or educational opportunities made possible through

¹ *The Housing Act of 1949*, GovInfo.gov, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/COMPS-10349/pdf/COMPS-10349.pdf>.

the G.I. Bill.² Rapid expansion of new construction in the mid-1940s and 1950s also highlighted the existing aging and inadequate housing stock as well as the desire to improve public facilities. Thus, attention soon turned to aging infrastructure, in particular the older inner city neighborhoods and the downtowns that had largely been designed at the turn of the century around now-obsolete public transit systems.³

In his 1964 commencement address to students at the University of Michigan, President Lyndon B. Johnson spoke of his vision to advance America. Known as his “Great Society” speech, it emphasized the need for partnership between the federal government and local communities to address societal issues of poverty and racism by focusing on improvements to cities, rural areas, and education.⁴ The speech previewed the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Act of 1965, a signature piece of legislation for his administration.

President Johnson significantly expanded the federal government’s involvement in housing when he signed into law the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Act of 1965 and an enhancement again in 1968. The Act of 1965 established HUD as an agency to oversee the various programs including grants for infrastructure projects, urban beautification, and public housing.⁵ The Act of 1968 further opened up federal housing programs to public-private partnerships encouraging construction of affordable housing units, and sustainable planned communities to address urban sprawl. Its specific goal was to replace substandard dwellings with six million new homes for low- and moderate-income families within ten years. Cities and towns across the country, including Grand Forks, took advantage of the program to make substantial investments in their communities.

By the mid-1960s, urban renewal had become a nationwide effort, profoundly reshaping American cities—sometimes with controversial and lasting consequences. The stated goal of urban renewal was to eliminate “blight,” a term used to describe areas with deteriorating buildings, overcrowded housing, or perceived economic underperformance. Using federal funding and oversight, local governments identified neighborhoods and commercial districts for clearance and redevelopment. In theory, this process would stimulate economic growth, provide modern housing, and improve urban infrastructure.

However, the actual implementation of urban renewal was often marked by displacement, racial injustice, and the erosion of community life. The program disproportionately targeted low-income neighborhoods, many of which were home to African American, Latino, and immigrant populations. Through eminent domain, local governments seized properties, demolished homes and businesses, and fractured communities. In many cases, the promised redevelopment never materialized, or the new construction—such as highways, office complexes, or luxury housing—

² The official legislation was the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, colloquially referred to as the G.I. Bill.

³ Jon C. Teaford, *The Rough Road to Renaissance*, 1990, p.4

⁴ “President Lyndon B. Johnson, The Great Society”, *Remarks at the University of Michigan*, Ann Arbor, Michigan, May 22, 1964, C-Span <https://www.c-span.org/program/white-house-event/great-society-speech/101218> Accessed May 15, 2025.

⁵ United States, Congress. *Housing and Urban Development Act of 1965*, Pub. L. 89-117, 79 Stat., pp. 451-509, 1965, Congress.gov, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/89th-congress/house-bill/7984/text>, Accessed May 14, 2025.

did not serve the original residents. As a result, urban renewal programs displaced millions of people from their homes, further contributing to urban inequality and resentment.

The program was closely tied to the broader midcentury attitude towards modernist planning, which favored large-scale redevelopment and rationalized cityscapes over organic, community-centered growth. Modernist architects and planners sought to replace old, disorganized urban neighborhoods with high-rise public housing, wide boulevards, and business districts. Some of the most famous urban renewal projects, such as those in New York City led by Park Commissioner, Robert Moses, exemplified this approach. Moses worked with the Committee on Slum Clearance which was responsible for the construction of thousands of “necessary but uninspiring” housing units.⁶ Four of the early projects included two apartment blocks in Harlem, a third near Columbia University for employee housing and a fourth in collaboration with a workers’ union, a third of which was intended for employee rentals.⁷ While these developments aimed to bring order and economic vitality, they often erased cultural and historical fabric in the process.

Criticism of urban renewal grew louder during the 1960s, especially as the civil rights movement highlighted the racial and economic injustices embedded in the program. Community activists, scholars, and even urban planners began to challenge the top-down nature of urban renewal, emphasizing the need for community participation and preservation. Jane Jacobs, an activist and influential urbanist, became one of the most prominent critics of the top-down approach to urban development, arguing that cities thrived on diversity, density, and the complex interplay of old and new. Despite not having formal training in urban planning, Jacobs argued that the safest and most vibrant city streets had a high volume of pedestrian traffic and passive observers, and that sidewalks encouraged opportunities for social interaction and safety.⁸ Furthermore, she advocated for mixed-use districts and a blend of old and new buildings that allowed for economic diversity of businesses and residents.⁹

By the 1970s, federal support for urban renewal began to wane. The policy was gradually replaced by programs focused on community development and neighborhood preservation, such as the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program introduced in 1974.¹⁰ These newer efforts aimed to decentralize decision-making and prioritize grassroots involvement.

Urban revitalization and housing projects impacted population centers from large cities to small communities across the country. While some of the successes and failures of the program may be more visible in places like New York City and Detroit, smaller communities like Grand Forks navigated the same challenges and opportunities facing postwar America in the pursuit of a civic renaissance and the removal of old and “unsafe” neighborhoods for higher density affordable housing.

⁶ Jon C. Teaford, *The Rough Road to Renaissance*, 1990, p 112.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Jacobs, Jane, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Random House, New York, 1961, pp. 31-33.

⁹ Ibid, pp. 156-157, pp. 187-188.

¹⁰ Community Development Block Grants were established with the passing of the Housing and Community Development Act, providing federal support to state and local governments for community development initiatives.

Grand Forks Midcentury Growth

Federal census data show that Grand Forks' population effectively doubled between 1940 and 1970, from 19,448 to approximately 40,000.¹¹ The population increase was the result, in large part, of a continuing trend of people moving to towns from rural areas. The expansion of the University of North Dakota and the regional medical center, as well as the opening of the new Air Force Base in 1957 also attracted newcomers to the city. *The Windshield Survey of Midcentury Grand Forks Housing* conducted in 2020, studied the construction of single-family housing from 1945 – 1970.¹² The survey inventoried almost 4,000 new homes built during this period, significantly expanding the footprint of the city to the south and the west. Rapid suburban sprawl additionally increased reliance on personal automobiles as churches, schools, retail, businesses and even leisure activities continued to decentralize. A new commercial district grew along South Washington Street with strip malls, office buildings and several auto-related businesses including gas stations. Anchored by major retailers, Kmart and Sears, South Forks Shopping Center opened in 1964 and boasted abundant parking and an indoor, undercover shopping experience adding competition to the downtown commercial district.¹³

By 1962, city officials recognized the strain of aging buildings and traffic congestion in the downtown commercial and nearby residential districts. The Great Northern Railroad divided downtown from the south and west zones presenting traffic flow and safety issues (Fig. 1). In addition to reconsideration of the street system in the downtown, it was concluded that extending DeMers Avenue over the railroad tracks would allow traffic to connect uninterrupted to the south end, as well as the proposed Interstate 29 Expressway.¹⁴ The *Central Business District Plan* proposed the redevelopment of this area for renewal and revitalization, and to establish a framework for future growth.¹⁵ The primary concerns centered on commercial expansion, traffic routes, parking availability and encouraging safe pedestrian routes. This plan provided the basis for the urban renewal goals over the next fifteen years.

Grand Forks had created a City Planning Commission as early as 1935 at a time when the federal government was establishing the Federal Works Programs with housing initiatives to help people move out of unfit housing to better, safer options. As noted, the Housing Act of 1949 required communities to have a Workable Program for Community Improvement to be eligible for federal funding for a variety of assistance programs including capital grants and contracts for loans, mortgage insurance and affordable housing. The U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development required regular reporting for recertification, these applications provided a detailed

¹¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grand_Forks,_North_Dakota , accessed Jul. 12, 2024

¹² Caraher, William and Susan Caraher, *Report on the Windshield Survey of Midcentury Grand Forks Housing (1945 – 1970)*, Grand Forks Historic Preservation Commission, 2021.

¹³ “Push Developments in South Forks Center”, *Grand Forks Herald*, Jan. 26, 1964, p. 22. South Forks Shopping Center is now known as Grand Cities Mall at the corner of Washington St. and S. 17th St.

¹⁴ Grand Forks County's section of I-29 was built in 1968.

¹⁵ “Comprehensive Plan Must Be Implemented”, *Grand Forks Herald*, Jan. 23, 1963, p.44.

snapshot of the community as it argued the case for continued support.¹⁶ The recertification applications were necessary to demonstrate compliance with the program and the efforts made toward eliminating slums and blight.¹⁷

Grand Forks' Mayor, Nelson Youngs, appointed an Urban Renewal Commission in 1963 to begin studying the city's needs. The commission recommended that the city establish a formal Urban Renewal Agency and the city did this in 1965. New Mayor, Hugo Magnuson, then reappointed the five member commission approved by the City Council.¹⁸ In 1966, HUD awarded the city \$216, 881 to participate in the Workable Program for Community Improvement. It contracted with New Jersey planning consultants, Candeub, Fleissing and Associates, to study the proposed seventy-acre zone. The renewal zone is detailed in the boundary description included in the First Renewal Project report (Fig. 2 and Fig. 3).¹⁹ The 1967 recertification application shows that the City was looking to HUD programs that would specifically address housing for elderly residents, housing code enforcement, urban renewal, beautification projects and open public spaces.

The neighborhood immediately south of the railroad tracks between South Fifth Street and South Washington Street was a mix of residential, commercial and light industrial. Some of the homes in the neighborhood predated the arrival of the Great Northern Railroad and others were constructed soon after making it one of the oldest residential areas in the city. Early census data show that it was home to a diverse immigrant population representing twenty countries including a significant number of Jewish immigrants. The Jewish community was perhaps the most visible in the neighborhood owing to the two synagogues, a Hebrew School and ownership of several small businesses.²⁰

¹⁶ The City's Department of Planning and Community Development preserved a valuable collection of documents associated with the Workable Program and Urban Renewal efforts giving insight into the status of housing, perceived challenges in the downtown and the plans for revitalization. These documents and maps are unpublished and will be submitted to Special Collections at the University of North Dakota for accessioning at the conclusion of this project.

¹⁷ Applicant communities were required to adhere to several outlined objectives including codes and ordinances, a comprehensive community plan, neighborhood analyses, administrative organization, financing, housing for displaced families, and citizen participation.

¹⁸ "Urban Renewal Start, Development, Needs Are Told," *Grand Forks Herald*, Apr. 5, 1967, p. 34. Members included Myron Denbrook, Edward Lander, Jayson Graba, Lloyd Richmond Sr., and James Lamb.

¹⁹ See also Fig. 5 and 6 for the photogrammetry plans of the two zones.

²⁰ The Children of Israel Synagogue stood at the corner of 2nd Ave S. and Girard St. which was later changed to S. 7th St. Nearby, the Independent Synagogue was established after a disagreement about practice between the Reform Jews and those of more Orthodox tenets. The fracture between the two groups remained for more than two decades before they reunited with the construction of the B'Nai Israel Synagogue on Cottonwood St. The Hebrew School provided the Jewish children instruction into the traditions and study of Judaism after their day at Belmont Elementary School. It also served as a community center for a variety of activities for their community. Several neighborhood grocers, a fur tanning warehouse, and a junk yard were owned and operated by members of Jewish community.



