

## CHASING DREAMS

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What a strange title! Is this some sort of Freudian Romp or psychological treatise on dreams? No, it isn't even though its genesis stems from my childhood and subsequent experiences. Rather, it is about the pursuit of ideas, wishes, illusions, and hopes or, in some instances, delusions or obsessions. Dreamers can be individuals, loosely affiliated groups, and sets of determined like-minded people or perhaps dupes. Alliances can change with time or concepts can mutate. Outsiders may be the initiators or promoters of these expectations. Let us visualize being enclosed in a large "dream factory" where ideas and concepts circulate freely.

Growing up as an only child in a neighborhood without other playmates was not easy. With a funeral home at the top of street things only got deader as one progressed toward our house. Except for school homework, there was an abundance of time for exploring books about architecture and planning in other parts of the world. I grew to wonder how great buildings and cities were created. Our property had a partial riverview; it was easy to imagine creating high-rise river view buildings in super blocks in Walnut Hills. In 1939 a trip to the New York World's Fair took me to the General Motors exhibit, "The City Of Tomorrow". The panoramas of superhighways, skyscrapers and open spaces stimulated my imagination even more. I wondered how some of the concepts could be realized here in Cincinnati.

Originally, I had planned to have Chasing Dreams the overall theme of three short papers; the first about civic or community dreams using Cincinnati; the second on corporate dreams; and finally a Walter Mitty type emulator. The latter two may be delivered at another time. Tonight's part of this trilogy is entitled:

HAS THE QUEEN CITY LOST ITS CROWN?

How much have our impressions of our beloved city been transformed by time? I would like to take you back a few years.

The time is October 1946. The author, just released from the Army and awaiting reentry to Princeton University in the Spring of 1947, takes an entry level job at The City Planning Commission of Cincinnati. To my shock and awe, the Enquirer ran a story headlined, "Industrialist's Son Takes Master Plan Job." Mercifully, the story omitted any job description because my actual role was as a glorified gopher. I believe the job title was Jr. Clerk.

The 1948 Metropolitan Master Plan was being completed at the time so this provided the chance to observe the various plan elements being assembled. Further, the staff was extremely helpful and took time to answer the author's inquiries. At the very least I gained a greater understanding of the comprehensive planning process and the local legacy upon which it was based.

Some of the major plan elements were; A Motorways Report featuring the Millcreek and Northeast Expressways that became I-75 and I-71 respectively. They were considered important in linking the suburbs to the central city; An Industrial Areas Report recognized the shortage of developable land within corporate Cincinnati and identified the area west of the Mill Creek Expressway for possible industrial development. During World War II the growing slums in the West End area became a matter of great public concern but any slum clearance efforts would have to find or create replacement housing. Another component of the plan dealt with Riverfront Redevelopment. These plans included a convention center, a stadium near the present Great American Ball Park, consideration of produce market relocation, as well as The Third Street Distributor (Fort Washington Way). It was a blueprint for much of what has evolved. There were also Neighborhood Development Plans at least in concept.

City planning arose in Cincinnati largely through the efforts of Alfred Bettman who wrote an act in 1915 enabling cities to create planning commissions. The United City Planning Commission was created that same year funded by private sources. The first

Cincinnati Master Plan was created in 1925 and became a national model. Under the city charter, the planning agency was supposed to be independent from political pressures. Ladislas Segoe, author of the 1925 plan, was a frequent visitor to our household. By 1944 the need for updated plans became apparent. The same year voters passed a \$41,000,000 bond issue to support post war redevelopment efforts. In 1947 the city was able to get legislative backing at the state level to use excess revenue from the Cincinnati Southern Railroad to help support bonds for city improvements including expressways.

At the end of my brief tour of duty in the city planning department, I went away with a deep appreciation of all the work that had been done to create the 1948 Master Plan and hope that much of the plans would reach fruition. It had been a great opportunity to observe the inner workings of the planning process but it did not stir any particular passion to become a planner. So, it was back to engineering school at Princeton.

