



# CENTRAL CITY PLAZA HISTORIC DISTRICT

600 W. Walnut Street, 1747 N. 6th Street, & 1730 N 7th Street

Historic District Designation Report and Preservation Guidelines  
CCF 241559

HPC March 2025

ZND April 2025

# CENTRAL CITY PLAZA HISTORIC DISTRICT

## Property Name

Historic	Central City Plaza	
Common	600 W. Walnut	Most Worshipful Prince Hall Masonic Center
	1730 N. 7 <sup>th</sup>	Salvation Army Emergency Lodge
	1747 N. 6 <sup>th</sup>	George Hilliard Health Center/Yellow Cab

## Location

Address	600 W. Walnut Street, 1747 N. 6 <sup>th</sup> Street, and 1730 N. 7 <sup>th</sup> Street
Legal Description	CERTIFIED SURVEY MAP 1676 IN NW & SW 1/4 SEC 20-7-22 PARCELS 1, 2, and 3

## Nomination Details

Nominator	Chris Rute
Aldersperson	Milele Coggs, 6 <sup>th</sup> District

## Building Data

Year Built	1973
Architect	Alonzo Robinson, Jr. of DeQuardo, Robinson, & Crouch
Style	New Formalist

## Owners

600 W. Walnut	B C MANAGEMENT LLC 2232 N 52ND ST MILWAUKEE , WI 53208-1137	HG WALNUT LLC 600 W WALNUT ST MILWAUKEE , WI 53212
1747 N. 6 <sup>th</sup> and 1730 N. 7 <sup>th</sup>	SALVATION ARMY 11315 W WATERTOWN PLANK ROAD WAUWATOSA, WI 53226	

## Description

### Setting

Central City Plaza sits at the northwest corner of the busy, broad intersection of W. Walnut and N. 6th Streets. Despite its proximity to downtown, the neighborhood has a distinct character of a suburban commercial corridor, reflecting its history as the commercial center of a series of loosely related midcentury renewal developments executed under Modernist architectural and planning ideals. Central City Plaza is a shopping complex of three buildings in the New Formalist style with related surface parking and limited landscaping. It fills the block bounded by N. 6th, W. Walnut, N. 7th, and W. Vine Streets.

### 1747 N. 6<sup>th</sup> Street

It is a one-story, rectangular building with a flat roof and a full basement. The form is the traditional mercantile arcaded block, expressed in the New Formalist style.<sup>1</sup>

### Front/East

The symmetrical primary façade rises from its rough stuccoed foundation into a series of vertically-oriented concrete panels with a continuous score line near their edges. In front of the minimally exposed foundation is a ramp leading to the front doors from the north and south with a simple metal railing.

From south to north, the façade features a large porthole window that projects from the concrete panel, followed by a series of five arches framed with aluminum storefront systems. The third and fourth arches feature entry doors. (The asymmetrical door alignment is an original feature.) Beyond the last arch is another projecting porthole window balancing the other. A shallow score line atop the arches defines a plain frieze capped by a boxed, extended eave that carries the building's flat roof.

### North

The stuccoed foundation, vertical concrete panels, and projecting eave continue around the northeast corner. Shortly around the corner from the 6<sup>th</sup> Street façade is another projecting porthole window.

### Rear/West

The west façade features additional detailing, making it unclear which was the original intended front. It largely mirrors the east façade with the five centered arches and off-center doors. However, in place of the porthole windows is an aluminum-framed full-lite door at each end with a vertically grooved concrete panel above the lintel for each door. The entrances consist of simple

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<sup>1</sup> Richard W. Longstreth, *The Buildings of Main Street: A Guide to American Commercial Architecture*, Building Watchers Series (Washington, DC: Preservation Press, 1987), 118.

concrete slabs, one step up from the parking lot grade, running the length of each end door and separately along the five central arches.

### South

The south is a mirror image of the north.

### 1730 N. 7<sup>th</sup> Street

The 1730 building is located at the northwest corner of Central City Plaza block, at the intersection of N. 7th Street and W. Vine Street. Originally designed as a motel, this U-shaped, two-story building is currently used by the Salvation Army as the Emergency Lodge and Social Service Department. The building features a flat roof and includes a basement level. The building features a courtyard that serves as a paved parking lot, enclosed by the west, north, and east wings, accessed from the south through a driveway. Additionally, there is a surface parking area located on the south and east sides of the building.

A mown grass strip runs along the west and north sides of the building, continuing along the south side of the west wing; although narrower than the strips on the north and west sides, it serves as a buffer separating the surface parking area. A separate mown grass strip runs parallel to the north façade, between the city sidewalk and W. Vine Street, and it includes multiple trees planted along it. An additional two-story concrete block stairwell has been fitted into the northwest corner of the courtyard.

### Front/South

The 1730 building is located at the northwest corner of Central City Plaza block, at the intersection of N. 7th Street and W. Vine Street. Originally designed as a motel, this U-shaped, two-story building is currently used by the Salvation Army as the Emergency Lodge and Social Service Department. The building features a flat roof and includes a basement level. The building features a courtyard that serves as a paved parking lot, enclosed by the west, north, and east wings, accessed from the south through a driveway. Additionally, there is a surface parking area located on the south and east sides of the building.

A mown grass strip runs along the west and north sides of the building, continuing along the south side of the west wing; although narrower than the strips on the north and west sides, it serves as a buffer separating the surface parking area. A separate mown grass strip runs parallel to the north façade, between the city sidewalk and W. Vine Street, and it includes multiple trees planted along it. An additional two-story concrete block stairwell has been fitted into the northwest corner of the courtyard.

The south elevation features the main entrance portico located at the center of the north wing, facing the courtyard flanked by the west and east wings of the building that project southward. The entrance portico features three arched concrete canopies connecting to partial arches at the east and west ends and supported by four piloti. The double swing aluminum framed glass door is at the center of the curtain glass wall under the middle arched canopy creating a central axis

to the symmetrical arrangement of the building. The glass panes of the curtain wall are arranged with a horizontal and evenly spaced vertical grid; however horizontal mullions are not spaced evenly. The solid wall behind the portico is 13 inches taller than the rest of the south façade, creating a parapet that emphasizes the entrance and has the smooth surface of vertically oriented concrete panels.

The south façades of the west and east wings mirror each other. They are of a plain design of flat, vertical, full-height concrete panels. On each end, one panel in from the courtyard side, are featured a stack of two louvered vents vertically surrounded by recessed, fluted spandrel panels. They were likely originally windows and match the configuration and materials of the 600 building. These window/vent sections are surrounded to the left and right by concrete panels containing three centered vertical fluting lines, but otherwise matching the plain ones.

The outward perimeter walls are otherwise uniform with the three-flute vertical concrete panels alternating with room recessed smooth panels. The recessed panels feature one metal horizontal slider window per floor with the vent of a PTAC unit beneath it. The north wall features slight projections near the outside corners for staircases. They each feature plain concrete panels and have one stack of vertical fixed windows between fully fluted spandrels.

The east and west courtyard walls match the design of the perimeter walls, except that there are no PTACs and every other window on the upper floor features a large concrete planter box.

## 600 W. Walnut Street

The building is located at the intersection of W. Walnut Street and N. 6th Street and was originally designed as a shopping center within the Central City Plaza complex. This rectangular building has two stories with split flat roofs at different levels and includes a full basement. The ground floor features a fairly square layout. The building's two-story rectangular massing is reduced to a single story at the rear side, in order to give the grocery store that occupied this space with an architecturally independent identity. A driveway connects N. 7th Street and N. 6th Street, giving access to the west entrance of the building for the grocery store. The city sidewalks along W. Walnut Street and N. 6th Street provide direct pedestrian access from the streets. A neatly mown grass strip extends along the south elevation of the building and continues along both the east and west sides. Another grass strip runs parallel to the east façade, situated between the city sidewalk and N. 6th Street, featuring a few trees planted within it.

## South

The south two-story façade of 600 W. Walnut St. features a late modern architectural design with a predominantly concrete exterior. The entrance is off-center, toward the east. The entrance features a portico consisting of three arched concrete canopies connecting to partial arches at the east and west ends. The arched canopies are supported by four concrete piloti that taper downward. This design gives the structure a bold, geometric aesthetic characteristic of New



Formalism. The main entrance door is placed at the center of the large aluminum-framed glass curtain wall behind the portico. The panes of the curtain wall are rectangular, but mixed in size, extending the elaborate geometric effect. The western most arch of the south façade sits within a rectangular projection that carries the signage stating “Most Worshipful Prince Hall Masonic Center F. and A. M. of Wis. Inc.,” with a standard compass and square masonic insignia at left.