The Children of Israel Synagogue.



Rabbi Benjamin Papermaster.



This early 1900s photo was taken at the intersection of Girard St. (changed to Seventh St.) and Second Ave. The Children of Israel Synagogue is behind the photographer, and the image shows at least two of the small businesses. The building second from the left was a grocery store. The flour mill is at the far end of the street.

However, its proximity to the railroad and polluting industrial activities allowed the city to classify parts of this neighborhood as blight and argue that the removal of substandard buildings would improve conditions for residents. Continued construction of new neighborhoods to the south and west provided displaced residents with options for alternative housing, as well as the new housing units planned to replace the demolished homes.

Thus, in concert with the Workable Program recertification application, the Urban Renewal Agency engaged Real Estate Research Corporation. The Chicago-based consulting firm conducted economic analyses for property markets produced the *Land Utilization and Marketability Study and Transient Housing Study* report.²¹ This comprehensive report details various market factors including housing, retail, parking, industrial and public facilities, and measured them against general economic factors such as population, projected population, household income and employment. This research provided the data used to analyze and drive the urban renewal efforts. The study made recommendations such as the ideal mix of housing, a shopping mall at the corner of DeMers Avenue and North Fifth Street, and a new convention-style hotel among others.

The land use plan looked at several criteria including assessing buildings for deficiencies, a plan to retain those in good condition, removal of buildings that did not fit the plan, and the provision of improved commercial and residential uses, and community facilities.²² The plan for new residential apartments along the south side of the railroad called for a sound and site barrier to improve the environmental conditions for these residents.

The business district on the north side of the tracks included several public and semi-public buildings including a high school, public library, city auditorium, and various retail, commercial, and industrial buildings. One of the central issues identified in this area was a lack of suitable parking. Essential to the overall redevelopment was the improvement of traffic flow with the widening of streets, removal of on-street parking to dedicated parking ramps and an overpass to move traffic easily in and out of downtown while avoiding the barrier presented by the railroad.

Grand Forks: A City in Transition and the Pursuit of "Demonstration City" Status

One aspect of President Johnson's "Great Society" and his "War on Poverty" was the experimental "Model Cities Program", also known as the Demonstration Cities and Metropolitan Development Act of 1966. The program was designed to develop new models of municipal government and anti-poverty programs.²³ The City of Grand Forks, in its 1967 application for "Demonstration City" status, presented a comprehensive overview of its unique challenges and

²¹ *Land Utilization and Marketability Study and Transient Housing Study*, Grand Forks, North Dakota, Real Estate Research Corporation, Unpublished report, May 1967.

²² "Summary of Part 12: Urban Renewal Manual 'Conservation and Rehabilitation'", Urban Renewal Administration, Housing and Home Finance Agency, Oct. 4 1960.

²³ Demonstration Cities and Metropolitan Development Act of 1966, Pub. L 111-5, GovInfo.gov, <https://www.govinfo.gov/app/details/COMPS-476> Accessed May 18, 2025

ambitious goals. Seeking a \$75,000 planning grant, the application highlighted the city's rapid growth, its role as a regional hub, and the pressing need for significant urban development and social welfare initiatives. The proposal underscored Grand Forks' commitment to addressing its multifaceted problems through innovative and coordinated programs, aimed at improving the quality of life for all its citizens. Despite not securing the grant, the application provides a corpus of historical information that identifies issues that the city was encountering, and proposed solutions giving contemporaneous insight into the state of the city.

As North Dakota's second-largest urban center at the time, Grand Forks served as a vital trade and service hub for a twelve-county region, with its economy historically rooted in agriculture. The presence of the Grand Forks Air Force Base significantly contributed to the city's regional importance, however, it also exacerbated certain demographic and infrastructural pressures. The University of North Dakota further cemented Grand Forks' status as an educational, medical, and cultural center. The blend of agricultural, military, and academic influences created a dynamic, albeit challenging, environment. The population boom is further evidenced by the fact that Grand Forks added eleven schools in the three decades following World War II including eight elementary schools, two middle schools and a new high school.²⁴

Despite its growth and regional significance, Grand Forks faced several critical issues in the mid-1960s. The city's rapid population increase, fueled by immigration from surrounding farms and towns strained existing infrastructure. The aging housing struggled to keep pace with demand, pushing the city's budget and banking capacity to their limits. Furthermore, the city's average income was below the national average, indicating underlying economic disparities. The Demonstration City application specifically identified the major concerns as the age and deterioration of neighborhoods and housing, compounded by the recently opened Grand Forks Air Force Base and the influx of construction workers for the new missile wing.

According to the application, the City's social and educational infrastructure also required significant attention. There was a pressing need for a vocational school to train the growing youth population and retrain low-income adults who had migrated from rural areas. Deficiencies in libraries, cultural, and recreation facilities were also noted. A critical objective was to better coordinate welfare and low-income family support to reduce dependency. Additionally, it highlighted the importance of crime prevention, particularly concerning juvenile delinquency, and the need for expanded hospital services, nursing beds, and long-term elderly care.

In response to these challenges, Grand Forks outlined several ambitious program goals. Central among these was the improvement and expansion of housing options for low- and medium-income families. Education and vocational training were prioritized, aiming to provide youth, the unemployed, and the elderly with the necessary skills and opportunities for independent and productive lives. Economic development was another key focus, with goals to create jobs, increase income for all citizens, and diversify the tax base by fostering agricultural

²⁴ These schools include West Elementary, St. Michael's Catholic School, Lewis and Clark Elementary, Valley Junior High, Viking Elementary, Ben Franklin Elementary, Lake Agassiz Elementary, Wilder Elementary, Elroy Schroeder Junior High, Red River High School and Holy Family Catholic School.

research and manufacturing. Crime reduction and prevention were to be achieved through counseling, vocational training, and increased access to cultural and recreational facilities.

The proposed program strategy emphasized innovation, particularly in the realm of integrated services. A notable characteristic of the proposal was the plan to construct a new high school and to renovate an existing high school to serve as a comprehensive Civic Service Center.²⁵ This center was envisioned as a single building housing a welfare agency, vocational rehabilitation center, veterans' services, an opportunity training center, family services, social services, alcoholic family counseling, and mental health and intellectually disabled centers. This consolidated approach aimed to streamline service delivery and improve accessibility for vulnerable populations.

The research findings for the Demonstration City application claimed the entire city was to be designated as the "Model Neighborhood Area," reflecting the pervasive nature of the challenges and the comprehensive scope of the proposed solutions. According to the Government Office on Accountability, approximately 150 cities were designated nationwide.²⁶ Although Grand Forks' application was not successful, the research and data formed the foundation for *Grand Forks' First Renewal Project*.

The Grand Forks First Renewal Project: A Comprehensive Urban Revitalization Effort

The 'First Renewal Project', submitted in November 1967, presented a supplemental application to significantly increase its scope and funding, signals a pivotal moment in the city's urban revitalization efforts. This ambitious undertaking aimed to address issues of urban blight, traffic congestion, and economic stagnation, primarily within the downtown area and the adjacent residential zone. It outlined the comprehensive strategy for redevelopment, emphasizing modern commercial and residential uses, substantial infrastructure improvements, and a meticulous approach to land acquisition and resident relocation.²⁷

The primary objectives of the 'First Renewal Project' were multifaceted and called for extensive redevelopment to counter problems of inadequate parking, detrimental land use patterns, traffic inefficiencies, and general obsolescence. The project sought to develop modern commercial uses to stimulate economic activity in the downtown core and establish improved residential options to support low- to moderate-income households. A critical aim was to improve overall traffic circulation through strategic street realignment and widening on both sides of the railroad, along with the provision of a railroad overpass for vehicles. This overpass was envisioned to create a direct link between the new residential and commercial areas,

²⁵ This is likely a reference to Central High School which was the only high school in the city before the construction of Red River High School in 1967. Furthermore, it would have concentrated these civic services adjacent to City Hall.

²⁶ "Improvements Needed in Federal Agency Coordination And Participation in the Model Cities Program", *Office of Management and Budget and Other Federal Agencies*, United States General Accounting Office, Jan. 14, 1972, p. 1.

²⁷ *First Renewal Project: Final Project Report, Part 1 of Application for Loan and Grant, Project No. N.D.R-4*, Unpublished report, November, 1967, Binder No. 13.

alleviating heavy traffic through the southern residential neighborhoods. The presence of the Great Northern Railroad (GNRR) mainline and numerous spurs significantly hindered the existing street system and commercial redevelopment, underscoring the need for such a major infrastructural intervention.

The expanded scope of the project necessitated a request for an increase in funds from an initial \$2,555,000 to \$4,937,281, nearly doubling the original budget. Despite the increased investment, the project acreage was reduced from 77.9 acres to 71.0 acres, indicating a more focused approach. The surge in costs was attributed to significant street and utility improvements, as well as an overall rise in construction expenses.²⁸

A cornerstone of the project was its proposed land use plan, which designated areas for multi-family residential, commercial, limited industrial, and park uses. The plan detailed specific regulations for land coverage, building height, setbacks, and parking for each zone, aiming to ensure orderly and attractive development. Key infrastructure proposals included the widening of North Eighth Street, Second Avenue North, North Sixth Street (which would also be extended), and First Avenue North. First Avenue South was to be realigned, widened, and reconstructed to include a sight and sound barrier along the railroad. The proposal designated DeMers Avenue, which, at the time terminated at the Great Northern Railroad depot, for extension and reconstruction. While a vehicular overpass was essential to provide direct access to the commercial area, it was to be complemented by a pedestrian overpass to ensure safe passage between the project's north and south sections. The project also mandated that new utility lines be placed underground by developers.

The Urban Renewal Agency conducted a survey from December 1966 through February 1967 designed to collect data on blighting influences, the condition of the buildings and environmental conditions.²⁹ The City Engineering Department and the Fire Department conducted inspections for building, plumbing, electrical, housing safety and fire prevention. The result of the survey classified the project as Category 5 blight, identifying 85% of 187 of the project area buildings as exhibiting some deficiencies of which 71.1% were deemed structurally substandard, and therefore necessitating clearance. These findings underscored the significant level of decay and the urgent need for comprehensive intervention. Of these, 105 were properties in the residential neighborhood.

From its earliest development as a predominately immigrant neighborhood, many of the homes were converted to accommodate multiple residents either as boarding houses or apartments.³⁰ The Agency inspections found that many had inadequate facilities for separate living arrangements, small or no yard space and suffered the adverse influence from noise, fumes and odor from the railroad and other industrial and commercial properties such as the Hide and

²⁸ Ibid, Section R-201, pp. 1-3

²⁹ *Land Utilization and Marketability Study and Transient Housing Study*, Grand Forks, North Dakota, Unpublished report, Real Estate Research Corporation, May, 1967.

³⁰ Census data, especially from 1910, identifies many residents as boarders.

