

IX -- APPEARANCE OF THE CITY

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An early form of city planning was the "City Beautiful" movement of the late nineteenth century. It was a well meaning but somewhat futile effort to escape ugly and haphazard growth and urban blight by building monumental public buildings, large parks and boulevards. These embellishments could not provide a solution for basic, underlying ills of the community. The principles of the "City Beautiful" movement still have real significance, however, as one element of a comprehensive program for orderly community improvements.

To make Utica as attractive as possible is a two-fold responsibility. It is the responsibility of public officials to so design, construct and maintain public buildings, public schools, parks and playgrounds, streets and bridges, street tree plantings and other public facilities that they are objects of civic pride as well as purely utilitarian. Public property, however, accounts for only about one fourth of the total city area. The other three fourths of the city is privately owned. The responsibility for attractive appearance of private property, through good design, construction and maintenance, must be accepted by each citizen of the community.

The appearance of Utica is an important factor in the impression we make upon visitors in the city. It is vastly more important, however, to build beauty into the city and to maintain an attractive appearance in order to stimulate and justify civic pride for all the residents of the community.

Streets

Utica has 183 miles of streets, constituting about twenty per cent of the developed area of the city. All residential, commercial, industrial and recreational properties in the city have access to the public streets. They are, therefore, the show window of the community, and their appearance is of real importance.

Street appearance depends upon the design, construction and maintenance of the street pavement and sidewalks, the street trees and planting strip between the pavement and sidewalks, the street signs and lighting, utility poles and wires, advertising signs, and the abutting private property.

Street Trees. Probably every Utican recognizes that tree-lined streets such as Genesee Street and the Memorial Parkway constitute one of the city's greatest assets.

Long-range planning for street tree plantings, maintenance and replacement involves several important factors. One of these is the preparation of a comprehensive street tree plan, showing the location, variety and spacing of existing and proposed street trees. The proper relationship of the tree to curb and sidewalk should be shown, and future street widenings as proposed in the Major Street Plan and the official map should be given full consideration.

Planting of street trees according to plan may speed replacement of trees which must be cut and in many cases replanting may be done in advance of widening because of better coordination of street construction and planting programs. The street tree planting program suggests the desirability of developing a city nursery for the propagation of the trees which are included in planting lists shown on the tree planting plans. Consideration should be given to the size of trees used in plantings. Many years are necessary to produce a street tree of effective size. Some time can be cut from this period by using large stock. One way of assuring a supply of trees of proper size for transplanting is to grow them in a city nursery. Replanting of trees in an established street suggests use of large nursery stock, while planting in a new development may require only 8 to 10 foot trees.

The problem of tree cutting needs coordination. The care of street trees has been officially recognized as a function of the Bureau of Parks. It is recommended that the

cutting or trimming of any street tree be controlled by the Park Department.

The proposed subdivision regulations require that when new subdivisions are laid out, the Planning Board shall require as one condition of plat approval the planting of street trees by the developer. The Board should require that the plantings conform with the tree planting plans throughout the city and that the trees should be of proper species, size and spacing and that they be properly fertilized, braced and protected.

Planting Strips between the curb and sidewalk are part of the street right-of-way and should receive the same good maintenance required of any other public property. In residential areas, the planting strips are generally considered as part of the lawn of the private properties and are maintained on the same basis. In cases of new street construction, the developer should place topsoil on the planting strip and plant seed to assure a good stand of grass. When the city widens a pavement, the contract should include proper grading, topsoiling and seeding in the planting strip to establish good turf on this portion of public property. Much of the ugliness along streets near the business district is due to neglect of the city to remove street construction scars by proper planting.

Street Signs. A uniform system of legible street name signs shows orderliness and good municipal operation. They often give visitors one of their first impressions of the city, as well as making travel in the city more convenient for residents. Name signs should be placed in a uniform position and manner at each street corner. They should be of uniform design, legible and of durable construction. A program of street sign replacement has recently been carried out in Utica so that at the present time this element of the city appearance and hospitality is in good condition.

Street Lights are an essential utility. The spacing and intensity of lights along the streets are dependent upon

the type of district - residential, neighborhood commercial, central business or industrial; upon traffic volumes; upon the street width from curb to curb and upon the size of lamp used. A general plan of street lighting should be developed by the City Department of Engineering to serve as a guide for lighting in new developments, for installation of additional lights, and for constant modernization of street lighting as methods of lighting improve.

Proper street lighting is regarded as a sound investment. The dividends are greater safety, better business conditions, and enhanced appearance of the city.

Genesee and some other streets have been improved within the last decade with ornamental metal standards and light brackets, and the result is very satisfactory. Elsewhere, lighting equipment includes metal standards with luminaire on top, wooden poles with luminaire suspended from metal brackets, and many luminaires hung on long mastarms mounted on wooden poles. The conventional post-top luminaire has the disadvantages that the mounting height is only half that of the more modern pendant types and that much of the light is dissipated upward rather than being reflected downward toward the street.