The building is elevated on a plinth that stands three feet above ground level and is accessed by a single flight of steps from the city sidewalk. The stairway is equipped with three metal railings. Originally, the building featured two elaborate rectangular planter boxes on both side of the entrance stairway. The planter box on the east side remains intact, while the western one was replaced in 1984. This change was made to accommodate a raised platform in front of a secondary entrance door, located under the west arch, as well as a ramp to provide wheelchair access. The height of the landing platform at the secondary entrance is higher than the plinth to match the interior floor level of the building. The ramp is 4 feet wide and is constructed from precast concrete slabs. It features metal pipe railings similar to those of the stairway and can be accessed from the city sidewalk of W Walnut Street. The ramp is 55 feet long and rests on three structural supports: one located near the western starting point and two positioned under the mid-landing area where the sloped sections meet.

The rest of the south façade presents an orderly composition through the alternate arrangement of fluted window panels and plain vertical panels of pre-cast concrete, extending across both stories. Each plain panel features vertical grooves in the center, except for the last panels at the western and eastern ends, where the vertical grooves are off-centered. These panels frame the windows, emphasizing verticality and reinforcing the building’s geometric consistency. The narrow single sash fixed windows feature thick rectangular sills and lintels. The vertical bays containing stacked windows allude to classical columns with their fluted texture. The fluted panels are slightly recessed from the plain vertical panel surface and introduce a subtle textural contrast, breaking the flatness of the façade while maintaining rhythmic repetition and continuity. In contrast, the plain vertical panels provide a smooth, uninterrupted surface that balances the textured elements and maintaining the overall uniformity of the design. In total, the south façade features twenty-three windows—twenty evenly spaced across both levels to the west of the arched canopies, and three more continuing on the eastern side of the second floor. This design creates a structured visual effect that enhances architectural formality and monumental presence, a characteristic often associated with New Formalist architecture.

## East

The east elevation of the building faces N. 6th Street and features both two-story and single-story sections. The southern half is the two-story component. The two-story mass features a distinct curved concrete entrance portico formed by a single arch between two partial arches resting on a pair of piloti. On each side of the entrance portico, two concrete planter boxes highlight the entrance and support the piloti. There is an aluminum framed double swing glass door placed at the center of a curtain glass wall behind the canopy and is accessed directly from the sidewalk

without any stairs. The glass curtain wall is divided into multiple rectangular panes in a grid pattern, with thin aluminum mullions enhancing the depth and transparency of the facade. Above the arched entrance, the curtain glass wall enhances the visual identity of the entrance with a vertical expression created by five evenly-placed, pilaster-like slim concrete posts. The curtain glass wall stands four feet behind the concrete wall surface further bringing attention to the entrance as well as contrast to the solid concrete exterior finish.

The rest of the east façade, across both the two-story and single-story sections, maintains the same rhythmic pattern of fluted and plain precast concrete panels as seen on the south façade. The windows follow the same design, ensuring a consistent architectural uniformity throughout the building. In total, the east elevation features twenty-two windows—fourteen on the two-story section and eight on the single-story portion. At the northern end, a single-flight staircase with metal pipe railings provides access to the elevated walkway leading to the supermarket entrance.

## West

The west façade of the Central City Plaza building faces a parking lot and features a combination of two-story and single-story sections, similar to the East façade.

The western entrance alcove reflects the design of the east façade, featuring the same curved concrete portico formed by a central arch flanked by two partial arches. These arches rest on supporting piloti, with planter boxes on either side of the entrance. Beneath the canopy, the curtain glass maintains the same design as on the east elevation, including a double-swing aluminum-framed entrance door that opens directly onto the walkway separating the parking lot from the landscaped grass bed in front of the west façade. Above the canopy, the curtain glass wall mirrors the east elevation, with a grid pattern of glass panes framed by slim vertical concrete posts. This design element allows natural light to filter into the interior while providing a striking contrast to the otherwise solid concrete exterior, reinforcing the building's geometric and structured aesthetic.

The west façade of the building maintains a consistent design language, featuring repetitive vertical pre-cast concrete panels with an alternating pattern of fluted and plain surfaces, punctuated by narrow rectangular windows. This creates a cohesive and rhythmic façade, like the east and south elevations. A distinct feature on this side is an additional mass projected outward from the single-story section, originally designed as a loading area for the grocery store. The west wall of this extension consists of a solid concrete wall without windows, visually dividing the west elevation into three distinct planes. It also includes a covered entry with a flat overhang, accessible from the north via a driveway that is separated by a metal pipe railing. Additionally, the single-story section towards the north side is taller than typical single-story spaces, indicating a specialized use or design consideration.

## North

The north façade of the building faces a parking lot and features a single-story elevation with a wider portico than the other sides. This portico includes a series of four arched canopies, flanked by two partial arches at each end, which are supported by slender piloti, maintaining consistency with the treatments on the other façades. Two aluminum-framed glass doors are situated under the first arched canopy from the west, serving as the entrance to the grocery store that was previously located there. The original glass curtain wall behind the canopies has been replaced with vertical hard panels, leaving only the half-circled windows above the spring line of the arched canopies. The remainder of the façade consists of an alternating arrangement of fluted and plain vertical pre-cast concrete panels, similar to other elevations but without windows, offering an austere solidity to its formal expression. The series of sculptural canopies extend outward, and the solid wall composed of repetitive concrete panels (both fluted and plain) creates a pattern that reinforces the monumental and formal aesthetic characteristic of the New Formalist style, parallel to other façades.

The adjacent driveway is elevated to align with the level of the concrete walkway in front of the entrance door. The walkway runs along the north elevation from east to west. At the eastern end, the walkway connects to a single flight of steps leading down to the street-level walkway that continues around the east façade. Close to the west end, a service entrance door associated with a slightly raised platform provides access to the storage area of the grocery store. In addition, a freight located under the fourth curved canopy (from left to right), and a staircase toward the west before the service entrance door, provide access to the basement level. The staircases, freight elevator, and service entrance all feature the same metal pipe railings, mirroring the railings used on the rest of the façades.



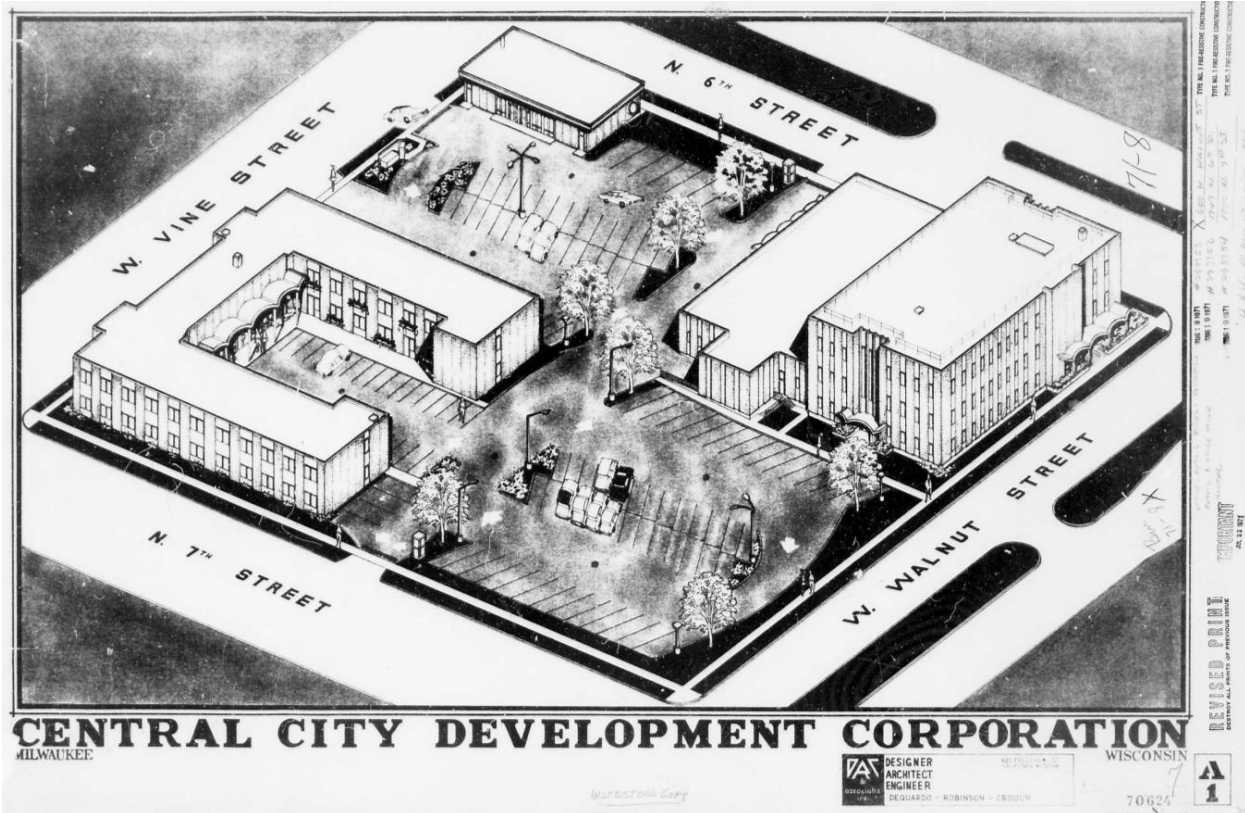


FIGURE 1. ALONZO ROBINSON, CENTRAL CITY PLAZA, ORIGINAL AXON RENDERING C. 1970. MILWAUKEE CITY RECORDS.