Fur Company and junk yard.³¹ Land acquisition targeted 165 parcels for clearance and redevelopment.³²

The Urban Renewal Agency worked to ensure those whose homes were to be purchased and cleared could obtain affordable, safe and sanitary housing within their financial means. The buy-out and relocation efforts impacted 129 family units and 77 individuals. Some chose to purchase housing elsewhere in the city, or take the rental option. Several households were attached to the Air Force and chose to move back to the Grand Forks Air Force Base, and a small number reported they planned to move out of town.³³ The city's objective was to minimize hardship during displacement, with a significant portion of the displaced families (31 white, 1 non-white) eligible for federally aided housing.

The project's policy emphasized negotiation as the primary method of acquisition, resorting to eminent domain only if necessary, and ensuring fair compensation and at least 90 days' notice to property owners. Despite the efforts to negotiate buyouts, several property owners refused the city's offer and faced lawsuits and the threat of eminent domain.

Other plans outlined in the 1967 recertification application include redevelopment of the former city airport, the finalization of a comprehensive traffic study, continuation of the seventy acre urban renewal planning, and a study to potentially combine the new police and fire stations.

Financially, the project's total gross cost was estimated at \$7,452,566. This was to be offset by \$1,250,958 from the sale of project land, \$1,550,402 in local grants, a project capital grant of \$4,651,206, and a relocation grant of \$286,175. The legal framework supporting the project included resolutions authorizing the application, legal opinions affirming the urban renewal plan's adherence to regulations, and published notices of public hearings, ensuring transparency and legal compliance. The Urban Renewal Agency made the project publicly available to provide citizens the opportunity to review and provide input. Artist renderings depicting a shopping center, garden apartments, and townhouses provided a visual representation of the project's transformative potential (Fig. 7, 8 and 9).

Presentation to the City Council and the Public Hearing

At a public hearing in August, 1968, Urban Renewal Agency Executive Director, Royce LaGrave provided a project update to the City Council. He noted that after surveying the proposed project area, a large percentage of the buildings were substandard and that the current status of mixed land use was bad for neighborhoods, pointing to the Hide and Fur Company and the junk yard as examples. These two businesses were adjacent to the railroad tracks on First Avenue South and had been part of the residential neighborhood for decades. He noted that homeowners were not encouraged to improve their homes in an area that was increasingly

³¹ *First Renewal Project: Final Project Report, Part 1 of Application for Loan and Grant, Project No. N.D.R-4*, Unpublished report, November, 1967, Binder No. 13, Section R-212.

³² The 165 parcels were comprised of 4 public and 161 private properties.

³³ See "Relocation Report", Section R-223 of the *First Renewal Project, Final Project Report, Part 1 of Application for Loan and Grant Project No. N.D. R-4*, issued by the Urban Renewal Agency of Grand Forks, Nov. 1967.

dilapidated, and further, the railroad tracks made access to the downtown business district hazardous.

Discussing the comprehensive plan, LaGrave emphasized the necessity of the project that highlighted a new street pattern and an overhead walkway over the railroad tracks. The vehicular overpass was to be strategically placed on less valuable railroad land to maximize commercial potential and provide a direct route to Interstate 29. Additionally, a planned park was intended to serve as a buffer between light industrial and residential zones.

It is worth noting that the *Grand Forks Herald* reported in a 1973 article that the pedestrian bridge project was estimated to cost between \$150,000 and \$250,000 which was substantially higher than the \$100,000 the Urban Renewal Agency had anticipated and, therefore, it was never constructed.³⁴ Almost six decades later pedestrian traffic remains at grade level on Third, Fourth and Fifth Streets.

LaGrave noted the relocation plan for those affected and mentioned the plan includes, “sixty-four rent-supported units sponsored by the local Teamsters Union”, a plan similar to that seen in the New York projects. A further sixty-four units privately owned and leased to the local Housing Authority.³⁵ Federal government funds were earmarked for moving costs, cash grants, and small business displacement, with federal contributions covering 75% and local funds accounting for 25% of the project's cost. Many of the business owners present at the meeting expressed support for the plan believing it would help to stimulate growth and economic opportunities in the business district.

However, the meeting also brought forth considerable opposition and questions. A primary concern revolved around the financial burden on taxpayers. Local realtor, Grant Jensen addressed the Agency and the Council noting that the *Grand Forks Herald* had published many of the ‘pro’ project points. He had taken the initiative to contact the National Association of Real Estate Boards for their opinion of urban renewal and shared several counterpoints. These included concerns about increasing property taxes in the urban renewal area and examples of similar projects leading to more problems than solutions. He noted one study that indicated that one in four businesses did not return to renewed areas due to higher rents.³⁶ Jensen quoted Texas Representative John Dowdy who critically described urban renewal as “Robin Hood in reverse,” suggesting it involved “taking property by police action and selling to wealthy developers for a 30% discount”. Notable, perhaps, Mr. Jensen also served as a co-director of the new South Forks Shopping Center and actively promoted development in the new commercial area on Washington Street.³⁷

The prioritization of urban renewal also came under scrutiny. Community member, Walter Fowkes, noted that while it appeared to be a beautiful plan, urban renewal was fifth on a priority list of survey respondents, behind water, sewage, police, and fire, questioning why it had advanced ahead of these other pressing concerns. Local businessman, Ed Christenson inquired

³⁴ Chuck Haga, “Pedestrian bridge costs much higher”, *Grand Forks Herald*, Dec. 7, 1973, p. 2.

³⁵ *Transcript of Public Hearing – Urban Renewal – August 6, 1968*, Unpublished transcript, p.3.

³⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 6-7.

³⁷ “Push Developments in South Forks Center”, *Grand Forks Herald*, Jan. 26, 1964, p. 22.

about the "use or lose" nature of federal funds allocated through the State, while Bob Jacobson, chair of the ACTION Committee, clarified that multiple initiatives could be pursued simultaneously, implying that priorities did not necessarily need to be strictly sequential.³⁸ Reverend Robinson of the Federated Church raised a question about the community's ability to vote on the project and sought a timeframe for relocation.³⁹ LaGrave outlined the possible timeline and process for property acquisition and sale to developers, mentioning the need to purchase properties on the city's south end for residential purposes and for the overpass. He clarified that all properties would undergo a second appraisal to determine fair market value while also acknowledging the city and Urban Renewal Agency's power of eminent domain.

Alderman O'Neill voiced strong opposition to accepting federal funds and objected to the federal government spending money on this type of program, claiming it to be un-American. He expressed concern about the displacement of vulnerable populations, such as those served by missions and the Salvation Army.⁴⁰

Several others voiced their opinion, and despite the vocal opposition, the meeting concluded with a motion to adopt the resolution. The motion passed with a vote of thirteen in favor and one, Alderman O'Neill, voting against.

Central Business District

The Grand Forks Public Library Demolition Controversy

The proposed demolition of the Grand Forks Public Library, a historic Carnegie building, sparked a significant controversy in the late 1960s and early 1970s, pitting urban development against historic preservation. Built in 1903 with funds donated by Andrew Carnegie, and designed by Joseph Bell DeRemer, the library was once a source of civic pride.⁴¹ However, by the mid-1960s, the 65-year-old structure was deemed "completely inadequate" for the city's growing needs, lacking sufficient space for its collection, patrons, and modern library functions.⁴²

In response to the perceived inadequacy, the Grand Forks Public Library Board initiated plans for a new facility. In 1966, the Library Board requested a \$600,000 bond issue to construct a new library, estimated to cost \$750,000. Funds for the new building were anticipated from federal sources, a building fund inheritance, and crucially, the sale of the existing library property.⁴³ Robert Vaaler, chairman of the Library Board, emphasized that a new, expanded

³⁸ ACTION stood for Active Citizens Taking Interest On Needs. The ACTION citizen-led program brought together hundreds of local residents to consider the community's needs and to prioritize those needs and was most active from 1967 to 1970; "All Should Aid", *Grand Forks Herald*, Jan. 5, 1968, p. 4.

³⁹ The Federated Church was located at the corner of Fifth St and First Ave N. and was the proposed location for a potential new department store.

⁴⁰ The Salvation Army moved to University Ave.

⁴¹ Marilyn Hagerty, "Older Home Sports Ballroom." *Grand Forks Herald* Apr. 14, 1969, p. 6.

⁴² "\$600,000 Bond Issue Proposed for Library." *Grand Forks Herald*, Jul. 11, 1966, p.12.

⁴³ Ibid.

library was essential for the city's future growth and to meet the demands of an increasing population.⁴⁴



*Carnegie Library, designed by Joseph Bell DeRemer in built in 1903.
The building was demolished to construct the parking ramp on N. Fourth St.*

The controversy intensified as the City Council considered a downtown parking plan that included the demolition of several buildings, among them the old Carnegie Library.⁴⁵ Proponents of demolition argued that the old building was obsolete, costly to maintain, and that its site was ideal for much-needed off-street parking, which was seen as integral to urban renewal efforts.⁴⁶ The sale of the property was also a practical means to finance the new library.

Conversely, a vocal group of concerned citizens and preservationists vehemently opposed the demolition. They championed the Carnegie Library as a "beauty spot" and an invaluable part of Grand Forks' heritage—an "architectural tribute to education and cultural progress" and a

⁴⁴ "Larger Library Needed." *Grand Forks Herald*, Jan. 28, 1968.

⁴⁵ "Parking Plan Delay Denied By Council", *Grand Forks Herald*, Mar. 16, 1971, p. 1.

⁴⁶ "Old Library: Cultural Center or Parking Lot?", *Grand Forks Herald*, Jun. 12, 1969, p. 13.

"monument to our pioneer past".⁴⁷ Preservationists proposed alternative uses for the building, such as converting it into a cultural center, museum, or even offices, rather than replacing it with a "harsh, ugly, nondescript parking lot."⁴⁸ They organized petitions, gathering thousands of signatures, and repeatedly called for a delay in the demolition and a public vote on the library's fate.⁴⁹

Despite the significant public outcry, the City Council ultimately denied a six-month delay requested by the concerned citizens group. A motion to allow a public vote on whether the library site should be used for parking was also defeated.⁵⁰ This decision indicated that the demolition plans were proceeding, underscoring the municipal government's commitment to the urban renewal project over the preservation of the historic structure. The debate encapsulated a common tension in rapidly developing cities: the balance between modernizing infrastructure and safeguarding historical landmarks. Furthermore, it illustrated the type of top-down decision making that Jacobs had denounced, over a grassroots community approach.

Other Demolitions and New Construction North of the Tracks

Using a specific set of criteria inspectors evaluated the conditions of buildings including seeping, crumbling or rotting foundations, bulging, sagging or leaning exterior walls, and roofs with inadequate construction, or cracked and inadequately supported interior loadbearing walls. Another element that could seal the fate of an otherwise structurally sound building was its potential hindrance to the plan, as was the case of the public library.

North of the tracks, some of the public and semi-public buildings that were demolished include the Imperial Motel near the Great Northern Passenger Depot, the YMCA, the Federated Church, the Salvation Army, and the Odd Fellows building which became the new addition to Grand Forks Central High School. The Grand Forks Surplus Outlet was also demolished.

⁴⁷ "Beauty Spot", *Grand Forks Herald*, Dec. 6, 1970, p. 8. Letter to the Editor "Keep the Landmark." *Grand Forks Herald*, Nov. 23, 1969, p. 45.