Now, let us fast forward to 1962. Construction of the expressways was in progress. A number of new structures had been constructed--P & G Headquarters on Sixth Street, a new Kroger Building along Central Parkway and a new Western & Southern Life Building on Broadway. At Sixth and Vine, John J. Emery erected the first new hotel in years, the Terrace Plaza. The riverfront was now the focus of many different plan concepts but not much progress occurred except for the desire to build a new baseball park for the Reds. There was growing concern that the Central Business District was becoming blighted in spots and the tax base was deteriorating. Landlords and merchants were reluctant to sell their properties except at premiums not reflected on the tax duplicate. For them the use value was all that mattered. Eminent domain would be required to get the land needed for downtown renewal. A sense of urgency arose to produce a workable urban renewal plan for preservation, strengthening and redeveloping the Central Business District and its core. There was much talk but little action in agreeing on a downtown plan. Victor Gruen had proposed a plan incorporating an underground transportation terminal extending below today's Fountain Square and Government Square. Barton & Aschman representing developer interests offered a similar plan. John Emery was, in many minds, the logical choice to be a principal player in downtown renewal.

Since there was difficulty reaching a consensus on developing an action plan for the CBD core renewal, a new process had to be created. It happened in 1963 when Herb Stevens the planning director suggested the formation of a Working Review Committee whose members represented city council, the Downtown Development Committee (business interests), the presumed developer (Emery-Knutson), The Planning Commission, the city manager (William C. Wichman) and Peter Kory from The Department of Urban Development as secretary. Archibald Rogers, as the guiding light in creating Baltimore's Inner Harbor redevelopment, was chosen to come up with a new plan for downtown Cincinnati. Assisting his firm, RTKL, were Hammer and Associates as economic consultants. The final component of the consultant team was Alan Voorhees and Associates to provide traffic and transportation guidance. The culmination of their combined efforts was a series of proposed design and development options for each block under scrutiny as well as recommendations for vehicular and pedestrian traffic.

The function of the Working Review Committee was to review, on a block-by-block basis, various development options and select one. After each selection was made, council enacted it into legislation. Thus a step-by-step decision process created the final plan and provided a legislative framework to accomplish it. This mechanism became a national exemplar. The members of the committee were a remarkable group of individuals, chaired by Mark Upson. They were Eugene P. Ruehlmann, Gordon Rich, John J. Gilligan, Charles P. Taft, Willis D. Gradison, Frederick V. Geier, Addison Lanier, Dean Pickering, Mel Greiser, William C. Wichman, Herb Stevens, Rueben Hays, Dean Fite, and Donald Knutson.

In late 1963 or early 1964, representing a real estate development and research organization, I attended a significant number of the weekly meetings not just to observe the process but also to see whether there was any downstream prospect to participate in the renewal effort. What was so remarkable was the high degree of civility among the participants as various ideas were presented and thrashed out. Each week's labors were endorsed unanimously and forwarded to council for legislative incorporation in an official plan. The plan also included a design review process to assure plan guidelines

were being met. Despite all the goodwill among the participants, underneath concern was growing about the willingness of the Emery group to proceed undertake the development of Fountain Square called Block A.

Also a few, including myself, wondered if the design review procedure could be so restrictive as to inhibit offerings with superior economic potential.

In December 1964 “The Downtown Plan for Cincinnati” was submitted to city council along with two other supporting documents; Volume II - “The Central Business District Urban Design Plan” and Volume III – “The Documentation for the CDB Urban Design Plan”. With a legislative framework in place, the city was now ready to entertain development proposals. The dream was there but nothing happened. Although the Emery interests were willing to consider developing other blocks, they demonstrated no eagerness to proceed with Block A. The impasse grew and the Downtown Development Committee grew impatient because their favorite was perceived to be stalling.

Finally, as their desperation grew, Joseph Hall, a member of the DDC, said, “do you want an alternative?” When questioned as to whether he knew anyone who might be a substitute for Emery, he said, “Yes, John Galbreath. He has built many office buildings elsewhere and might be interested.