## Architecture

New Formalism is an architectural style from within the broader Modernist movement, but it represents a significant evolution of that design philosophy by defying many of its precepts. Modernism viewed ornament as an enemy that kept the Western world tied to the "bombast of the past." Modernists wanted to "change the world" and eliminate architecture's "merely decorative" nature.<sup>2</sup> They certainly did change the world, but this design philosophy had many inherent flaws, particularly its technocratic and dogmatic approach to the design style and the arrogance of its proponents and practitioners.<sup>3</sup> This architectural philosophy was designed for an imperialistic Western worldview of what society should be.<sup>4</sup> Thus, this philosophy underlay much of the urban renewal era, particularly its housing developments. In fact, architecture critic and

<sup>2</sup> Chester Nagel quoted in Leland M. Roth, *American Architecture: A History*, Icon Editions (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2001), 411.

<sup>3</sup> Roth, 416, 475–83.

<sup>4</sup> Roth, 413.

historian Charles Jencks credits culturally blind utopian vision for of public housing with the downfall of Modernist architectural theory and practice.<sup>5</sup>

New Formalism moved beyond this in defiance of Modernism and its most prominent architectural iteration, the International Style. It has clear roots within classical antiquity and its reinterpretation through the stripped classical style of the Depression era. It takes classical forms, proportions, and shapes and strips them to the bare minimum of functional expression, giving grand arcades and temple-like structures with square columns and clean lines while still following the Modernist stricture against unnecessary ornament.

New Formalism, as introduced in the English language architectural press, is largely considered to have begun with Edward Durell Stone's U.S. Embassy in New Delhi, India (1954 design, completed 1959).<sup>6</sup> Architectural historian Marcus Whiffen attributes the starting point to earlier buildings by Philip Johnson, although, in this author's opinion, Johnson's early iterations cited by Whiffen seemed primarily interior. Johnson was also likely inspired by earlier Brazilian precedents that culminated in Oscar Niemeyer's Brasilia.<sup>7</sup>

New Formalism was primarily used for monumental civic and financial buildings. Banks and insurance buildings were common (Minoru Yamasaki's Northwestern National Life in Minneapolis), as were large civic plazas like Johnson's Lincoln Center of New York City and Yamasaki's Pacific Science Center from the Seattle World Fair of 1962.

Anchor department stores at malls are typically the largest examples in the Midwest. The Southridge JC Penney and Brookfield Square Boston Store serve as local exemplars of the type. The anchor store type is rarely of high architectural quality. Going down in size, the smallest examples of this style are branch banks, which, while still modest in size, are generally twice the size of CCP 3.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the CCP 3 building is a rare example of such a small-scale commercial building in this style and the complex a rare coherent complex by one architect.

The most prominent local example of the style was Donald Grieb's Union Train Depot on St. Paul (Figure 2). It was extensively altered in 2007 to become Milwaukee Intermodal Station. Most other prominent local examples have also been heavily altered or demolished. Examples include 1<sup>st</sup> Bank at 211 W. Wisconsin, the former Indian Community School building on the Concordia campus, and the Cathedral Square Building at 533 E Wells (Figure 2). The Milwaukee County War Memorial Performing Arts Center (PAC) is a partially surviving example downtown. Although the

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<sup>5</sup> Charles Jencks, ed., *The New Paradigm in Architecture: The Language of Post-Modernism*, 7. ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 9.

<sup>6</sup> David P. Handlin, *American Architecture*, 2nd ed., World of Art (New York, N.Y: Thames & Hudson, 2004), 247–48.

<sup>7</sup> Marcus Whiffen, *American Architecture since 1780: A Guide to the Styles*, Rev. ed (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1992), 260–66.

<sup>8</sup> Department of Archaeology & Historic Preservation, "New Formalism," DAHP Architectural Style Guide, May 27, 2011, <https://dahp.wa.gov/historic-preservation/historic-buildings/architectural-style-guide/new-formalism>.

PAC has been altered, the south façade's New Formalist character has not been affected by the change in cladding. The Central City Plaza complex is likely the best intact survivor in the style in the city.

Major features of the New Formalism style are as described below by the Ohio History Connection:

A common feature of the style is a stark separation between nature and building, typically through the use of a podium or raised slab foundation, thus creating a temple-like feel. Other characteristics include the use of exotic forms and details, evenly spaced arches, columns, and other classical elements, and smooth wall surfaces often covered in stone. Delicate decorative, albeit functional, details, such as patterned sunscreens or grilles, polished metal, concrete, or stone, represented a departure from the strict prohibition on ornamentation found in the International Style.<sup>9</sup>



**FIGURE 2. DONALD GRIEB, MILWAUKEE UNION STATION, 1965, UNDATED POSTCARD.**



**FIGURE 3. GRASSOLD & JOHNSON, CATHEDRAL SQUARE BUILDING, 1966. 1984 HPC PHOTO. DEMOLISHED.**



**FIGURE 4. BOSTON STORE AT BROOKFIELD SQUARE. UNDATED PHOTO BY IRGENS.**



**FIGURE 5. PHILIP JOHNSON, LINCOLN CENTER, 1969. AJAY SURESH - LINCOLN CENTER OVERVIEW, CC BY 2.0, 2019.**

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<sup>9</sup> Gray & Pape, "Design Trends in Ohio, 1940-1970," in *Ohio Modern: Preserving Our Recent Past* (Columbus: Ohio History Connection, 2010), 109–76, <https://www.ohiohistory.org/preserving-ohio/survey-inventory/ohio-modern-preserving-our-recent-past/>.

## Architect: Alonzo Robinson, Jr. (1923-2000)

Alonzo Robinson, Jr. was born in North Carolina and raised in Delaware, where he briefly attended a state university before serving in World War II. Upon his return, he attended Howard University, where he graduated with an architecture degree in 1951. After briefly working in the Philadelphia Naval Shipyard, the City of Milwaukee hired him in the Bridges and Buildings office in 1952. While working for the City, he became the first Black to attempt the Wisconsin architecture licensing exam, the first to pass, and the first licensed architect in Wisconsin.<sup>10</sup> The number of Black architects in Wisconsin is still low; there were only three at Robinson's retirement in 1998.<sup>11</sup> Current Wisconsin statistics are unavailable, but as of 2019, less than two percent of architects in the U.S. identified as Black.<sup>12</sup>

Robinson went on to have an extensive career in the public and private sectors, working primarily in the Milwaukee area. He is known to have completed 119 designs. His record of design with the city is fuzzy due to the practices in the Bureau of Bridges and Buildings despite a 12-year career. Nonetheless, there are two complete projects that are clearly his: 1) Fire Department Headquarters, 1960, and 2) Cameron Water Works Office, 1966.<sup>13</sup>

While working for the city, Robinson operated a small side practice after obtaining his license in 1956. He operated this for 10 years, primarily serving the Black community. Projects were generally small churches and small offices. In 1966 he resigned from the city and closed his independent practice in order to attach himself to a partnership of two engineers, creating the new firm of DeQuardo, Robinson, Crouch, & Associates in Waukesha. It was under this partnership that he designed Central City Plaza. Other major projects under the DR&C partnership were N. 21<sup>st</sup> Street YWCA and Mahalia Jackson's Chicken System (a short-lived chain franchise building that has long since been occupied by Mr. Perkins).

The partnership dissolved near the time they completed Central City Plaza. Robinson returned to private practice for a few years, operating as Alonzo Robinson & Sons. He was unsuccessful but would retain it as a side practice while working elsewhere. In 1975, he joined the Milwaukee County Department of Public Works, where he stayed for the rest of his career and was exceptionally productive. Significant projects at the County were several courthouse remodels,

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<sup>10</sup> "Alonzo Robinson," *Milwaukee Star*, September 19, 1974; Justin Miller et al., "Milwaukee Houses Of Worship, 1920-1980," Architectural and Historical Intensive Survey Report (Milwaukee, WI: Milwaukee Historic Preservation Commission, 2023), <https://city.milwaukee.gov/ImageLibrary/Groups/cityHPC/Books/MilwaukeeHousesofWorship1920-1980.pdf>; Edward H. Blackwell, "Afro-American Style for Architecture," *Milwaukee Journal*, September 2, 1973.

<sup>11</sup> Tannette Johnson-Elie, "Pioneer in Architecture Still Stands Nearly Alone," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, October 6, 1998.

<sup>12</sup> Paul Wellington, *Black Built : History and Architecture in the Black Community* ([Milwaukee]: s.n., 2019), 1.

