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The International City Design Competition [Introduction]

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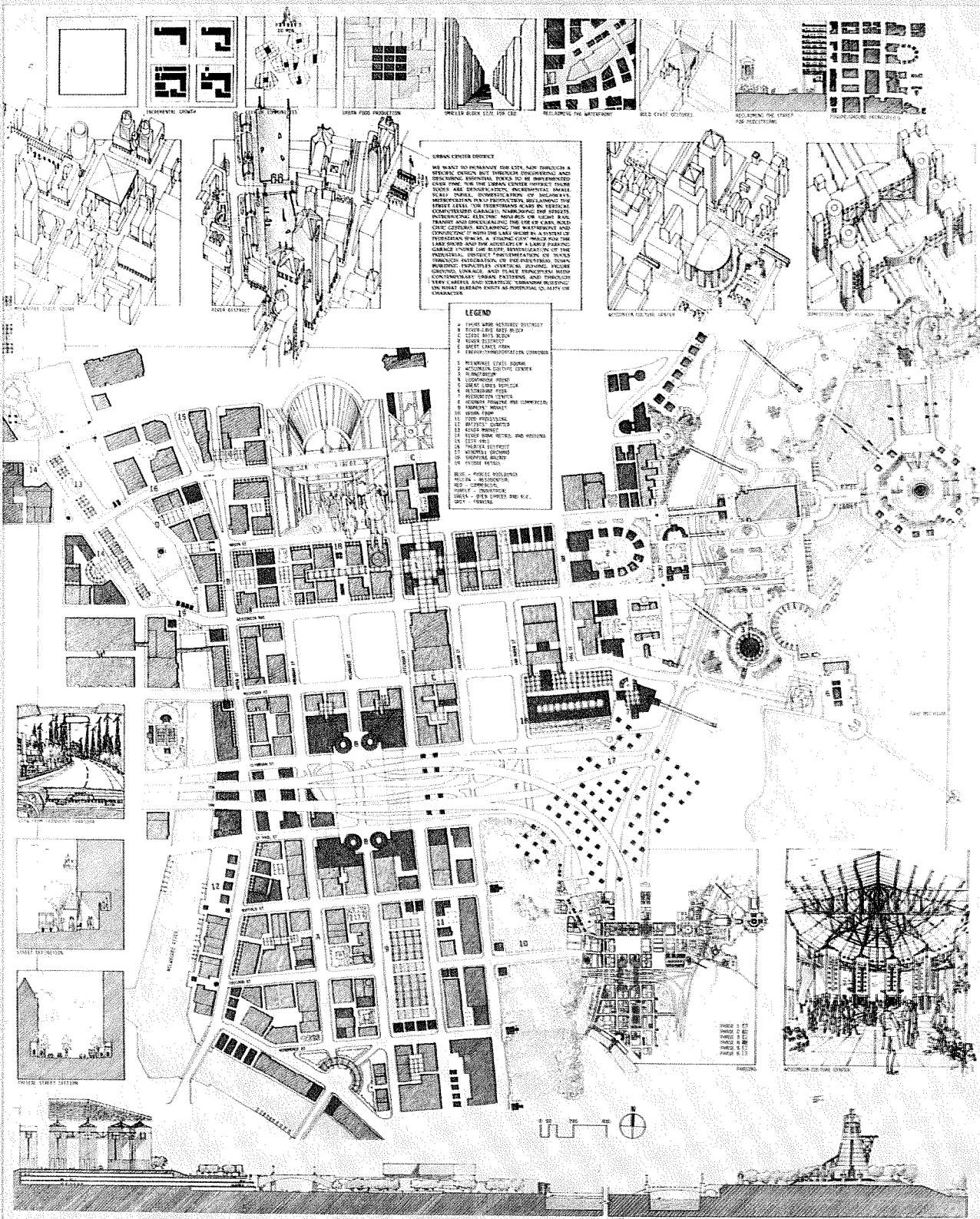
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We want to humanize the city by discovering and describing essential tools to be implemented over time. For the Urban Center District, those are:

- Densification.
- Incremental small-scale infill.
- Domestication of highways
- Urban food production.

- Reclaiming street level for pedestrians.
- Narrowing the streets.
- Introducing electric mini-bus or light rail.
- Bold civic gestures.
- Reclaiming the waterfront and connecting it with the lake shore.
- Revitalizing the industrial district.

These would be implemented by using pre-industrial town building principles (vertical zoning, figure ground, linkage and place) and strategically building on what already exists as a source of quality of character.

Project team: Milosav Cekic, James L. Cormier, Anthony DeGrazia, Neal Hubbel, Niko Letunic, Roy B. Mann (Gold Medalist).

The International City Design Competition

There are too few forums directed towards generating credible visions—that is almost an oxymoron—for the city of the future, especially those that encourage dialogue among the various groups responsible for planning, designing and building cities.

Politicians and public agency planners spend, with justification, most of their time, energy and money “fire fighting”—their tasks and efforts are defined by political situations, public opinion and economic forces. Rarely do they have the time and opportunity to develop long-term visions, plans and design alternatives based on realistic projections, or the luxury of reflecting on what ought to happen, given the opportunity.

As academics, my colleagues and I often ask ourselves if we do any better. As we teach professional skills, values and practices, are we introducing students to the political and economic realities that establish the constraints of the real world? When we define the planning and design problems for their studio work, are we insuring the projects will promulgate our personal values? That we have no answers to these questions is a source of great dissatisfaction to us.