We both serve on Ohio University’s Board of Trustees.” Even though this eventually led to the selection of The Galbreath organization as the developer for Block A, it took an intense behind the scenes campaign to persuade business leaders to accept the change. Long standing friendships and natural chauvinistic impulses favoring a local candidate had to be overcome. How fortunate we were to have Joseph Hall to step up to the plate. In retrospect, perhaps the Emery interests lacked major prospective tenants for a new facility and by building speculatively could only jeopardize the occupancy level in the Carew Tower. When the development group to which I belonged had acquired options on the land and other encumbrances at One East Fourth Street in order to build an office tower, we mentioned this, as a courtesy, to Emery. He couldn’t conceive of a use for the site except for a potential new Federal Reserve Building.

In 1969 The Hall-Galbreath-Stone partnership completed the Dubois Tower, now the Fifth Third Center, on Fountain Square. The Square was redesigned and the Tyler

Davidson fountain moved from the center of Fifth Street northward into the plaza. Much discussion had taken place during the working review committee meetings about the design of the square, particularly the landscaping. The trees were to be a “visual sieve” allowing full views across the plaza. It was further determined that any new building on the south side of Fifth Street would have to have an atrium in the middle to prevent shadows from being cast on the square. This eventually became the Westin Hotel and the US Bank Building. A system of upper level walkways, part of the urban design plan, was constructed to facilitate pedestrian traffic between major downtown buildings and the convention center to relieve congestion on the sidewalks at street level. The walkways were popular with persons wanting to reach destinations quickly without having to wait for traffic lights. However, anticipated second level retail traffic did not meet demand expectations for many places along the walkways

The 1964 downtown plan provided the framework for many ensuing developments in the late sixties and seventies. The Provident Tower at One East Fourth was completed in 1968 without urban renewal funds. New hotels were built near the convention center. In 1970 at the N.W. corner of 4<sup>th</sup> and Walnut, the Formica Building was completed and included an atrium type passageway to The Contemporary Arts Center on Government Square and links to the Mercantile Library. A multi story garage was constructed on Fourth Street on the southern half of the block west of Race Street (Block D of the renewal plan). Southern Ohio Bank built the 580 Building in 1973. In 1978 Federated Department Stores erected a new headquarters building on Vine Street. The PNC Center on 5<sup>th</sup> and Main arose in 1979.

At this point in time progress in the core CBD area was slowing down. Speculation was growing as to whether the city’s Department of Urban Development as “gatekeeper” for prospective developers was exercising its own design preferences without regard to marketplace realities. In 1981 after much controversy over design controls and developer selection, The U. S. Bank Tower/Westin Hotel complex was completed with an atrium lobby designed not to cast shadows on Fountain Square. There were other indications of trouble. Some of the large department stores were heading to the suburbs or closing. Various plans to develop Fountain Square West (the area between Vine and Race Streets

south of Opera Place) languished until Lazarus committed to a small store along with Tiffany's and Brooks Brothers. Behind was the Fifth and Race Tower erected in 1974 on the west side of Race Street. Ironically, this building and its accompanying skywalk were later demolished to make way for a Nordstrom's store. The latter never materialized despite an avalanche of publicity. The dream is gone and all we have now is a vacant lot. A revenue producing facility had been needlessly sacrificed. Along Fourth Street the various carriage trade stores were beginning to disappear. Tower Place Mall was created within the old Pogue space in attempt to stem the retail decline.

In the 1980s and 1990s downtown corporate employment and space needs grew rapidly as not all office users were fleeing to the suburbs. Atrium One and Two were built in 1981 and 1983 respectively by Hunt Development to handle the grown needs of Cincinnati Bell and AT&T respectively. 1984 saw the creation of the Convergys Building at Sixth and Vine as well as the Chiquita Building to the east of the Federal Building on Fifth Street. In another major commitment to downtown, Procter and Gamble completed in 1985 a distinctive new twin towered office structure called Two Procter & Gamble Plaza (I always think of Dolly Parton when I see it.) . Duke Realty Interests built 312 Walnut, the Scripps Center, in 1990 and 312 Elm Building in 1991.