<sup>13</sup> Justin Miller, Clayborn Benson, and Eric Vogel, "The Architecture of Alonzo Robinson, Jr. [Unpublished Draft]," Thematic Survey Report (Milwaukee, WI: UWM, December 2024).

airport remodels, the Kosciuszko Park Community Center, interior remodels at the Domes, and several small park buildings.<sup>14</sup>

## Robinson and Central City Plaza

Robinson implied that he made efforts to design the complex as “Afro-American Architecture” but was significantly constrained by the requirements of the Small Business Administration (SBA). The SBA's financing requirements were for relatively traditional forms. Robinson complained that Black architects rarely had the opportunity to bring a Black sensibility to their designs for this and other economic and sociocultural reasons.<sup>15</sup>

## History

In broad terms, urban renewal is heavily tied to automobile culture, which, while officially separate from highway programs, often harmed the same low-income communities in substantially similar ways.<sup>16</sup> It displaced communities, tore impenetrable barriers through them, and increased homelessness as demolition typically outpaced new construction. Racial minority homelessness was a particular issue in Milwaukee prior to fair housing laws, as rental properties available in general and those available to minorities were not adequately considered in relocation programs.<sup>17</sup>

Formal, federally authorized urban renewal began with the Lower Third Ward area, which ran northeast from Milwaukee and Menomonee Streets to Cass and Michigan Street. Its goals were to eliminate all housing in the area due to “incompatible land uses” and create a thriving light industrial district. Only one of these goals was meaningfully achieved. It is largely responsible for all the low-rise industrial buildings and surface parking today east of Milwaukee Street.

The city's urban renewal programs heavily targeted the Walnut Street area and Bronzeville. Many such efforts were focused on N. 6<sup>th</sup> Street and effectively began in the late 1940s with the Hillside Terrace Housing development. Officially, the Hillside development predated urban renewal, with an initial completion date of 1950, and all work was done under the authority of the Housing Authority of the City of Milwaukee (HACM). The Hillside Terrace Addition's second phase was completed in 1956 and included 15.5 acres. The formal Hillside urban renewal area was created in 1957, still under HACM.<sup>18</sup> This connected to the HACM Hillside developments and extended them north from Galena to Walnut Street. The urban renewal zone, however, was dedicated to

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<sup>14</sup> Miller, Benson, and Vogel, 73.

<sup>15</sup> Blackwell, “Afro-American Style for Architecture.”

<sup>16</sup> Roth, *American Architecture*, 461.

<sup>17</sup> *City Within a City: When Pretty Soon Runs Out* (Madison: Wisconsin Public Television, 1968), <https://www.pbs.org/video/wpt-archives-1960s-city-within-city-when-pretty-soon-runs-out/>.

<sup>18</sup> “Hillside Renewal Project Gets U.S. Green Light,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, October 27, 1957.



private rather than public housing developments.<sup>19</sup> The City recognized that large-scale urban renewal that went beyond public housing needed a separate agency. In the fall of 1958, it created the Redevelopment Authority of the City of Milwaukee (RACM), which took over all pending projects that were not strictly related to public housing.

Eventually, the Lapham/Carver/Halyard developments were added to the mix, starting at Vine Street and opening in 1964. With Hillside and Lapham well underway, the City decided to clear the gap between them from Walnut to Vine in 1966, too.<sup>20</sup>

### Roosevelt urban renewal site

Named after the still extant Roosevelt School at 800 W. Walnut Street, the Roosevelt development began in 1964 with a federal grant of \$100,817 to complete a planning study of the area. The initial plan was for housing or retail.<sup>21</sup> In 1966, the project area and scope were settled: the area would be the north side of Walnut Street from 6<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> Streets, with suggested land uses for community service and semi-public institutions (Figure 3). Roger Franks described the project as follows:

The proposed land uses for the redeveloped area fell into three basic categories: playground, park, and local business. These uses were based on a perceived need to expand park and play facilities and provide an adequate area for a centralized commercial development to serve the adjacent renewal and public housing projects. No residential development was proposed for the project area. It was felt that the expansion of playground facilities, improved setting for the school board's facilities in the area, and the tightly knit, one square block, commercial shopping area would remove the last vestiges of blight in the immediate area.<sup>22</sup>

The project would remove an initial population consisting of 12 single people and 88 families across 100 housing units. 93% of the population were minorities, most of whom were also low-income. By the time formal relocation assistance was available, only 29 families were left. By 1969, all the land had been cleared, but there was no approved project for the Central City Plaza site.<sup>23</sup>

The Hillside and Roosevelt developments both had difficult starts. The housing in Hillside had trouble finding buyers, even with subsidized mortgages and prices. The low occupancy stalled

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<sup>19</sup> Milwaukee Department of City Development and Housing Authority of the City of Milwaukee, *Milwaukee's Community Housing*, 5th ed. (Milwaukee: Housing Authority of the City of Milwaukee, 1977), 12–17; Roger L. Franks, "The History of Urban Renewal in Milwaukee" (M. S. Thesis, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 1976), 16–19.

<sup>20</sup> Franks, "The History of Urban Renewal in Milwaukee," 27.

<sup>21</sup> "Progress Reports Given on Projects," *Milwaukee Journal*, June 28, 1964.

<sup>22</sup> Franks, "The History of Urban Renewal in Milwaukee," 28.

<sup>23</sup> Franks, 27; Sanborn Map Company, Inc., *Sanborn: Milwaukee, Wis.* (Chicago: Sanborn Map Company, Inc., 1969), 3: 248; "Progress Reports Given on Projects"; "City to Seek US Loans for Roosevelt Project," *Milwaukee Journal*, January 12, 1965.



further housing development in Hillside (Figure 4) and resulted in a major change in its development plans that carried over to Roosevelt. Hillside's proposed commercial site was used for the Plymouth Manor Nursing Home (replaced by Sojourner Family Peace Center) and the Central City site became the new neighborhood commercial site.<sup>24</sup> Despite these setbacks, Vel Phillips saw the opportunity for synergies between Hillside, Roosevelt, and Carver Park redevelopments and insisted to RACM that they continue with Carver Park rather than delaying it as was briefly considered by RACM.<sup>25</sup>

Progress continued to be slow in Roosevelt. Demolitions were far behind announcements of the projects, resulting in mass vandalism and the functional abandonment of properties by landlords and the city. Final approval of the Roosevelt development in November of 1965 did not speed things up. The vandalism and urban decay harmed property owners and renters, as the appraised value of the properties declined significantly before the ultimate land purchases. Despite significant complaints, demolition was not to begin until August 1967. The *Sentinel* went as far as saying that "peril lives" in the "slums" of the Roosevelt area.<sup>26</sup> Milwaukee Public Schools ultimately took all the land except for what would become the Central City Plaza site. Adjacent highway projects were nonetheless in full-swing. The area was completely cut off from downtown by the new Park East freeway which had extended from the still extant Hillside interchange to the Milwaukee River by 1968 and reached its final stop at Jefferson Street in 1971.<sup>27</sup>

### Developer: Central City Development Corporation

As the inaction on demolition and acquisition continued, RACM began to seek buyers for the CCP site. The first and only bid to the first announcement was from Kenneth Coulter, owner of the *Milwaukee Star*, a Black weekly newspaper. He planned three buildings: an office building, an entertainment building with a restaurant, bowling, billiards, etc., and a "third building [that] would be either a 50-room motel or a neighborhood theater" and appears to have formed the Central City Development Corporation (CCDC) to complete the development around this time. The bid was less than \$10,000 against a minimum price of \$77,000 and was rejected by the city as too low and without sufficient proof of feasibility. Mr. Coulter went public with his proposal in

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<sup>24</sup> Vincent Baldassari, "Developer Tries to Salvage Languishing Project in Core," *Milwaukee Journal*, November 12, 1967.

<sup>25</sup> "Redeveloping Unit Keeps Same Priority," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, July 23, 1965.

<sup>26</sup> "Redevelopers OK Walnut St. Job," *Milwaukee Journal*, November 9, 1965; Robert Dishon, "Our Exploding Slums: Peril Lives There Now," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, April 1, 1966; "Renewal Site Values Slashed by Vandalism," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, June 10, 1966; Tom Gumbrell, "Vandalism Rife at Roosevelt Project," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, June 14, 1966.

<sup>27</sup> Christopher Bessert, "Milwaukee Freeways: Park Freeway," Wisconsin Highways, 2016, <https://www.wisconsinhighways.org/milwaukee/park.html>.