A lighting improvement program for the city can best be effected by engineering analysis of lighting requirements for each part of the city, and negotiation with the private utility company to install and modernize lights progressively.

Utility Poles and Wires create a disorderly and unsightly appearance unless carefully planned and located. In the business district, a long-term program should be worked out with the utility companies for removing poles and placing wires underground. This work should be coordinated with the street widening and resurfacing program.

In existing residential areas, utility poles and wires are generally located along the street where they are unsightly and conflict with street trees. It is recommended that future

subdivisions provide for a ten foot utility easement at the rear lot line in order that poles and wires will not detract from the good appearance of the street and hinder the development of street trees. As urban redevelopment takes place in Utica, full consideration should be given to placing utilities underground.

Sidewalk Encroachments for the display of merchandise, storage of goods, cartons and removable advertising signs; or steps, porches or fire escapes on street right-of-way is a misuse of public property dedicated and improved for pedestrian circulation. Besides unlawful encroachment upon the space needed for pedestrians, these practices create a very unsightly appearance which should not be allowed to continue.

Billboards and Advertising Signs are excluded from Utica's residential areas by existing and proposed ordinances. Such signs as exist at present in these districts should be removed within a reasonable time.

In commercial and industrial areas, the size and character of signs should be strictly regulated. Often the maze of signs in a business district creates such a confused appearance that the legibility and effectiveness of each sign is destroyed. In many cases the confusion of commercial signs hung on buildings and over sidewalks and streets constitutes a traffic hazard by obscuring traffic control and directory signs.

Present practice in the design of commercial buildings is to eliminate the use of signs and billboards in favor of more attractive architectural name plates in simple, bold designs placed flat against the building. Much can be done to improve the appearance of Utica's business and shopping districts by replacing the clutter of signs and billboards with simple architectural signs and indirect lighting.

Public Parks, Buildings and Grounds. Utica is in need of various new public buildings such as municipal buildings,

schools, branch libraries, fire stations, auditorium, and various park structures. Special attention should be given to the matter of securing adequate sites to properly serve and provide setting for each particular building.

Public schools have generally provided essential buildings, but little or no attention has been given to the size and design of the grounds as attractive neighborhood areas for open space and recreation. All public structures and facilities, no matter how large or small, should be so planned as to be architecturally attractive as well as structurally safe and functionally efficient. Even the most utilitarian structures in a city, such as park buildings, light standards and parking lots can and should be attractively designed.

It is important, that the reputation of Utica for its beautiful parkway and parks be extended to its playgrounds, schools and other public buildings and grounds. As a means of achieving the best possible design for maximum use and enjoyment of public parks and recreational and scenic areas, it is recommended that a General Development Plan be prepared for each public property. Such a plan will show topographic conditions and existing improvements. Analysis of these factors and of community needs will show unexplored possibilities for public use and enjoyment, and will guide orderly and efficient development of existing and proposed public parks, buildings and grounds.

Commercial and Industrial Areas

Commercial buildings in Utica's Business district are generally old three to five story buildings which have undergone successive "face-lifting" as tenants have changed. It is highly desirable to consider the appearance of all store fronts in the block together, rather than each building by itself. If this is done, it is probable that a uniformity of design will develop over a period of years which will improve the appearance of the business district.

Commercial buildings serving residential neighborhoods are often old dwellings which receive a minimum of remodeling for the new use. Neighborhood stores should be carefully remodeled and improved in order to be as attractive as possible and to conform with the character of the neighborhood.

Experience in other communities has demonstrated that it is desirable to develop complete neighborhood shopping centers with a uniform architectural design and adequate off-street parking and service areas. These centers serve to concentrate neighborhood shopping facilities at important intersections, thereby reducing the need for small, scattered neighborhood stores.

Industrial buildings are primarily utilitarian in purpose. Industrialists today realize, however, that their plants can be attractive as well as utilitarian. Several new plants have been built in Utica and vicinity on spacious grounds, with attractive drives, lawns, parking areas and plantings. Improvements such as these should be made on existing plants in so far as possible in order to make the plant and the entire community more attractive, and to provide a more pleasant environment in which to work.

Residential Neighborhoods

The importance of attractive and spacious neighborhood parks, school grounds and playgrounds in stabilizing residential areas has been stressed in several parts of this city planning study. The primary responsibility, however, for attractive neighborhoods must be placed squarely upon the residents and their pride in making their own homes attractive.

The process of making neighborhoods attractive in Utica is not easy due to the large percentage of stereotyped two-family or multiple family dwellings built on small lots and lacking privacy and individuality.

The attractiveness of the older residential areas can be gradually improved by removing dilapidated houses, and by repairing other houses. An effective tool for implementing such action is the proposed minimum housing standards ordinance which gives the health and building departments authority to require improvements necessary to public health, safety, morals and welfare.