Many of the projects previously described could not have been built without some kind of financial subsidy—usually called “incentives” but some conservatives might employ the phrase “bribes”. Some of the early buildings used Federal Urban Renewal Grants to cover the difference between land acquisition and site clearance costs and the disposition price. Later projects often used what is called “Tax Increment Financing” where the resultant increment in property values is used to pay off any bonds issued. In this case, attempts are made to provide the schools with up to 25% of the incremental revenues. This is less than the normal share that our public schools would collect: however, The Department of Community Development and Planning has insisted that the growth in tax base from this type of financing more than offsets any shrinkage in revenue due to the lower tax allocation percentage. This sounds like the old bromide. “We are selling this below cost but will make it up in volume”. I do believe we should ascertain the veracity of the city in this instance.

In the late sixties, I examined the development and benefit assumptions for key blocks in the downtown plan and deduced that our school system would not share in the tax revenues. These assumptions were forwarded to several fellow Chamber of Commerce members as well as Dennis Durden, a good friend, who was Secretary of the Downtown Development Committee.

I have always felt that our Chamber of Commerce was an important part of our region because its members constituted a large body of volunteers whose energies could be mobilized to back important area programs and influence public policy decisions. While always committed to promoting economic growth, the Chamber has constantly reexamined its mission to see how it can be more effective. Since joining the Chamber decades ago I was involved in a number of activities. Two convention hall expansion studies were done at different time periods. In each case advocacy triumphed over rigorous market research and cost analysis. It was deemed essential to expand the center to capture the presumed burgeoning market and thus benefit downtown hotels. It was considered bad taste to look at the growth of the overall space market, compare it to planned expansion elsewhere and question the share Cincinnati could capture. We were better( as a city) and to hell with facts. We are now faced with a shrinking overall convention market and much expanded space. Where will all this lead?

In the seventies, in response to a need to improve area marketing effectiveness, my committee at the Chamber was asked to conduct a nationwide study to ascertain how outsiders perceived Cincinnati. Great efforts were made to assure the survey was free from any possible bias. We employed outside experts with impeccable credentials. When the Image Study findings were tabulated and failed to match local expectations, the messengers were discredited. I think we need to periodically review our area's strengths and weaknesses otherwise we will become complacent or be in denial. Marketing and promotional strategies should be based on solid data.

Overall, I regard the Chamber as a very positive force in our region. Use it in working to better our community. Some of its positions, reflecting narrower local interests, have to be viewed with a grain of salt, or as Ronald Reagan might say, “Trust but verify”.

Now let us fast forward to the present. Once more we are facing uncertainty over downtown progress, the central riverfront and our obsession with Over-the-Rhine.. Conflicts, confusion, cross currents of opinions seem to abound. How has planning and development evolved? What does it mean? I have some opinions.

Ever since 1948 there have been great expectations for the riverfront. Some hopes them have been realized. Others are unfulfilled. We now have, at an exorbitant cost, two stadiums. The vote in 1996 to undertake the building of these structures was the product of a sustained effort of deceit and misrepresentation coupled with blatant messages that we would be a bush league city without them. The excess costs incurred would have allowed us to have one facility, preferably Paul Brown stadium, at Broadway Commons and link it by monorail to riverfront parking. At the very minimum, we should subject the football stadium revenue or cost figures to rigorous annual scrutiny. In Atlanta, the Georgia Dome, The International Congress Center, and CNN are next to each other and share parking. It seems a shame our Convention Center couldn't have been expanded south toward Paul Brown Stadium and WCPO retained at its previous site. In the area between the stadiums, we have just erected the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center deemed a vital and worthy component of our community. Since there are purportedly 10 or 11 similar attractions around our nation, once the novelty wears off, it may require sustained public support to keep this endeavor solvent. We are indeed fortunate to have John Pepper commit himself to this endeavor.