May and was formally rejected in December.<sup>28</sup> RACM put the site out to bid two more times. CCDC continued to be the only bidder, and although a white-operated auto mechanics' training school for people of color was proposed, no formal offer was submitted. Ultimately, after many years of efforts, a higher price of \$20,000 was accepted from CCDC in 1971. RACM board members acknowledged that part of their support for the project was due to the CCDC's commitment to Black self-empowerment and that donations from the immediate neighborhood primarily funded pre-development expenses.<sup>29</sup> Loans were provided by Northwestern Mutual, the SBA, and Sears Roebuck. The project was heavily dependent on the SBA for loans and guaranteeing the other loans.<sup>30</sup>

In the three years of attempting to purchase the property, CCDC built a complex capital stack, with equity from 152 shareholders, nearly all of whom were black and either from the immediate neighborhood or previous residents of it.<sup>31</sup> The idea was to have a community project bringing business, life, and vitality back to Walnut Street for the Black community after so much destruction.<sup>32</sup> It should therefore have been no surprise that the primary commercial center in the development was sited such that it would be given a Walnut Street address. Operating behind the scenes was the Afro-Urban Institute, a short-lived economic development agency focused on Black business in the "inner core" and to put together the business partners, make connections, and be a pass through entity for federal funding.<sup>33</sup>

By this time, Felmers Chaney had taken over as President of CCDC.<sup>34</sup> Chaney was Milwaukee's fourth Black police officer, joining in 1947 and the first to reach the rank of sergeant in 1954. Walnut Street was part of Chaney's foot patrol district in the 1950s, which gave him deep knowledge of the neighborhood and community prior to the destruction of the highways and urban renewal.<sup>35</sup>

Early in Chaney's career, he famously refused to comply with civil rights violations ordered by Harold Breier. Chaney took disability leave from the police in 1969 and began working in

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<sup>28</sup> "Publisher Tells Plans for 3 New Buildings," *Milwaukee Journal*, March 30, 1967; "Core Site Draws Only One Bid," *Milwaukee Journal*, May 21, 1967; "City Rejects Renewal Bid by Publisher," *Milwaukee Journal*, December 1, 1967.

<sup>29</sup> Marge Iglitzen, "Black Project in Core Plans an Unveiling," *Milwaukee Journal*, August 19, 1973; "Auto Shop Offered for Negro Training," *Milwaukee Journal*, May 7, 1968, sec. 25; Steve Tatarsky, "OK Urban Renewal Sale," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, September 25, 1970; Gregory Stanford, "Residents Explain Why They Go Elsewhere to Shop," *Milwaukee Journal*, September 8, 1974, sec. 2.

<sup>30</sup> "Defaults Avoided in City Land Sale," *Milwaukee Journal*, September 25, 1970; "Black Milwaukee Business Group Seeks Funds for \$1.7 Million Business Project," *Jet*, November 19, 1970.

<sup>31</sup> Chris Lecos, "Project of Blacks Becomes a Reality," *Milwaukee Journal*, March 19, 1973.

<sup>32</sup> Personal communication, Clayborn Benson, 2/21/2025.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Tatarsky, "OK Urban Renewal Sale."

<sup>35</sup> Jan Uebelherr, "Civil Rights Leader Chaney Was 'Champion of the Community,'" *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, December 5, 2012, <http://www.jsonline.com/news/obituaries/civil-rights-leader-chaney-dead-at-94-2l7tuc2-182225641.html>.

neighborhood development. He also founded North Milwaukee State Bank. He formally retired from the police in 1972.<sup>36</sup> His achievements after 1972 were also significant but beyond the scope of this designation, see the obituary by Jan Uebelherr for a fuller discussion.

Coulter's original plan was largely followed. It was unclear at what point Robinson became involved in the project, but it was likely early in the project as the only Black architect in the state at the time. The design filed with the city and published in the *Sentinel* on November 26, 1970, showed the final design that survives today. It was a complicated project involving creating separate corporations for nearly every tenant, 11 corporations in total for the 14 tenants.

On April 1, 1973, the project finally opened. CCP soon fell into financial trouble. The grocery store in particular suffered greatly with insufficient capital to keep the shelves stocked and "only the retail liquor store, photo studio, and barbershop [were] financially healthy by the end of 1974 and only 20% of the was occupied."<sup>37</sup> Even with professional accounting coaches at the outset, construction delays, inflated construction costs, and undercapitalization were barriers that could not be overcome. The grocery store was to be an anchor, but ended up hurting much of the other retail in the complex.<sup>38</sup>

Barely a year from opening, the Small Business Administration promised assistance to the businesses which were suffering from general economic issues, but also a dearth of community patronage.<sup>39</sup> Typically the density of the neighborhood would have supported such a neighborhood commercial node, unfortunately the density consisted almost entirely of public housing residents who had limited disposable income. The SBA did provide their promised aid of financial relief and a financial consultant, but it only went so far with underprepared, undercapitalized business owners in a generally poor economy. Despite initial praise from the SBA for creating a hub for Black business, the SBA was forced to take over ownership in 1975. The complex was vacant by 1977, by which time the SBA had sued several original tenants for back rent defaulted loans.<sup>40</sup> The SBA sold the complex to the City in May of 1979.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> "Tribute to Local Civil Rights Activist, Felmers O. Chaney," *Milwaukee Courier*, December 21, 2012, <https://milwaukeeecourieronline.com/index.php/2012/12/21/tribute-to-local-civil-rights-activist-felmers-o-chaney/>.

<sup>37</sup> Gary C. Rummler, "Shopping Center in Inner City Ailing," *Milwaukee Journal*, September 8, 1974, sec. 2.

<sup>38</sup> Rummler; H. L. Matzner, "Milwaukee Is Midwife to Shopping Complex," *Management Accounting*, February 1975, 55–56.

<sup>39</sup> "SBA Aid for Plaza Pledged," *Milwaukee Journal*, September 29, 1974; Stanford, "Residents Explain Why They Go Elsewhere to Shop."

<sup>40</sup> Eileen Hammer, "Plaza Faced Collapse before Aid," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, November 15, 1974; Rummler, "Shopping Center in Inner City Ailing"; Stanford, "Residents Explain Why They Go Elsewhere to Shop"; "Project Delayed by Equity Issue," *Milwaukee Journal*, February 26, 1971; Leslie Johnson Clevert, "Future Uncertain for Once Busy Plaza," *Milwaukee Journal*, March 10, 1977; "US Sues 2 Firms for Funds," *Milwaukee Journal*, January 20, 1977.

<sup>41</sup> "20 Cent per Mile Hike in Taxi Rates," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, May 2, 1979.

## 600 W. Walnut Street

### Miniplaza, 1973 – c. 1978

The original tenants of this building were the following, “Central City Drug Store, Darby’s Food Store,...The Masterpiece Supper Club, Central City Merchandise Mart, E.K. Photo Service, The Satin Wave Barber Shop, Spic and Span cleaners, a laundromat, Apollo Lanes [bowling], Central City Distributors, Inc, a wholesale liquor outlet, and an office for psychiatric counseling.”<sup>42</sup> Very limited information is available on any of them, as all had vacated the building by 1977.<sup>43</sup> The following two early businesses are offered as examples.

### Apollo Lanes Bowling Alley

Apollo Lanes Bowling Alley owned by Maxine C. Howard was one of the earliest businesses to run their business at the basement of Central City Plaza at 600 W Walnut St. Maxine C. Howard was a social worker, an entrepreneur, avid bowler and a sports enthusiast.<sup>44</sup> The business folded in 1977, like the other original tenants.

### New Concept Self Development Center Inc.

New Concept was founded in 1975 by two women, June M. Perry and fellow social worker Geri McFadden. They wanted to bring culturally competent and coordinated social services to Milwaukee’s Black community to keep people from falling through the cracks.<sup>45</sup> The center operated there until 1981.

### Prince Hall Masons

Prince Hall Masons are a Masonic fraternity founded in 1784 by Prince Hall. They are a predominantly Black group, founded because of racism in post-Revolutionary America. The U.S. Grand Lodge consistently rejected Prince Hall’s requests for a charter and chapters throughout the first states rarely accepted Black members. Accordingly, after much frustration, Hall sought and received a charter for African Lodge No. 1 from the Premier Grand Lodge of England. The Prince Hall Grand lodge of Wisconsin was chartered by Grand Master John C. Ellis of the Illinois Grand Lodge during a convention in Milwaukee on June 29, 1925.

After the collapse of the original venture, the Prince Hall Masons were the only group to make a serious offer for the building after it fell into public ownership. The Small Business Administration opposed their bid because of discrimination concerns because they did not have open membership; they permitted only men with religious beliefs to join and then only by vote of the current members.<sup>46</sup> Nonetheless, after the City acquired the building, they leased it to the

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<sup>42</sup> Iglitzen, “Black Project in Core Plans an Unveiling.”

<sup>43</sup> Johnson Clevert, “Future Uncertain for Once Busy Plaza.”

<sup>44</sup> “Maxine C. Howard [Obituary],” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, December 6, 2019, <https://www.jsonline.com/obituaries/mjs016253>.

<sup>45</sup> La Risa R. Lynch, “Milwaukee’s New Concept Development Center Leaves Legacy of Helping,” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, December 14, 2023, <https://archive.ph/xekIJ>.

<sup>46</sup> “US Agency to Refuse Shift of Central City Plaza,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, November 14, 1978.

Masons for several years before formally selling it in 1981. The Masons retained the building until 2019 when they sold it to a LLC controlled by Kalan Haywood. At the time, Kalan Haywood, Sr. was a leader of the chapter. Wisconsin Department of Financial Institutions' records are unclear as to whether the LLC is controlled by by Kalan Haywood Junior or Senior.