⁴⁸ "Old Library: Cultural Center or Parking Lot?" *Grand Forks Herald*, Jun. 12 1969, p. 13.

⁴⁹ "Aldermen Hear Debate on the Fate of Old Library." *Grand Forks Herald*, Mar. 14, 1971, p. 22;

⁵⁰ "Parking Plan Delay Denied By Council." *Grand Forks Herald*, Mar. 16, 1971, p. 1.



*The Grand Forks Surplus Outlet at the north side of N. Fifth St. and Demers Ave.
before and during demolition.*

Two bids for a large site on First Avenue and Eighth Street sparked controversy over the use of the land. Buttrey Foods was seeking to build a large grocery and merchandise store that would also accommodate an Osco Drug store. Town House Motel bid to construct a \$2.2 million motel with 106 rooms, dining, meeting rooms and tennis courts. They argued that the Civic Auditorium was underutilized and that a nearby hotel would be a benefit to attract more conventions and meetings to the city. In what could be perceived as a conflict of interest, the projects were to be voted on by members of City Center Inc. who had solicited the proposal, and three of whom worked for the Urban Renewal Agency. Buttrey Foods needed no additional financial investment for its project, however, the Town House Motel would require “a firm commitment from local financial institutions to finance a loan for \$1.6 million”.⁵¹ The original land use survey noted the need for a convention-style motel, and when the vote was taken on the two projects, the Town House Motel emerged the winning proposal. The motel has since been demolished and replaced with an apartment complex.

The demolition of the Imperial Motel, formerly the Griggs Hotel, made way for the construction of the midcentury-inspired dodecagonal building (32GF3802) at the intersection of Kittson Avenue and DeMers Avenue alongside the Railroad Depot. Vaaler Insurance occupied the adjacent building and then moved into the new space next door. A new structure was built between the two buildings in the 1980s effectively making it one building, though there is now no access between the two on the interior.

The surplus store, YMCA and Federated Church demolitions were intended to make way for a shopping center that ultimately was not constructed. However, in 1978, City Center Mall opened on South Third Street. The Mall was created by constructing a roof between the buildings on South Third Street and enclosing its walls at the DeMers Avenue and Kittson Avenue ends. It

⁵¹ Stuart Smith, “Motel firm second contestant for controversial downtown property”, *Grand Forks Herald*, Jan. 9, 1975, p. 9 and “City Agency votes to accept motel plan”, *Grand Forks Herald*, Jan. 29, 1975, p. 1.

was intended to compete for shoppers who were increasingly drawn to the convenience of the South Forks Shopping Center on Washington Street that boasted convenience and abundant parking for the increasing reliance on cars. City Center Mall was demolished in 1998 following its destruction during the 1997 flood.



Interior of City Center Mall on DeMers Ave.

Thrifty Corner on the corner of DeMers Avenue and Fifth Street, as well as Happy Harry's Central Liquor Store diagonally opposite have been reclaimed by the families that once had businesses on those locations. The Magnuson family which owns Hugo's Family Marketplace built a mixed use building that includes a grocery store on the site of Hugo's original Pure Market.⁵² Central Liquor, owned and operated by Harry Gershman, was demolished during urban renewal and replaced with a government building for the Internal Revenue Service and later a law office (32GF3264). In 2020, Gershman's son, Hal, and his wife Kathleen, purchased the building and converted it into a 1940s-themed restaurant called, "Harry's Steakhouse" (Fig. 10).

The Northern Bell Company was located on the corner of North Fifth Street and First Avenue on the same site as its successor, CenturyLink. The company built a \$1.1 million, 28,000 sq. ft. addition which was completed in 1979 (32GF3912) (Fig. 11).

Exceptions to the demolition plan north of the tracks included in the Grand Forks Armory (later Civic Center), Vaaler Insurance, Armour and Co. Wholesalers, and the Great Northern Railway Depot and Dispatcher's Office Building.⁵³

⁵² Hugo Magnuson served as Grand Forks Mayor from 1964 to 1972.

⁵³ The Grand Forks Armory/Civic Center was demolished in 2010 and is now the Northern Heights at Griggs Square building at First Ave N. and N. Sixth St. Vaaler Insurance was located in the building at 519 DeMers Ave, now the

The reconfiguration of DeMers Avenue created an opportunity for Metropolitan Federal Savings Bank to claim a highly visible lot as vehicles enter the downtown from overpass (32GF3908). The five-story brick and glass office building is now known as the U.S. Bank building at 600 DeMers Avenue.



Metropolitan Federal Savings Bank in 1983, looking west along DeMers Ave. The overpass is to the left of the water tower. This building is now the U. S. Bank at 600 DeMers Ave.

DeMers Overpass

One of the most significant achievements was the construction of the overpass that extended DeMers Avenue over the tracks allowing for uninterrupted traffic flow (Fig. 12). The four lane bridge (Bridge No. 0297-002.696) was constructed in 1972 and is 1120 feet long.⁵⁴ It connected to major traffic corridors and provides a direct route to Interstate 29 and easy access to emerging commercial district along South Washington Street. Careful consideration was given to its design and construction primarily to use the less valuable railroad land to support its structure. The overpass extended DeMers Avenue from the Great Northern Railroad Depot across the tracks and ended prior to the emergency access for the Central Fire Station. It has an exit ramp that leads to the redeveloped neighborhood and an entry ramp from the neighborhood to head east towards downtown (Fig. 13). Its construction allowed for traffic to completely bypass the grade crossing and avoid train delays. The overpass was inspected in 2021 and later repaired to ensure its continued safety.

Forx Home Builders building. The wholesaler, Armour and Co., was located at 817 First Ave N. now the HB Sound building.

⁵⁴ "Bridge 0297-002.696 Demers Ave. Overpass Inspection Report – NHU-6-297(013)002, PCN 23191", Houston Engineering, Inc., Oct. 20, 2021.



DeMers Overpass under construction, c. 1971 or 1972. The flour mill which was destroyed by fire in 1972 is visible at the far end of the newly configured First Ave.

Central Fire Station, Grand Forks Police Station and the Senior Citizen Center

The redevelopment of land provided the city an opportunity to better locate several of its services. The railroad tracks had long presented an emergency safety issue particularly for fire response. A fire station was built adjacent to City Hall in 1911, which also originally housed city law enforcement facilities. However, delays due to trains presented a considerable threat to timely responses and therefore a second fire station was built on the south side the tracks on South Fourth Street. The modernization of the truck fleet and the rapid expansion of the city pointed to the need for a new, larger and more modern fire station (32GF3911). It was to be located where it could better respond to all parts of the city and not be hindered by the railroad tracks. The old Chiefs baseball field presented an excellent location at the west end of the new overpass and the intersection of DeMers Avenue and Washington Street. The one-story brick building offered its firefighters a home-away-from-home feel with several single bedrooms at the rear, living and community space as well as offices close to the public access at the front. The five-stall garage was designed large enough to accommodate the modern fire engines and provided drive-through access from the rear of the building. The building was designed by the

architectural firm of Grosz Anderson. Perhaps in acknowledgement of its civic duty, the building was originally trimmed with red aluminum flashing.⁵⁵



Grand Forks Central Fire Station in 1983.

The city had been engaged in conversation about a new location for the police station. One suggestion included the redevelopment of the old municipal airport terminal building located on 43rd Street close to Interstate 29. However, a number of downtown business owners expressed concern that it was too far from the business district for fast emergency response. Another option considered was a location that would accommodate both the fire and police departments. A new option opened in 1972 when Peavy Company flour mill, formerly the Russell-Miller Mill burned down. The Grand Forks Herald reported the mill had been vacant for more than a year and thus, it would not be rebuilt. The mill was located on a large lot just south of the railroad tracks on Fifth Street. Coincidentally, perhaps, it was conveniently located opposite the Grand Forks County Jail and Courthouse.

⁵⁵ For more images of Central Fire Station, see Appendix, Figures 33, 34 and 35



Left: Destruction of the flour mill in 1972.

Above: The 1976 Police Station on the same site.

The location was determined ideal for the new Police Station (32GF3907) that would occupy the entire block with plenty of access and parking for police vehicles.⁵⁶ The firm of Wells Denbrook and Adams was awarded the contract to design the new building. It is a two story light brick building suggesting the design sensitivity to its location in a neighborhood. The original building has a somewhat novel shape that appears to reflect a law enforcement badge or shield, however a recent addition to the west side makes this shape less obvious. A dedication plaque in the lobby also mirrors the footprint of the building (Fig. 37). Other than the small one story addition, much of the building retains its original design and materials including the rock walls, concrete benches and stone floors on the main level. A jail cell now serves as a storage room but retains the original cell door. The basement includes a shooting range and other training rooms. Like the red design features at the Fire Station, the Police Station has blue trim and flashing.⁵⁷

In addition to the affordable housing projects, the other major civic infrastructure in the neighborhood is the Senior Citizens Center (32GF3909) conveniently located at Fourth Avenue and Cherry Street directly opposite those apartments. In addition to housing options, the Urban Renewal Agency noted the goal of providing services to the elderly population, prioritizing a recreation center in their project plan. The two-story brick building features a large south-facing full height window arrangement maximizing natural light into the activity and entertainment hall. There is a low stage and dance floor as well as a large kitchen to prepare and serve meals. The

⁵⁶ The Grand Forks Police Department formerly took ownership of the new building in early 1977 after leaving its former home at the old Grand Forks Airport administration building on 43rd Street. *Grand Forks Herald* staff writer, Michael Vadnie, described the new station as “like the Taj Mahal” compared with the former location. (“New police station has lots of space”, *Grand Forks Herald*, Jan 30, 1977, p. 94.)

⁵⁷ For more images of the Police Station see Appendix, Figures 36, 37 and 38.

second floor has offices to the west and a catwalk that overlooks the activity hall below. A newer portico designates a drop-off area by the front doors allowing for dry entry in the event of wet or snowy weather. A recent addition on the north elevation includes a drive through window for the collection of take-home meals.⁵⁸



The Grand Forks Senior Citizens Center in 2024 at the corner of Fourth Ave. and Cherry St..

Grand Forks Housing Authority and other Affordable Housing Developments

The residential neighborhood, once home to a vibrant and diverse immigrant population, was evaluated in 1966 and 1967 to assess the condition of property structures. By this time, many of these modest homes were seventy years or more and had been constructed before stricter building codes were enforced (Fig. 14 to 22). Furthermore, there existed a mix of residential homes, small businesses and unpleasant light industrial structures including a junk yard and an odorous hide tanning business. The city identified this neighborhood as blight and marked it for redevelopment. Homes were to be demolished, several streets were reconfigured and new higher density housing was constructed. The safety concerns and the noise pollution

⁵⁸ For more images of the Senior Citizens Center see Appendix, Figures 39, 40 and 41.

from the railroad were addressed with the construction of a sight and sound barrier at the north end of Cherry Street, and fencing along First Avenue South.