The location of the Freedom Center, the stadiums and not too easy pedestrian access from downtown have, I think, hindered the functionality of any so-called Banks Development. We have a hodge podge of make do evils, the result of ill conceived, top down planning. I don't wish to denigrate the proponents of the concept but their timing is wretched. We didn't try to get input from market-oriented developers before the placement of the Freedom Center. Now we need bidders for “the tail of the dog”. It has been cruel to raise

premature expectations for the Banks. What kinds of establishments belong there? Mayor Roxanne Qualls vetoed an offer by the Hofbrauhaus. Bill Butler's Corporex, across the river, has created many handsome facilities and seemingly has first call on new projects there. In Cincinnati, he can proudly point to the handsome Grand Baldwin Building on Eden Park Drive. But, in the case of the Banks, I think Butler has correctly determined that site-specific problems and the city disposition requirements make it too difficult to create a viable project. Will the Cincinnati City Center Development Corporation (3CDC) come forth with a workable plan and incredibly deep pockets? Your guess is as good as mine.

What is happening to our beloved Fountain Square? Once more the plaza is being ripped up to both lower the plaza to Fifth Street level and to fix the leaking roof of the parking garage below. The skywalk across Vine has been demolished and the Tyler Davidson fountain will be given a "superior" resting place north of its last position. The skywalk was considered an ugly duckling impairing the view of the restaurants and stores under the low rise Fifth Third Bank Building. Why couldn't some of these establishments been brought south under the walkway to make them more visible? The underground garage is being turned over to the developer 3CDC and cheap municipal parking there will disappear with higher rates charged to help pay for the project. Since it is too late to stop this project, what inestimable benefits will we get? World-class restaurants and stores? Year round throngs filling the square? 3CDC says, with professed confidence, that the existing establishments to the north are likely to stay or be replaced by better ones. Are these reasonable expectations? Is it realistic to expect the restaurants and other stores to survive the parking and construction disruptions? Will the temporary five-week closure of Fifth Street to fix the garage roof further discourage even more downtown visitors—some permanently?

Many friends and acquaintances have almost totally given up going downtown except for job or necessary visits.. It's inconvenient and seemingly unsafe. What kind of activities could provide a major draw strong enough to overcome these concerns about safety? How do we bring life back to Fourth Street? Could we replicate the kind of commercial activities on Main Street in Over-the-Rhine and thus bring more nightlife downtown?

What is the future of the Over-the-Rhine area? Once the proud home of earlier German Americans but now largely vacant, it is revered for the facades of its Italianate Buildings. Historic preservationists, planners and many community leaders feel we must preserve the architectural purity of this area at all costs. Innumerable studies have been conducted but little has happened except for properties at the southern boundary along Central Parkway, the renovation of Findlay Market and one small housing project by Western & Southern. 3CDC has intimated it will play a role in OTR. HUD's voucher program has facilitated a mass exodus of renters from the district. Buildings stand largely empty and dilapidated. Crime is rampant. Except for some parts of the northern fringe, there has been little rehabilitation or gentrification. We need to rethink our policies about this area. Must everything be preserved?

These are some of my reflections about the city and the dream factory we live in. Earlier planning efforts up through at least 1948 enjoyed wide popular and political support. Our newspapers were widely read and did a good job of in depth reporting. We were fortunate to have an extraordinary group of people involved in creating the 1964 plan. Highly qualified consultants provided good input to the process. Further, open meetings provided a high degree of transparency. Our news media were helpful. The ensuing office developments were in large part done to meet the needs of major tenants and, except for Fountain Square, controls were less intrusive. The bright hopes for Fountain Square West were largely unfulfilled due to unreasonable expectations accompanied by puffery from the media and PR entities. Today, the picture is also murky. The premises and expectations for Fountain Square and Riverfront seem a bit fuzzy. Certainly, the intentions of business interests represented in 3CDC are civic minded, altruistic and noble but not too transparent. We can't tell if their plans are based on credible research.

In conclusion, I urge our members to help us achieve a better future for our city by remaining involved in local affairs. Scrutinize questionable policies more carefully to distinguish between trappings and substance. Look at the stakes involved. Follow the money trail. Above all, be civil.

Thank you.