### Masonic Tenants and Later Years

Historic preservation staff conducted research in city directories and digitized newspapers to identify major tenants while the building was under Masonic ownership. While tenants were readily identified, no activities by these organizations related to their occupancy of this space were found to tie strongly to the criteria for designation. The identified long-term tenants were as follows:

- National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, 1981-1984
- Milwaukee Community Development Corporation, 1980-1986
- Wisconsin Educational Opportunity Program, 1980-1986
- State of Wisconsin Corrections Courts/ Community Corrections Division, 1997-2015
- City of Milwaukee Building Inspection Department, Safety Engineering Division, 1981 – c. 1993
- United Negro College Fund, 2001- 2016/17
- Unity Grand Chapter, Order of the Eastern Star, an affiliate entity of Freemasonry, with a largely female membership, 2001-2025.

### 1730 N 7<sup>th</sup> Street

#### Masterpiece Motor Lodge

The Masterpiece Lodge was one of the longest lasting original businesses in the complex. David Lawson, a former Marriott employee, was the original operator and desired to serve the city's Black visitors. He believed that having lodgings near the convention and business districts while still being in a predominantly Black neighborhood would attract Black customers.<sup>47</sup> They were never strictly a transient hotel and were known to accept permanent residents.<sup>48</sup>

It may have been a poor choice to locate here, as there was already a black-owned and Robinson-designed motel three blocks to the north that had opened in 1970, the Blue Spruce. Both were trying to attract Black clientele and likely oversaturated the market and the Blue Spruce remained in operation for decades.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Iglitzen, "Black Project in Core Plans an Unveiling."

<sup>48</sup> "Motel Has Fire," *Milwaukee Journal*, March 25, 1974.

<sup>49</sup> Miller, Benson, and Vogel, "The Architecture of Alonzo Robinson, Jr. [Unpublished Draft]," 60.

## Salvation Army Emergency Lodge

The motel received little interest for reuse. The first idea floated for the building was for use as a state prison. It was one local candidate among several other hotels, motels, and closed private schools. Ultimately none of the Milwaukee area prison reuse options were adopted.<sup>50</sup> By the end of 1978, the Salvation Army had expressed major interest in acquiring the building for a short-term shelter. The SBA initially refused to transfer the property to the City because it believed the City would immediately transfer ownership to the Salvation Army, a religious organization, regardless of the generally public purpose.<sup>51</sup> It is unclear how this was resolved, except that there were no other viable interested parties. Milwaukee County was offered the building, but repeatedly refused to take it.

Ultimately the Salvation Army began moving in under a lease from the city in fall 1979. Salvation Army had long wanted a space it controlled rather than needing to find emergency shelter for the homeless on the open market in hotels and boarding houses. Early plans for improving the landscaping and providing a play area for unhoused children appear never to have been adopted. This was likely due to initial financial difficulties from high construction costs in creating a commercial kitchen and dining room within the building. The SA acquired title to the motel in 1983 and has continued its operations on site ever since.<sup>52</sup>

## 1747 N. 6<sup>th</sup> Street

### Pago Liquor store 1973-1977

Little information could be uncovered on this original tenant of the building. After the first year, Pago was one of the few even reasonably successful businesses, per the Journal. Their financial health did not last long and they had failed along with all the other original businesses by 1977. The store furnishings and contents were auctioned that same year.<sup>53</sup>

### George Hilliard Health Center 1980-1990

Following closure of the Pago Liquor Store, the building was remodeled for use as an outpatient center operated by Deaconess Hospital. The new Dr. George Hilliard Community Health Center, named for a Milwaukee-based doctor who advocated for the need for health services in the inner city, was a joint project between Deaconess and the Inner City Development Project (ICDP). The ICDP received a federal grant of \$329,316 in 1979 to begin work on the center and a second clinic at 2411 W. Capitol Dr. In early 1980, contracts for \$90,000 were awarded to four contractors to work on the former liquor store building.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> "State Studies Buildings for Prison Use," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, June 4, 1977.

<sup>51</sup> "US Agency to Refuse Shift of Central City Plaza."

<sup>52</sup> Jerome Bailey, "New Tenant, New Plaza Era," *Milwaukee Journal*, September 20, 1979; "Salvation Army Shelter Saved by Aid Increase," *Milwaukee Journal*, December 9, 1980.

<sup>53</sup> Rummler, "Shopping Center in Inner City Ailing"; David S. Gronik and Company, "Another Gronik Auction [Ad]," *Milwaukee Journal*, May 1, 1977; Johnson Clevert, "Future Uncertain for Once Busy Plaza."

<sup>54</sup> "Work on Health Center to Start," *Milwaukee Journal*, February 21, 1980.



The clinic opened on May 5, 1980, initially staffed by Deaconess physicians, with physicians provided by the National Health Service Corps taking over care in June 1980. The clinic offered a number of services, including “preventative health care, comprehensive medical and dental examinations and treatment, infant and child care, immunizations, nutrition information and counseling, care for older adults and laboratory work.”<sup>55</sup> The clinic accepted Medicaid and Medicare and allowed a sliding fee scale for the remaining balance based on family income and number of dependents. By July of 1980, the clinic had served 231 people, including 150 dental patients. To meet the federal government’s funding criteria, the clinic needed 15,000 visits per year. To help raise awareness of the new clinic, ICDP had a 12-member outreach team that went door to door identifying health problems at households visited and referring the family to the clinic.

The clinic continued serving residents through the 1980s and received a \$175,000 to help reduce pregnancy among teenage Blacks in 1985.<sup>56</sup> By the mid-1980s, clinic operations were overseen by Milwaukee Comprehensive Community Health, Inc., a successor to the Inner City Development Project. Milwaukee Comprehensive Community Health, Inc. came under audit of the Inspector General of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in 1986. Results of the audit were released in 1988 and found conflicts of interest with the director of Milwaukee Comprehensive Community Health, Lee E. Holloway, and six members of the agency’s 17-person board.<sup>57</sup> The audit uncovered financial ties between Holloway and the board members and a printing firm owned and operated by Holloway and also uncovered questionable travel expenses and two unauthorized loans. By the late-1980s, Milwaukee Comprehensive Community Health was unable to support all four health clinics and just the Isaac Coggs Health Connection Center, 2770 N. 5<sup>th</sup> St., was chosen to evolve into a Federally Qualified Health Center (FZHC). In 1989, the Milwaukee Comprehensive Community Health dissolved, and Milwaukee Health Services, Inc.



—Journal Photo  
*Children Walked Past  
the closed door of  
Pago's Liquor Store.*

**FIGURE 6. MILWAUKEE  
JOURNAL. PAGO'S LIQUOR  
STORE, AFTER CLOSING IN 1977.  
IN JOHNSON CLEVERT, "FUTURE  
UNCERTAIN FOR ONCE BUSY  
PLAZA."**

<sup>55</sup> "Inner-City Health Center Slated to Open Monday," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, May 3, 1980.

<sup>56</sup> "State Funds Program on Teen Pregnancy," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, March 27, 1985.

<sup>57</sup> Neil D. Rosenberg, "Audit Faults Workings of Holloway Agency," *Milwaukee Journal*, May 20, 1988.

was established as the new parent company of the existing Coggs Health Center. Because the Coggs Health Connection Center served the same north side area as the Hilliard Community Health Center, the Hilliard center was closed in 1989.

#### Dr. George Hilliard (1916-1969)

Dr. George Hilliard had no direct connection to the clinic. Hilliard was born in Mississippi in 1916 and his family relocated with him to Beloit, WI by 1920. He received a scholarship to attend Beloit College, from which he was graduated in 1936. He then attended Meharry Medical College in Nashville, an historically black college. He returned to Wisconsin in 1951 and worked in Milwaukee as a surgeon, primarily practicing from Mercy Hospital at 2nd and North. The clinic was named in his honor, as he had been one of the first Black surgeons in the community.<sup>58</sup>

#### 1990-Present

The building has been largely vacant, although well-maintained, since the closure of the Hilliard Clinic in 1990. City directories showed no tenants from 1990 to 2012, although it was occupied by a get-out-the-vote operation during the 1998 election season.<sup>59</sup> From 2012 until 2023 or 2024, Yellow Cab was based out of the building.<sup>60</sup>

## Housing Impact

There is no permanent housing existing or proposed within the district. The present short-term housing will not be impacted. Nothing in this designation creates maintenance obligations in excess of those already found in Volume 2 of the Milwaukee Code of Ordinances. There are no uncommon or expensive materials used in the building's envelope that require specialized maintenance practices. Designation will have no effect on the city's market for low and middle income housing.

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<sup>58</sup> "Dr. George Hilliard," African American Historical Society of Beloit, accessed January 16, 2025, <https://www.aahsb.com/featuredstories/dr-george-hilliard>.