One of the principal goals in the *First Renewal Project* was to provide housing for the elderly as well as subsidized housing options for lower income residents. Grand Forks Housing Authority (GFHA), an agency established in 1967, worked to ensure affordable housing and resident self-sufficiency. Four years later, Grand Forks Homes, Inc. (GFHI) was created as a non-profit, to tackle the housing needs in the urban renewal zone. Members from eight local church congregation governing boards were elected to the board of the Grand Forks Homes.⁵⁹ A ten-acre site at the north end of the new Cherry Street extension and in the shadow of the DeMers Overpass was developed in three phases, primarily serving the elderly and family housing needs. The board selected the architectural firm of Wells Denbrook and Adams and Baukol Construction Company to design and construct each phase.

By February 1972, GFHI submitted a loan application for 208 housing units to the Federal Housing Administration (FHA). The project was envisioned as a multi-phase development, with the first phase comprising 76 units for elderly residents (32GF3041). The FHA approved funding and the GFHA agreed to manage the housing units. Referred to as Phase A in the planning and development, Cherry Heights was the first three story apartment building constructed on the site. Construction was poised to begin by March 1974 and was substantially completed by February 1975 and it achieved 100% occupancy by August 1975. Despite initial financial estimates, the project faced challenges such as unexpectedly high electricity costs, complaints about cold air from window ventilators, and initial maintenance. Grand Forks Homes also navigated the complexities of insurance valuation and obtained additional rent supplements.

⁵⁹ The represented churches were First Presbyterian Church, Calvary Lutheran, Augustana Lutheran, St. Marks' Lutheran, United Lutheran, St. Michael's Catholic, St. Mary's Catholic and St. Paul's Episcopalian.



Phase A now called Cherry Heights apartment building in 1983, looking south west.

Concurrently, GFHI explored options for family housing. An urgent request for 100 military housing units led to the consideration of a separate phase. By September 1972, an application for sixty-six units of family housing was submitted to the FHA. Architects presented plans for a complex of three-story 12-plex buildings, which were approved by FHA in May, 1975. The initial closing for Phase B was set for September 1975, and construction was expected to commence soon after however, the project encountered initial financing hurdles and the FHA objected to the three-story design for three- and four-bedroom apartments, favoring row-type housing. New city parking requirements, construction delays and tenant-related issues also contributed to the delay, however, it was back on schedule by February 1976 and the first tenants were expected by April. It was later named LaGrave Place in recognition of the Urban Renewal Agency's Executive Director, Royce LaGrave (Fig. 25 and 26).

Phase C, Oak Manor provided for an additional forty eight one-bedroom units of elderly housing (Fig. 27 and 28). This initiative stemmed from a HUD allocation under Section 8 of the Public Housing Act of 1974. A key characteristic of the proposal for a three-story, forty-eight unit apartment building was its reliance on all private financing due to the Section 8 allocation. This presented a significant challenge in securing a discount for financing. While churches and local banks were approached for contributions, the process was slow and complex. Grand Forks Homes also sought tax-exempt status from the Internal Revenue Service for contributions to this project. By February 1976, conditional and feasibility applications for Phase C were submitted. The names of the buildings in the affordable housing complex, Cherry Heights, Oak Manor and LaGrave Place, evoke more upmarket residential estates and are likely intended to give the housing campus a little extra cachet.

As previously noted, the 1968 version of the Housing and Urban Development Act was intended to spur public-private partnerships and encourage private developers to build new high density affordable housing. The removal of homes as well as the junkyard, hide tanning warehouse and other storage units gave developers a clean slate in this inner city neighborhood. A remarkable discovery made during the demolition phase was the identification of Grand Forks' historic log cabin post office building. It had been moved to the 600 block of Second Avenue and covered with siding, disguising its past and blending with the other homes in the old neighborhood. The Urban Renewal Agency donated the cabin to the city, and with the assistance of the Grand Forks County Historical Society, the building was saved and relocated to the Museum on Belmont Road.⁶⁰

Some of the new housing included a small development of five architecturally similar four-plex apartment buildings on Cottonwood Street between First and Second Avenues (32GF3913, 32GF3045, 32GF3046, 32GF3047 and 32GF3008). The basic rectangular buildings are oriented in a manner that allows for maximum privacy between the buildings, and has open parking spaces in the alley. The minimal landscaping allows for easier maintenance for rental properties and a single street-side multi-mailbox shows the development serves twenty apartments (Fig. 29 and 30).

Four apartment buildings on First Avenue South comprise the Markham Apartment complex (32GF3910). The main building is a two-story brick, 48-unit building with a large parking lot in the rear and pedestrian access from First Avenue and Cottonwood Street. Three other buildings are six-plex apartments along First Avenue. An eight-car garage and a small utility building complete the complex that wraps around onto Cherry Street. The complex faces the railroad tracks and the overpass. Most of the buildings have a mansard roof and cedar shakes indicating they are part of the same development.

The remainder of the urban renewal period housing is a mix of single family homes and duplexes found on Second and Third Avenues as well as two ranch-style brick homes on Cherry Street. A newspaper notice of building permits shows that D. L. Scholler Enterprises was granted six permits to construct the duplexes on Second Avenue at a value of \$30,000 each (Fig. 31).⁶¹ The street reconfiguration in this neighborhood included the creation of a curved road that linked Second and Third Avenues. With the homes built on one side of the street, the inner section was designated as a small neighborhood park, known as Half Circle Park, with playground equipment for the local families to enjoy (Fig. 32). The park is visible from all of the homes in this private street adding a sense of safety that Jacobs' "eyes on the street" notion of constant surveillance created.⁶²

⁶⁰ "Campbell House opens for summer", *Grand Forks Herald*, Jun. 2, 1974, p. 15.

⁶¹ "Building Permits", *Grand Forks Herald*, Jun. 28, 1974, p. 5.

⁶² Jacobs, Jane, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Random House, New York, 1961, p.35.

Conclusion

The Grand Forks urban renewal project, a local expression of a national trend, presents a mixed legacy of both successes and failures. On the one hand, the program succeeded in achieving many of its core objectives. It modernized the city's infrastructure by building a new fire station, a police station, and, most notably, the DeMers Avenue overpass, which significantly improved traffic flow and safety. It also facilitated the construction of new high-density housing, such as Cherry Heights, Oak Manor and LaGrave Place, providing affordable options for low-income residents and the elderly. The project also spurred economic activity and helped to create a revitalized downtown commercial district, reactivating a part of the city that had been in decline.

However, these successes came at a considerable cost. The project's most significant failure was its top-down approach, which often disregarded public opinion and resulted in the demolition of historic landmarks, including the Carnegie Library, and the displacement of a diverse, long-standing neighborhood. This disregard for community input led to significant public controversy and revealed the tension between large-scale civic improvement and historic preservation. Ultimately, the Grand Forks urban renewal program demonstrates that while such projects can achieve their aims of modernization and revitalization, they often do so by sacrificing the very communities and historic fabric they were meant to serve.

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APPENDIX

GRAND FORKS URBAN RENEWAL PROGRAM

September, 2025

Susan J. Caraher (Grand Forks Historic Preservation Commission)

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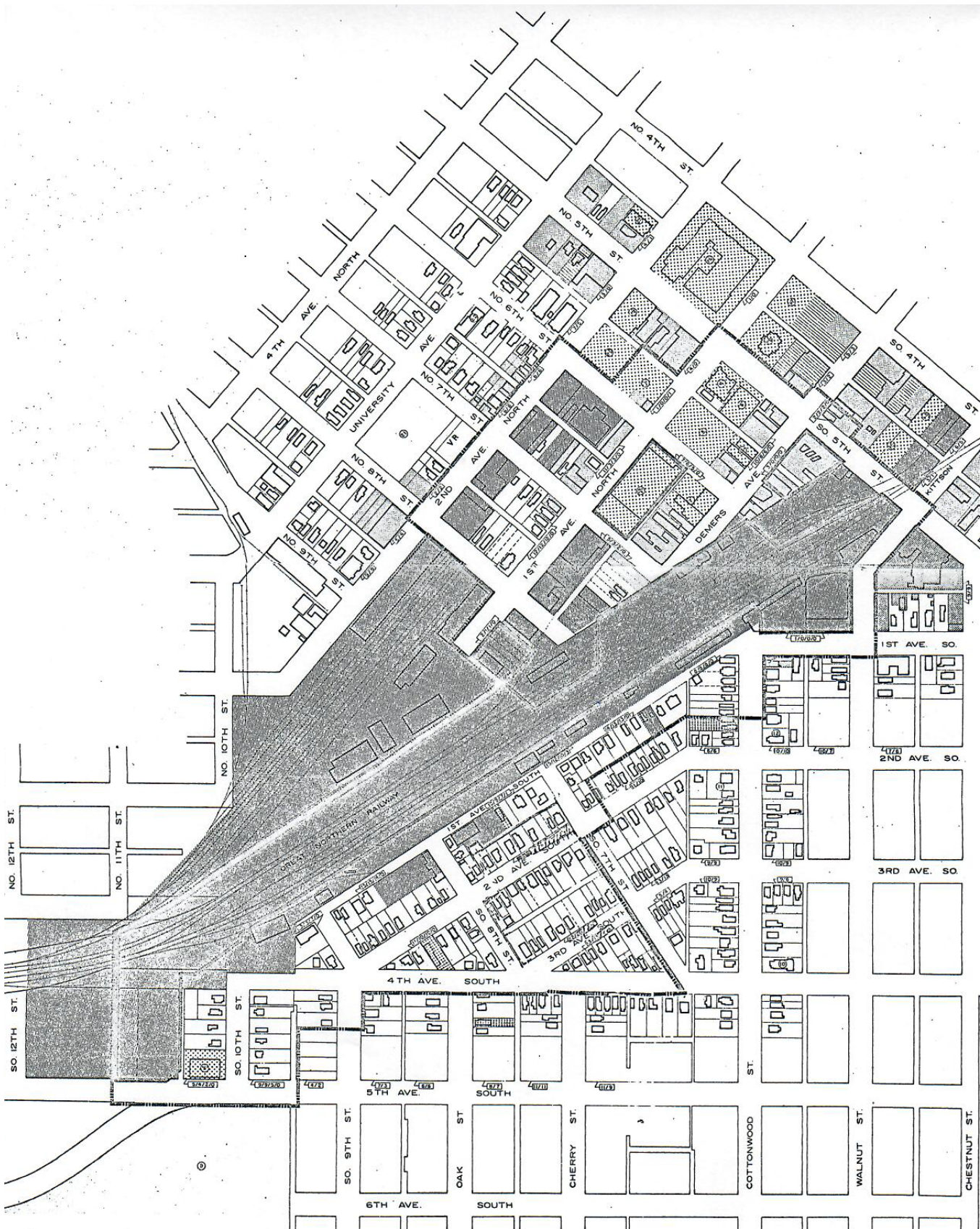


Figure 1: Project Area Map 10 – First Renewal Project Report Existing Land Use and Building Conditions Sheet 2 of 2, Code No. R-212, 1967.