By staging the International City Design Competition, we hoped to accomplish two things. First, we wanted interdisciplinary teams—including politicians, educators, planners, architects, social scientists and private developers—to address the problems and potentials of cities of the twenty-first century. Second, we wanted to move this discussion from the realm of fantasy and utopias and focus on a real place as it exists today and how it might exist in the next century. We thought Milwaukee, a nineteenth-century industrial city that is experiencing economic and social change, could be a prototype because it is familiar to us and is indicative of many places in the industrialized West. The ideas and concepts developed in the competition would be applicable to cities such as Detroit, Cleveland, Stuttgart and Liverpool.

The International City Design Competition was sponsored by the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, School of Architecture and Urban Planning. It was organized by Carl V. Patten, dean of SARUP, Associate Dean Lawrence P. Witzling and Jeffrey E. Ollswang. Places invited Ollswang and the jurors to comment on the lessons ICDC taught about city design.

All photos and graphics courtesy of ICDC, except Milwaukee map.

Aerial view of Milwaukee looking south from downtown, over a waterfront park and a parking/warehouse district.



People said Milwaukee is a conservative community and we would never be able to raise enough money to stage the competition, but we raised nearly half a million dollars, all from local, county and state sources: utilities, insurance companies, television stations, foundations and the Wisconsin Society of Architects. People who have participated in the building of the city and have a vested interest in it are a lot less cynical about the future, and it is a lot easier to make them think they can have a positive role in what is going to happen. It is not hard to convince people that they should be a part of the process.

How do you define the city of the future? Most people—including architects, planners and urban designers—envision places like those contrived for movies such as *Blade Runner*, places at which they can gawk and say “wow.” It was essential, though, that competitors did not spend their time predicting the future. Their effort was to be directed toward the creation of planning and design concepts based on a prepared set of predictive assumptions that were developed and presented as part of the program.

We approached the problem by thinking of what Milwaukee was like 15 years ago, how it has changed and what is likely to happen in another 15 years. We thought, if one of us were a developer or mayor, what would we like to see happen? What is likely to happen?

We generated various assumptions about economics, demographics, government policies and private investment from which the competitors could choose. We also established constraints. For example, it is unlikely that we could bring a Cyclopean developer into Milwaukee and say, “Here’s an eraser. You can start anew.” We figured enough land could be assembled, potentially, for four or five large projects downtown during the next 30 years. So it would be up to the competitors to determine if those would occur, where they should occur and what they would be.

The toughest thing was establishing the design problems, and I mean that in the broadest context. We know in a city like Milwaukee, if you take a map and put a pin where downtown is, then cut a wedge from that point out, you will include part of downtown, a mature residential neighborhood and the fringe or developing edge. So we decided those were the three prototype areas that should be addressed. The downtown site includes the lake front, harbor, part of the traditional commercial downtown and part of a close-in residential neighborhood. The mature neighborhood site includes parts of three neighborhoods, a railroad/industrial corridor, a creek and a parkway. The suburban edge is in the town of Oak Creek, nine miles south of central Milwaukee, and includes both a town center and undeveloped forest and agricultural land.



The assumptions and constraints made the task incredibly difficult for competitors. Although they predetermined the way in which we hoped competitors would think, they were meant to guide competitors towards a realistic set of criteria, not to constrain designs.

Interestingly, where we set the fewest constraints and guidelines, in the fringe or developing edge, competitors had the most problems. When you have enormous areas of farmland between Chicago and Milwaukee with a major highway and you tell them it is going to develop, many people do not know what to do.

Some of them did have good ideas. They recognized that Chicago and Milwaukee are growing together, so they proposed not a satellite city but a “village cross,” with a High Street, that could be noticed from the highway. Others said this is beautiful, rural land and it should remain undeveloped. It takes a lot of courage to say develop right along the highway and leave the rest for farmers. To be credible you need an economist and someone with the conviction that even though there may no longer be room for a quaint Wisconsin family farm, there is viable farmland left.

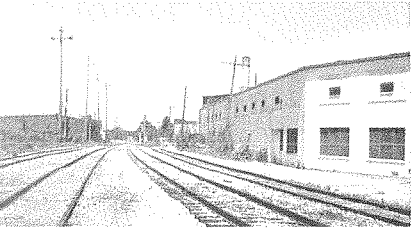
The competitors were best at working with the downtown and mature residential areas, probably because they are used to that. One area had a railroad running through it and a good park system with a little stream. You cannot realistically

remove the railroad. So they thought about how to bridge the right-of-way and make it more attractive, to make the little creek a real amenity and to weave together the railroad, commercial and light industrial uses with the residential. They did that sort of thing quite well.

Sometimes it is said we have no compelling paradigms that tell us how cities should be built. Did this competition turn up some new and astounding fundamental concepts of city design? If we had wanted that, we would have written to Walt Disney, because they are much better at it, or to people who are true visionaries in the best sense, or to a futurist.

Yet this competition reassured me it is possible to think about cities in a visionary way. And I am convinced this is the way to do it. We should have a competition like this every three years and each time pick a different type of city. The next one might be a city out of control, such as Mexico City, Cairo or Djakarta. Or it may be a city that has a thousand-year-old historic district that, because of some developmental pressures, is being destroyed. Not Athens or Rome, but some place like Dubrovnik or York. This can be the start of an ongoing dialogue, and get people talking.

A railroad line through the Lincoln Creek neighborhood, the Older Residential District competition site.



The city is a federation of communities. To work towards this in the Older Residential District, we propose:

- Re-introducing the concept of the urban quarter.
- Re-integrating aspects of daily life into the community.
- Increasing the intensity of commercial areas.
- Reclaiming abandoned facilities for commercial development (such as urban food production) or community centers.
- Creating higher residential densities to justify public transit.
- Increasing the variety of dwelling types.

—Cekic, Cormier, DeGrazia, Hubbel, Letunic, Mann