<sup>59</sup> Georgia Pabst, "Getting out the Vote: Organizations, Businesses, Schoolchildren Work for a Big Turnout," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, October 26, 1998.

<sup>60</sup> Permits, city directories, and staff site visits.

## Recommendation

Staff recommends that Central City Plaza be given permanent historic designation because it fulfills the criteria in MCO 320-21-3-f: 1, 3, 5, 6, 8, and 9.

### 1. Its exemplification and development of the cultural, economic, social or historic heritage of the city, state of Wisconsin or the United States

Central City Plaza was the first and remains the only known Black-conceived, designed, owned, and operated shopping center in Wisconsin. The complex housed fourteen Black-owned businesses and employed over 100 people—a significant achievement given that Black-owned businesses represented less than 1% of Wisconsin businesses at the time.

Despite its financial challenges, Central City Plaza remains historically significant as Wisconsin's first Black-owned and operated shopping center. It represents an important chapter in Milwaukee's African-American commerce and economic development history, particularly illustrating how the Black business community responded to urban renewal's effects and participated in federal minority business development programs.

### 3. Its identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the culture and development of the city.

Central City Plaza was Felmers O. Chaney's first major real estate project. Chaney was a Black pioneer in the Milwaukee Police Department, becoming the first Black sergeant. He went on to work in real estate, found the black-owned North Milwaukee State Bank, and became president of the Milwaukee NAACP.

### 5. Its embodiment of distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type or specimen.

New Formalism was a popular architectural style in the 1960s and early 1970s and a great number of local examples have been demolished or altered beyond recognition. This complex of three buildings are all in this same style by the same architect. No other complex of multiple New Formalist buildings is known to exist in the city. Together they are a fine and unusual example of the style for non-financial commercial buildings.

### 6. Its identification as the work of an artist, architect, craftsman or master builder whose individual works have influenced the development of the city.

Alonzo Robinson was the first Black architect in Wisconsin. He had an exceptional public and private career, designing buildings throughout the Milwaukee area. His career with the city and county has had an impact; he is responsible for countless city and county buildings, many of which we will never fully know because of the lack of signed drawings. He formed the first Black-

owned architecture firm in the state, Alonzo Robinson and Sons, under which he designed many projects for primarily black clientele who sought him out for his talents.

## 8. Its relationship to other distinctive areas which are eligible for preservation according to a plan based on a historic, cultural or architectural motif.

Central City Plaza is a grouping of three buildings and their associated landscaping and parking. There have been no significant alterations to any part of the complex, including the pavement since it opened in 1973. They are a coherent architectural assemblage of works of Alonzo Robinson all completed in a singular architectural style. The complex as a whole was determined eligible for the National Register by the Wisconsin Historical Society in the upcoming report on the works of Alonzo Robinson.<sup>61</sup>

## 9. Its unique location as a singular physical characteristic which represents an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood, community or the city.

The Central City Plaza complex is a noted landmark of the Hillside neighborhood. The buildings feature an unusual architectural style that has largely been erased from Milwaukee and represent a unique interpretation of it. While many other shopping centers have used this style, it has rarely been applied to all buildings in a center. New Formalism's most common use was for anchor department stores at indoor shopping malls. The Central City Plaza buildings also represent urban revival as an early attempt to revive the Walnut Street Black business corridor by creating a hub for black-owned businesses.

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<sup>61</sup> Miller, Benson, and Vogel, "The Architecture of Alonzo Robinson, Jr. [Unpublished Draft]."

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## Preservation Guidelines for Central City Plaza

The following preservation guidelines represent the principal concerns of the Historic Preservation Commission regarding this historic designation. However, the Commission reserves the right to make final decisions based upon specific submissions. Building maintenance and restoration must follow accepted preservation practices as outlined below. The intent of the guidelines is to preserve the buildings as closely as possible to their original form and details. Nothing in these guidelines shall be construed to prevent ordinary maintenance or restoration and/or replacement of documented original elements.

Any exterior alteration, exclusive of painting of non-masonry surfaces, will require a Certificate of Appropriateness. Any existing exterior features can remain for their lifespan. The historic designation does not mean that owners are required to restore their buildings to original condition, but that changes are subject to review so that they are compatible with the historic character of the building.

These guidelines expand upon those in MCO 320-21-11 & 12 of the historic preservation ordinance. These guidelines serve as a guide for making changes that will be sensitive to the architectural integrity of the structure and appropriate to the overall character of the building.

### I. Roof

- a. Retain the original roof shape. Skylights and solar collector panels may be added to roof surfaces if they do not visually intrude upon those elevations visible from the public right-of-way.
- b. Flat roofs with deep eaves are a defining feature of the New Formalist style. Avoid changing the roof shape in ways that would alter the building height, roofline, pitch, or extended eaves.
- c. Subtle, carefully positioned elevator penthouses are feasible on the 1730 and 600 buildings.

### II. Exterior Finishes

- a. Painting of unpainted masonry surfaces, including concrete, is not permitted
- b. If surfaces were painted prior to the designation, they may be repainted. Use only paints that are formulated by the manufacturer for use on exterior concrete. This will exclude most latex paints that typically do not bond adequately to concrete.
- c. Clean masonry only when necessary to halt deterioration and with the gentlest method possible. Sandblasting of historic surfaces is prohibited. This method of cleaning erodes the surface of the material and accelerates deterioration. Avoid the indiscriminate use of chemical products that could have an adverse reaction with the masonry materials.
- d. Repair or replace deteriorated material with new material that duplicates the old as closely as possible. Avoid using new material that is inappropriate or was unavailable when the building was constructed.

### III. Stucco.

- a. Repair stucco with a period-appropriate stucco mixture, duplicating the original as closely as possible in appearance and texture. Refer to “NPS Preservation Brief #22: The Preservation and Repair of Historic Stucco.”

#### IV. Windows and Doors

- a. Retain existing window and door openings. The shape of the original openings is a vital part of the character of the New Formalist style and the buildings in the district.
- b. Retain the original configurations of panes, sash, lintels, keystones, sills, architraves, pediments, hoods, doors, and hardware. Avoid making additional openings or changing the size of existing door openings. Avoid discarding original doors and door hardware when they can be repaired or reused.
- c. Respect the stylistic period or periods a building represents. If replacement of window sash or doors is necessary, the replacement should complement the appearance and design of the original window sash or door.
- d. Avoid the filling in or covering of openings with materials like glass block. Avoid using glazing configurations not appropriate to the style and scale of the buildings.

#### V. Porches, Trim and Ornamentation

- a. Retain porches and steps visible from the public right-of-way that are historically and architecturally appropriate to the building. Do not enclose open porches. Do not remove original architectural features, such as handrails or balusters.
- b. Retain trim and decorative ornamentation, such as the projecting trim around the porthole windows.
- c. Repair or replace, where necessary, deteriorated material with new material that duplicates the old as closely as possible. Avoid using replacement materials that do not accurately reproduce the appearance of the original material.

#### VI. Guidelines for Streetscapes and Landscapes

- a. The surface parking is a character-defining feature of this era of commercial development. While it should not be over-emphasized, it must remain visible from the public right of way. Infill of the lot is discouraged as it will interfere with the careful original layout of the site. Small structures such as freestanding ATMs, without roofs, limited garden beds, and bioswales can be approved.
- b. Fencing
  - i. Fencing at the perimeter of the block should be minimized and kept no taller than 4 feet, if it is necessary. Fencing must be at least 50% open in design.
  - ii. Fencing between buildings and around buildings is discouraged. It would create a fortress-like atmosphere inappropriate to the open character of a midcentury shopping center. Limited enclosures for refuse, child play areas, etc., may be approved on a case by case basis.

#### VII. Signs/Exterior Lighting

- a. Plastic internally illuminated box signs with a completely acrylic face (and other internally illuminated Type B signs) are not permitted as wall signs.

- b. Unlike other buildings so far designated, this property has a history of projecting Type B sign that dates back to its initial occupancy. A projecting 16 sf box sign was present on the southeast corner of the 1747 building from occupancy until 2024. A maximum of one such internally illuminated Type B projecting sign may be permitted on each building, not to exceed 16 sf.
- c. Type A monument signs are the recommended approach for additional signage. Combined type monument signs are permitted.
- d. Approval of any particular sign will be based on the sign's compatibility with the architectural character of the historic building.

#### VIII. Guidelines for New Construction and Additions

- a. No new construction has been completed in the Central City Plaza complex since 1973 except for accessibility ramps at the 600 and 1747 buildings and a staircase tucked into an inside corner of the motel. Therefore, it is important that additional new construction be designed to harmonize with the district's character.
- b. The buildings not generally conducive to additions. Extreme care is required with the design to avoid undermining the architectural integrity of these mid-sized commercial buildings.
- c. Siting. New construction must reflect the traditional siting of buildings in the Central City Plaza site. This includes setback, spacing between buildings, the orientation of openings to the street and neighboring structures, and the relationship between the main building and accessory buildings.
- d. Scale. Overall building height and bulk; the expression of major building divisions including foundation, body and roof; and individual building components such as porches, overhangs and fenestration must be compatible with the surrounding structures.
- e. Form. The massing of new construction must be compatible with the surrounding buildings. The profiles of roofs and building elements that project and recede from the main block must express the same continuity established by the historic structures.
- f. Materials. The building materials visible to the public should be consistent with the colors, textures, proportions, and combinations of cladding materials traditionally used in the Central City Plaza complex. The physical composition of the materials may be different from that of the historic materials, but the same appearance should be maintained.