EXHIBIT A

FIRST URBAN RENEWAL PROJECT

Urban Renewal Agency of the City of Grand Forks
Grand Forks, North Dakota

BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Located in the City of Grand Forks, State of North Dakota, and generally described as follows:

BEGINNING at the intersection of the south right-of-way line of First Avenue South and the east right-of-way line of Walnut Street proceed as follows:

Westerly along the south right-of-way line of First Avenue South to the east right-of-way line of Cottonwood Street; thence southerly along the east right-of-way line of Cottonwood Street for the distance of approximately 200 feet to a point; thence westerly across Cottonwood Street to the south lot line of Parcel 4, Block 11; thence westerly along the south lot line of Parcel 4, Block 11 and its extension to the rear lot line of Parcel 1, Block 12; thence southwesterly along the rear lot line of Parcel 1, Block 12 and its extension to the northeast lot line of Parcel 14, Block 12; thence southeasterly along the northeast lot line of Parcel 14, Block 12 and its extension to the southeast right-of-way line of Second Avenue South; thence southwesterly along the southeast right-of-way line of Second Avenue South to the southwest right-of-way line of South Seventh Street; thence southeasterly along the southwest line of South Seventh Street to the south right-of-way line of Fourth Avenue South; thence westerly along the south right-of-way line of Fourth Avenue South to the east right-of-way line of South Ninth Street; thence southerly along the east right-of-way line of South Ninth Street for the distance of approximately 125 feet to a point; thence westerly across South Ninth Street to the south lot line of Parcel 13, Block 24; thence westerly along the south lot line of Parcel 13, Block 24, to the east right-of-way line of an unnamed alley located within Block 24; thence southerly along the east right-of-way line of said alley to the south right-of-way line of Fifth Avenue South; thence westerly along the south right-of-way line of Fifth Avenue South for the distance of approximately 620 feet to a point; thence northerly across Fifth Avenue South to the west right-of-way line of vacated South Eleventh Street; thence northerly along the west right-of-way line of vacated South Eleventh Street and its extension, the west lot line of Parcel 8, Block 8; thence northeasterly along the northwest lot line of Parcel 8, Block 8 to the southwest lot line of Parcel 2, Block 7; thence northwesterly along the southwest lot line of Parcel 2, Block 7 and its extension to the northwest right-of-way line of First Avenue North; thence northeasterly along the northwest right-of-way

First Urban Renewal Project
Grand Forks, North Dakota

Rev. June, 1968

Figure 2: Page 1 of the detailed boundary description of the urban renewal zone, 1968.

line of First Avenue North to the southwest right-of-way line of North Eighth Street to the northwest right-of-way line of Second Avenue North; thence northeasterly along the northwest right-of-way line of Second Avenue North to the northeast right-of-way line of North Sixth Street; thence southeasterly along the northeast right-of-way line of North Sixth Street to the northwest lot line of Parcel 6, Block 3; thence northeasterly along the northwest lot line of Parcel 6, Block 3 to the northeast right-of-way line of an unnamed alley located northeast of Block 3; thence southeasterly along the northeast right-of-way line of said alley to the northwest right-of-way line of First Avenue North; thence northeasterly along the northwest right-of-way line of First Avenue North to the northeast right-of-way line of South Fifth Street; thence southeasterly along the northeast right-of-way line of South Fifth Street to the northwest right-of-way line of DeMers Avenue; thence northeasterly along the northwest right-of-way line of DeMers Avenue for the distance of approximately 50 feet to a point; thence southeasterly across DeMers Avenue to the northeast lot line of Parcel 1, Block 25; thence southeasterly along the northeast lot line of Parcel 1, Block 25 to the southeast lot line of Parcel 1, Block 25, thence southwesterly along the southeast lot line of Parcel 1, Block 25 to the northeast right-of-way line of South Fifth Street; thence southeasterly along the northeast right-of-way line of South Fifth Street to the southeast right-of-way line of Kittson Avenue; thence southwesterly along the southeast right-of-way line of Kittson Avenue to the east right-of-way line of Walnut Street; thence southerly along the east right-of-way line of Walnut Street to the south right-of-way line of First Avenue South which is the point of BEGINNING.

Figure 3: Page 2 of the detailed boundary description of the urban renewal zone, 1968.

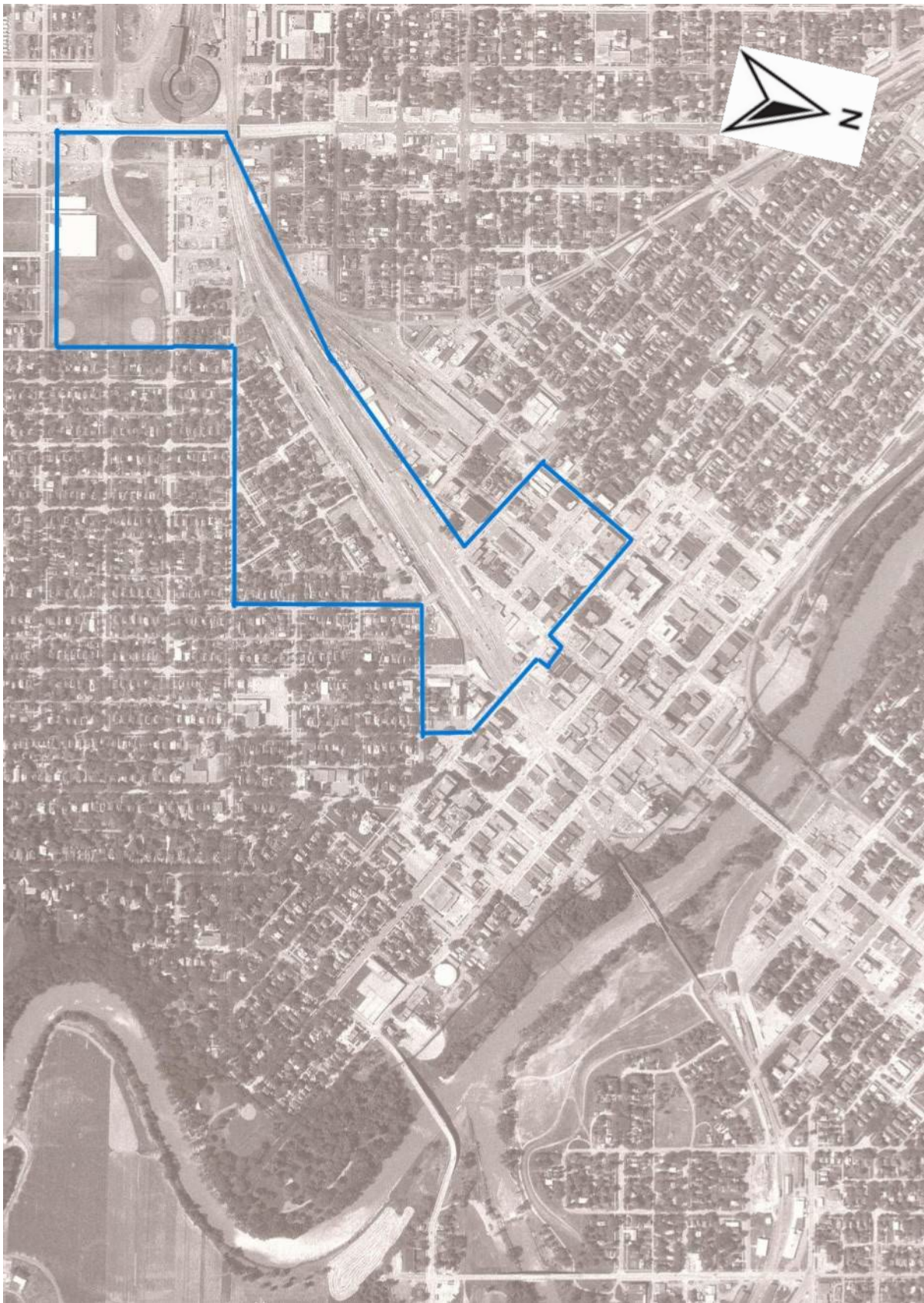


Figure 4: 1970 aerial showing the estimated urban renewal zone of downtown and the neighborhood prior to the redevelopment.

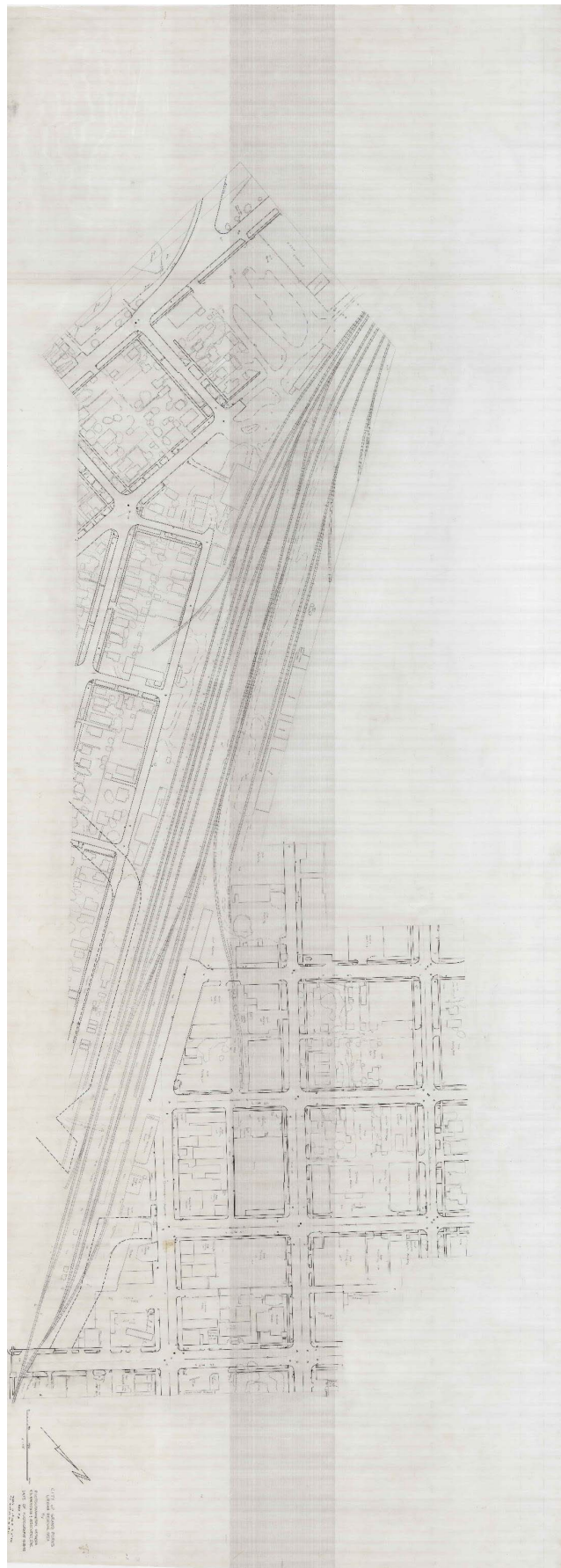


Figure 5: 1970 Photogrammetry Plan of urban renewal zone 1 north of the railroad.

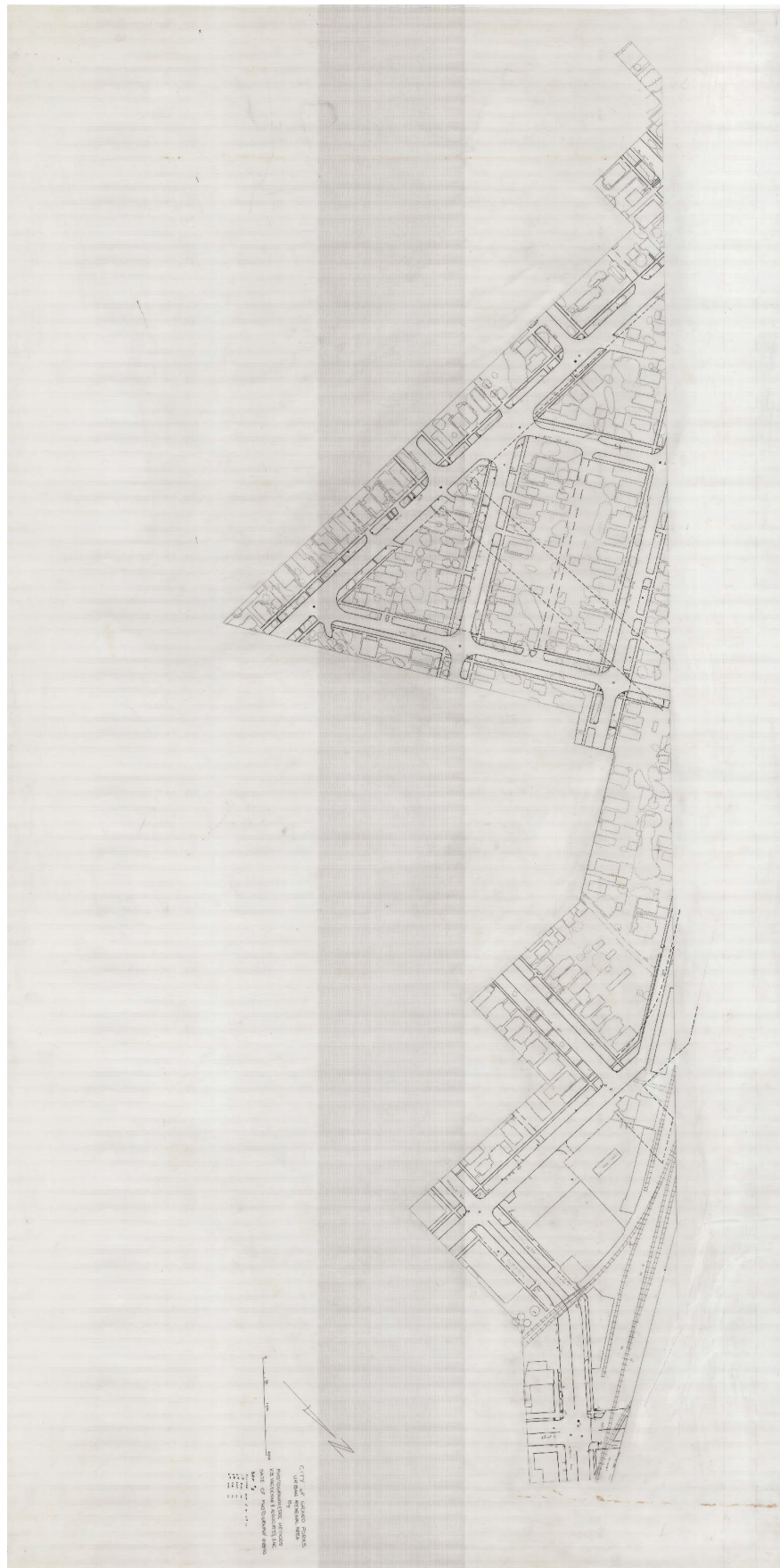


Figure 6: 1970 Photogrammetry Plan of urban renewal zone 2 south of the railroad.

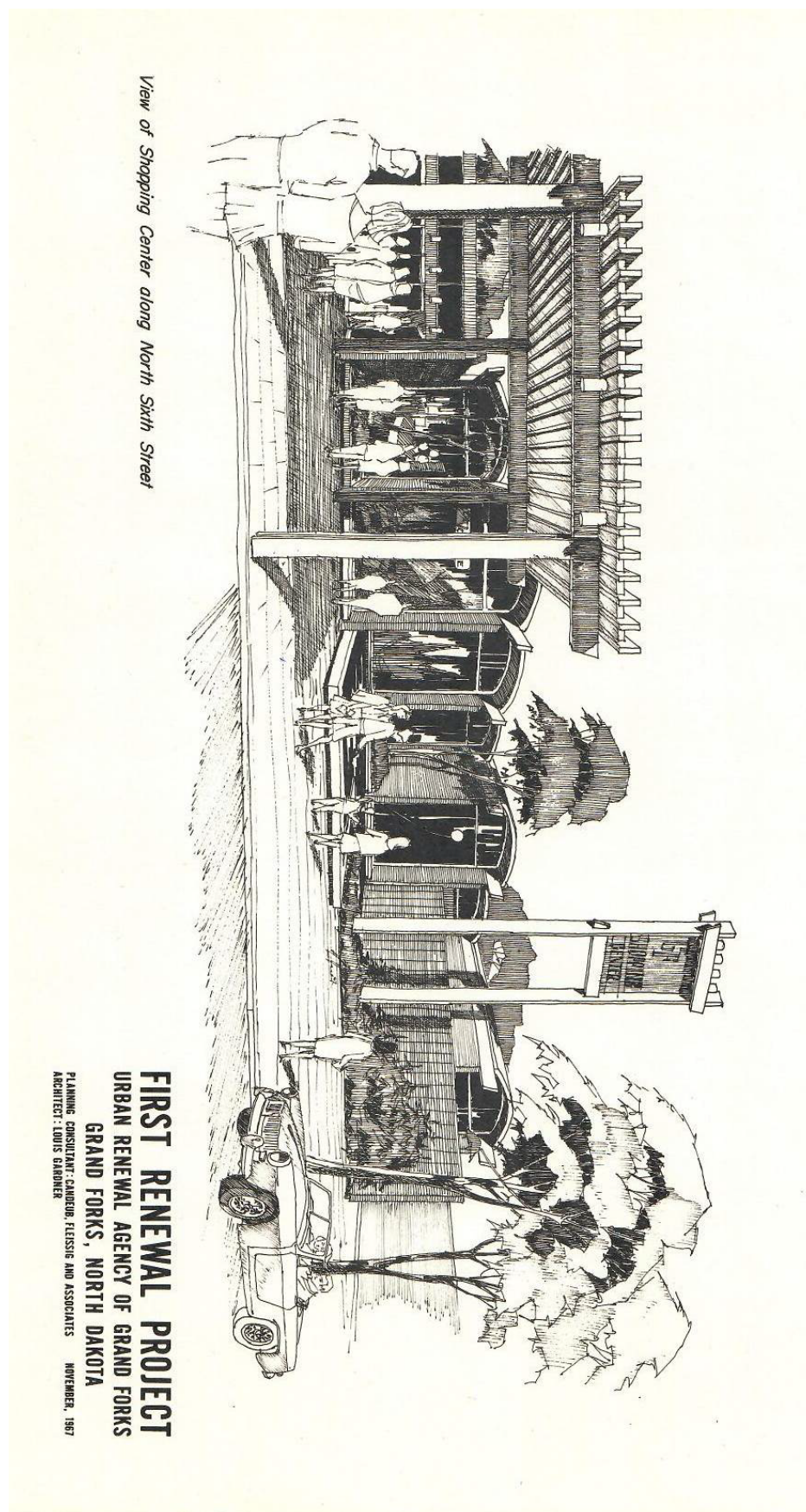


Figure 7: Rendering of the possible shopping center between Fifth and Sixth Streets.

View of Garden Apartments along First Avenue South



FIRST RENEWAL PROJECT
URBAN RENEWAL AGENCY OF GRAND FORKS
GRAND FORKS, NORTH DAKOTA
PLANNING CONSULTANT: CANOGUE, FLEISSIG AND ASSOCIATES
ARCHITECT: LOUIS GARDNER
NOVEMBER, 1967

Figure 8: Artist renderings of garden apartments

View of Town Houses



FIRST RENEWAL PROJECT
URBAN RENEWAL AGENCY OF GRAND FORKS
GRAND FORKS, NORTH DAKOTA
PLANNING CONSULTANT: CAHOEUR, FLEISSIG AND ASSOCIATES NOVEMBER, 1967
ARCHITECT: LOUIS GARDNER

Figure 9: Artist renderings of town houses



Figure 10: The 1978 building, now Harry's Steakhouse, adjacent to the Empire Arts Center.



Figure 11: The Northern Bell Company building, now CenturyLink, on N. Fifth St.



Figure 12: DeMers Overpass deck under construction c. 1972. The Metropolitan Bank building is seen near the center. The photographer is looking east.

THIS SET OF PLANS LIKELY
DESIGNED USING NGVD 29
AS VERTICAL DATUM

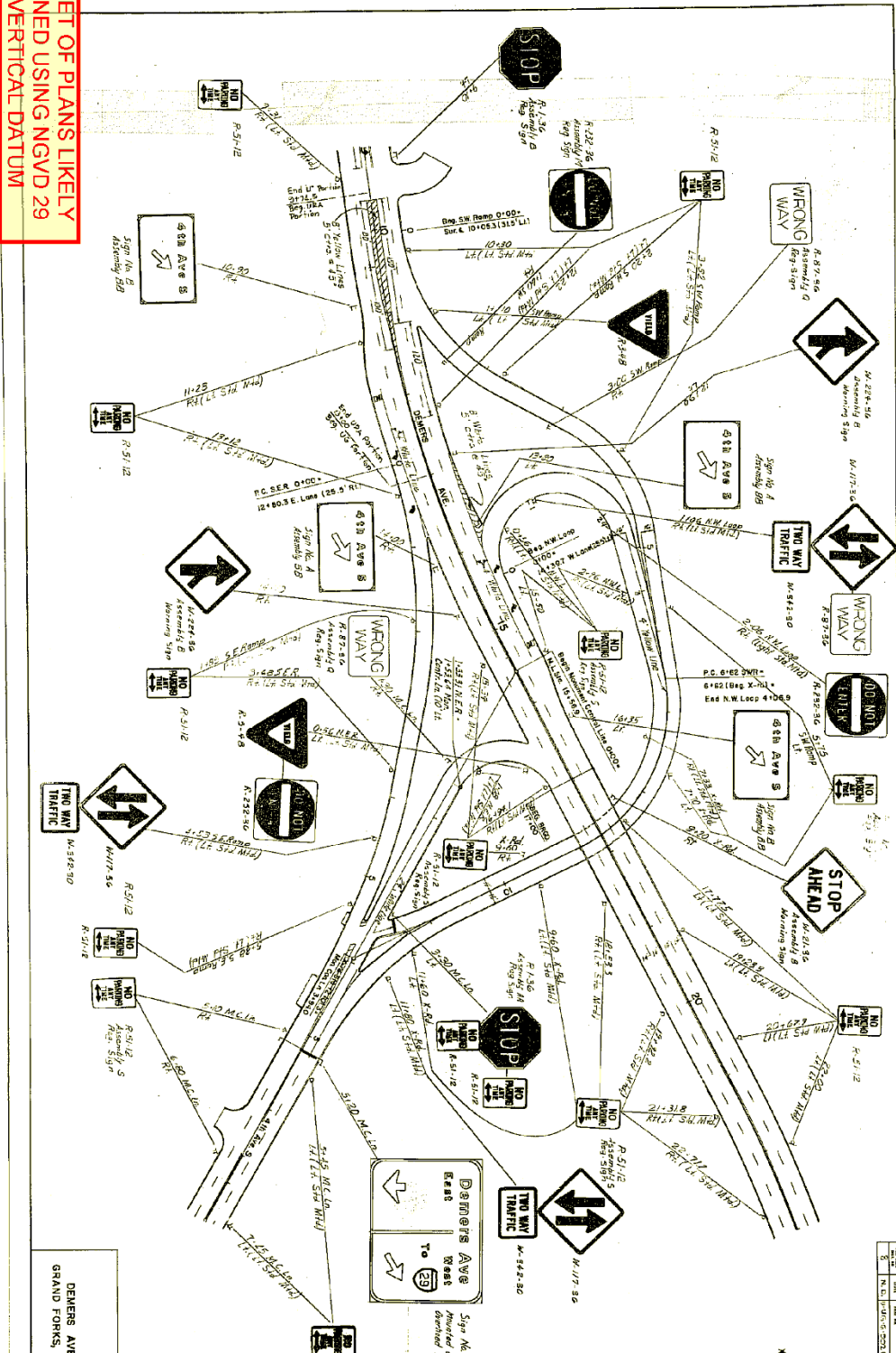


Figure 13: Engineering plan – design of overpass with entry and exit ramps.

Photos of some of the homes at the time of demolition, c. 1970.



Figure 14: Corner Cottonwood Street and 1st Ave S.



Figure 15: Demolition at Cottonwood St and 1st Ave S.



Figure 16: Homes on the south side of the railroad tracks



Figure 27: 105 S. 7th St.



Figure 18: 116 Cottonwood St.



Figure 19: 629 1st Ave. S.



Figure 20: 645 1st Ave S.



Figure 11: 637 1st Ave S.



Figure 22: 647 1st Ave S.



Figure 23: LaGrave Park established on the site of old homes to create a buffer from the railroad tracks.



Figure 24: Bike and pedestrian path between the railroad and the warehouse at 10 Walnut St. (32GF1364)

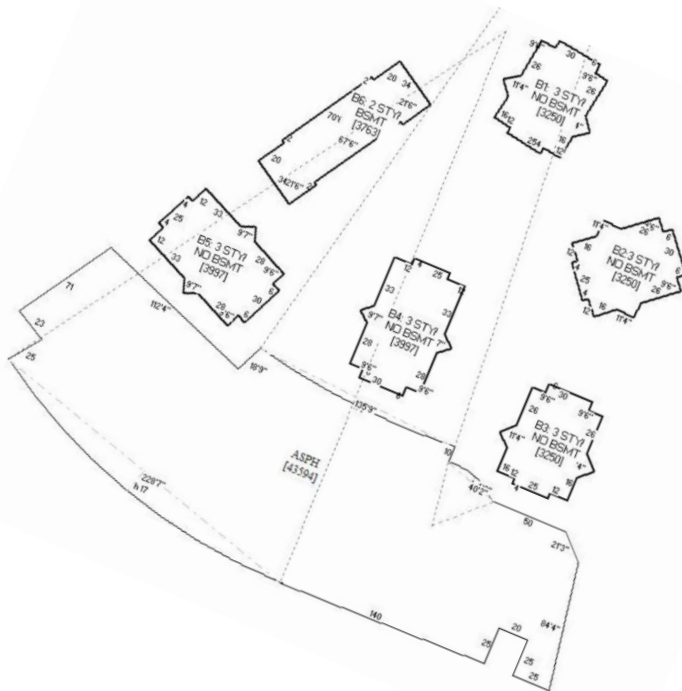
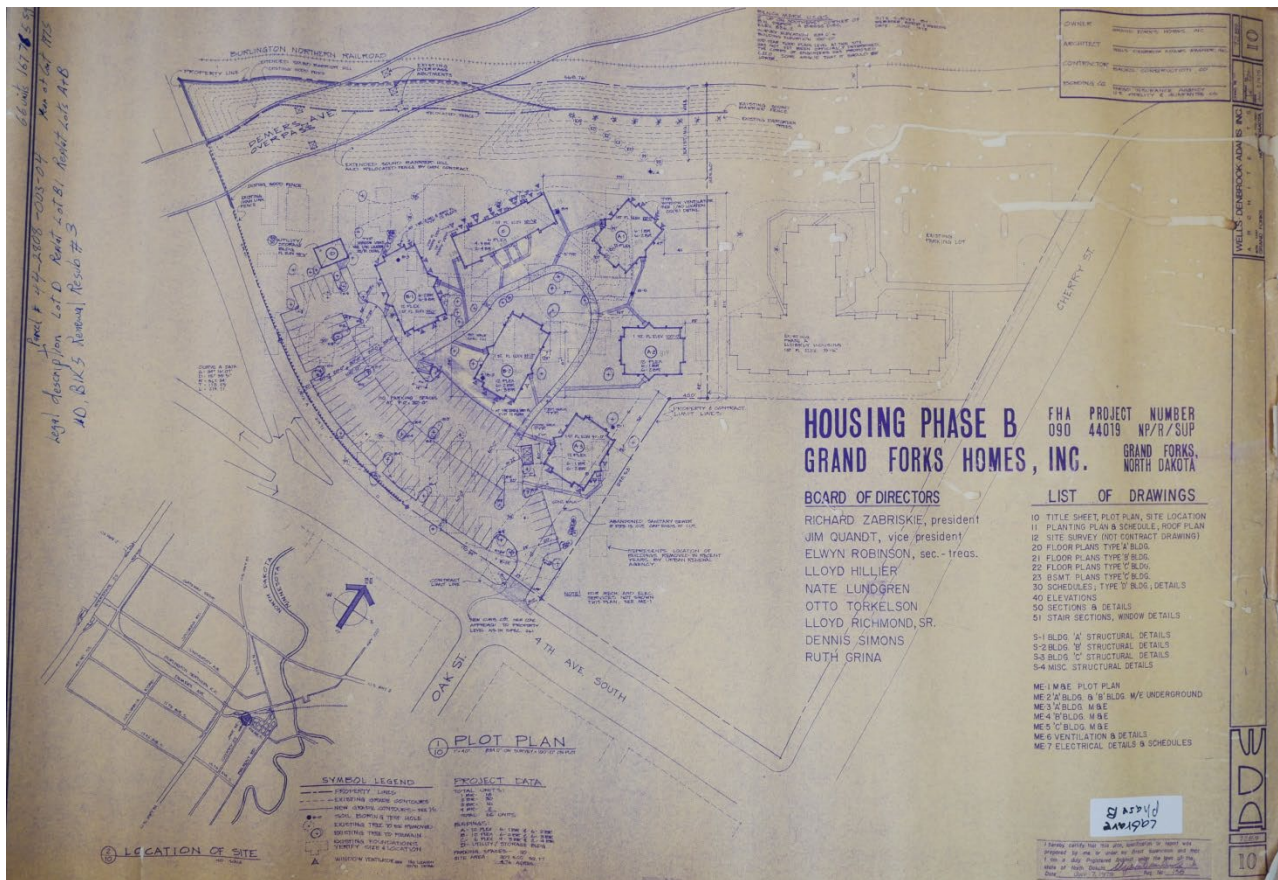


Figure 25 and 26: 1975 Blueprint and site plan for Phase B, LaGrave Place.



Figure 27, Oak Manor in 1983, part of the Grand Forks Housing Authority complex.



Figure 28: Oak Manor in 2024.



Figure 29: Three of the apartment buildings showing their orientation.



Figure 30: Street-side USPS mailbox that serves all twenty apartments on the block.



Figure 31: One of the six duplexes on Second Ave S.



Figure 32: Half Circle Park on Second Ave



Figure 33: Central Fire Station on DeMers and Washington St.



Figures 34 & 35: One of the sleeping rooms, and the dedication plaque.

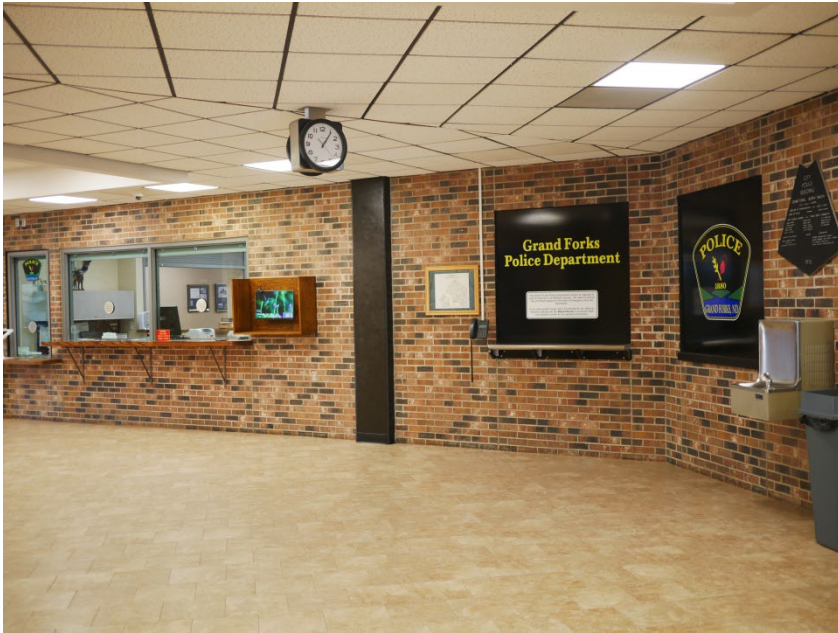


Figure 36: Lobby of Police Station

Figure 37: Police Station dedication plaque, the shape of which mirrors the footprint of the original building.

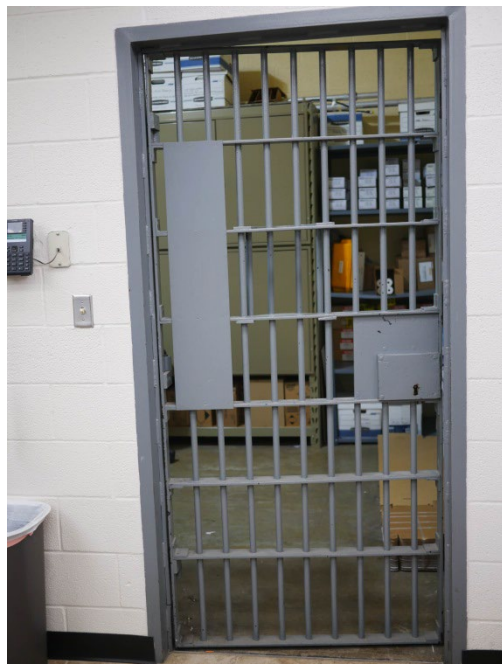


Figure 38: The old jail cell door, now a storage room.



Figure 39: South facing windows overlooking the Senior Citizen Center reception hall.

Figure 40: Senior Citizens Center, looking at the hall from the second floor.



Figure 41: Senior Citizen Center dedication plaque.