#### IX. Guidelines for Demolition

- a. Although demolition is not encouraged and is generally not permissible, there may be instances when it may be acceptable if approved by the Historic Preservation Commission. The Commission shall consider the following guidelines, along with those found in the ordinance, when reviewing demolition requests.

- b. Condition. Demolition requests may be granted when it can be clearly demonstrated that the condition of a building or a portion thereof is such that it constitutes an immediate threat to health and safety.
- c. Importance. All three original buildings are of equal importance in the history of the site. The relative modesty or grandeur of a building is not the only factor that influences its significance. Indeed, the architecture of the less grand buildings in the complex are significant examples of how and where people of different socioeconomic classes conducted commerce.
- d. Potential for Restoration. Consideration will be given to whether or not the building is beyond economically feasible repair. This will be weighed against the reason for the present disrepair, in order to avoid demolition by neglect.
- e. Additions. Consideration will be given to whether or not the proposed demolition is a later addition that is not in keeping with the original design of the structure or does not contribute to its character or historical pattern of development.

## Historic Images and Drawings

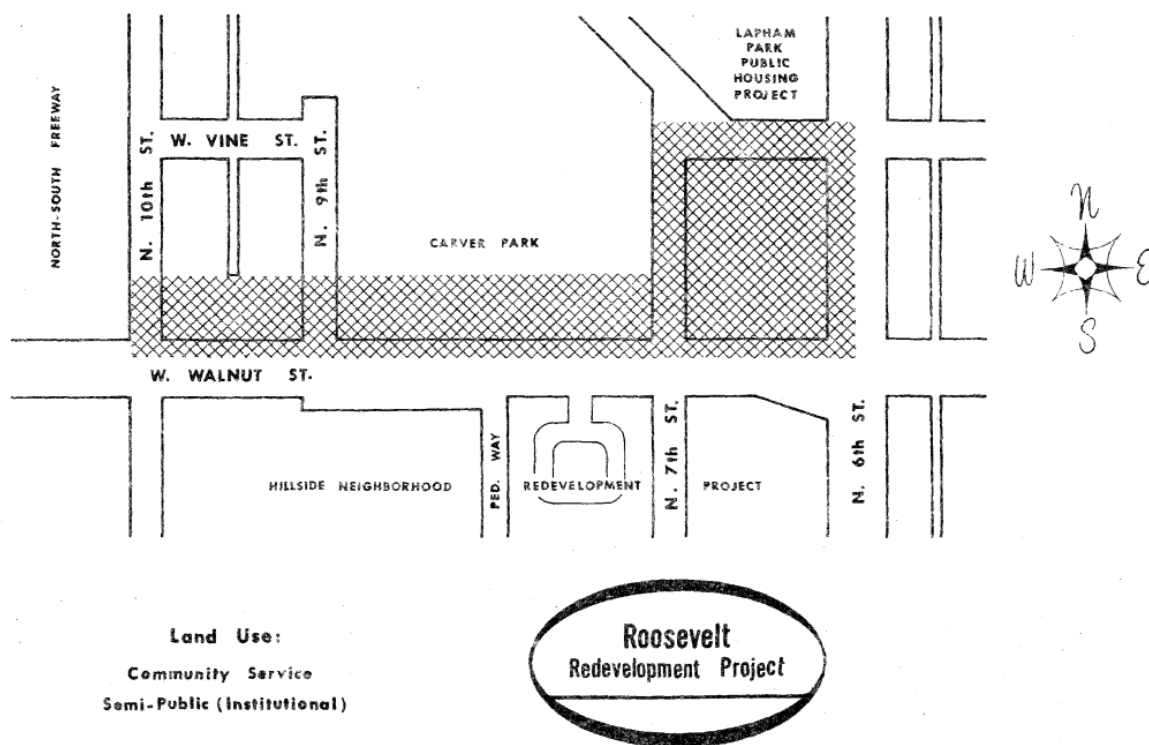


FIGURE 7. MAP OF ROOSEVELT REDEVELOPMENT PROJECT

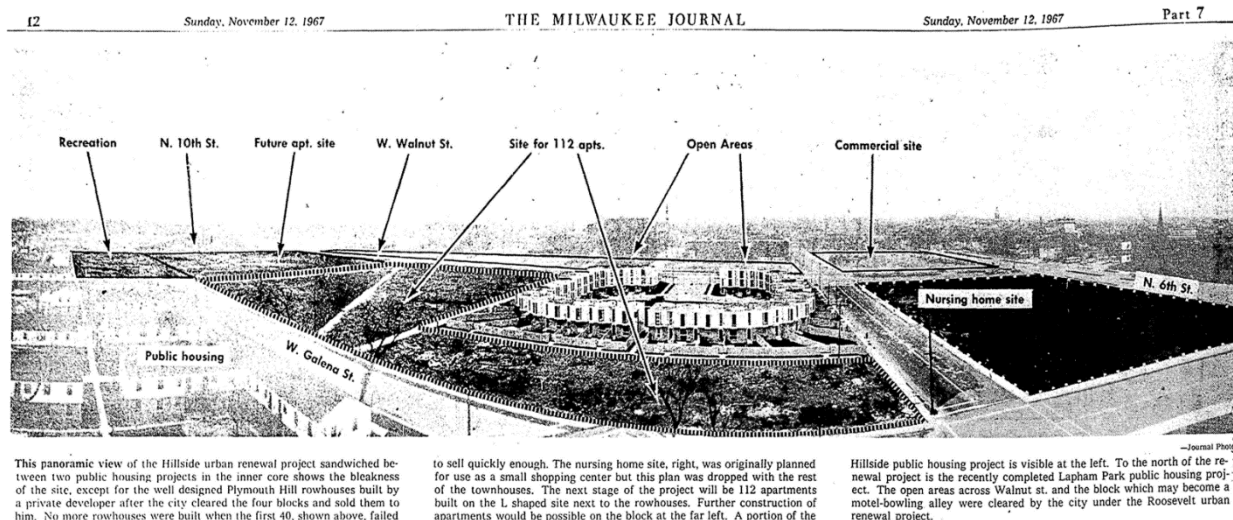
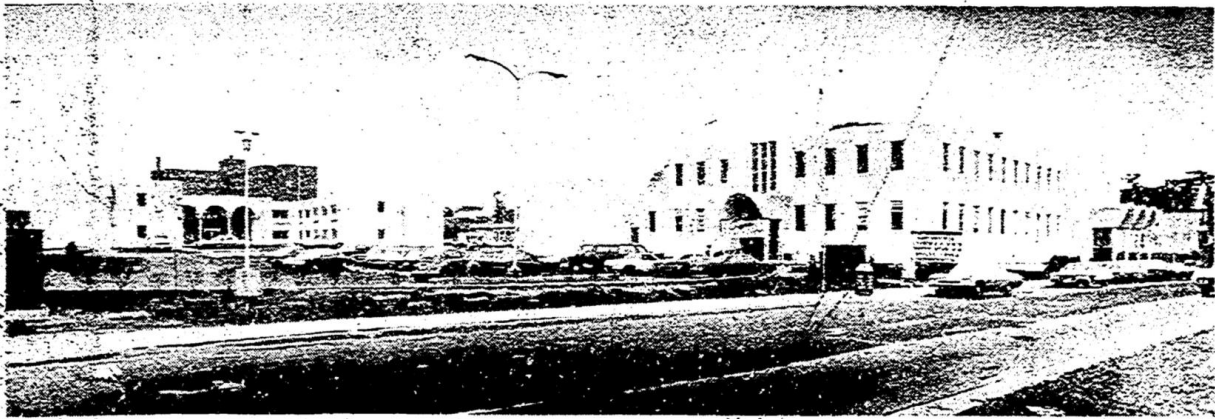


FIGURE 8. VIEW OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD IN 1967. HILLSIDE TERRACE IS IN GRAY AT LEFT; HILLSIDE URBAN RENEWAL IS UNDERWAY IN THE CENTER OF THE FRAME. THE ROOSEVELT AREA IS AT THE TOP OF THE IMAGE.





—Journal Photo by Ronald Overdahl

A new black business complex sits between N. 6th and N. 7th Sts., on N. Walnut, an area once lined with taverns

FIGURE 9. OVERDAHL, RONALD. MILWAUKEE JOURNAL PHOTO IN AN ARTICLE REPORTING ON THE OPENING OF THE COMPLEX. IN IGLITZEN, "BLACK PROJECT IN CORE PLANS AN UNVEILING."

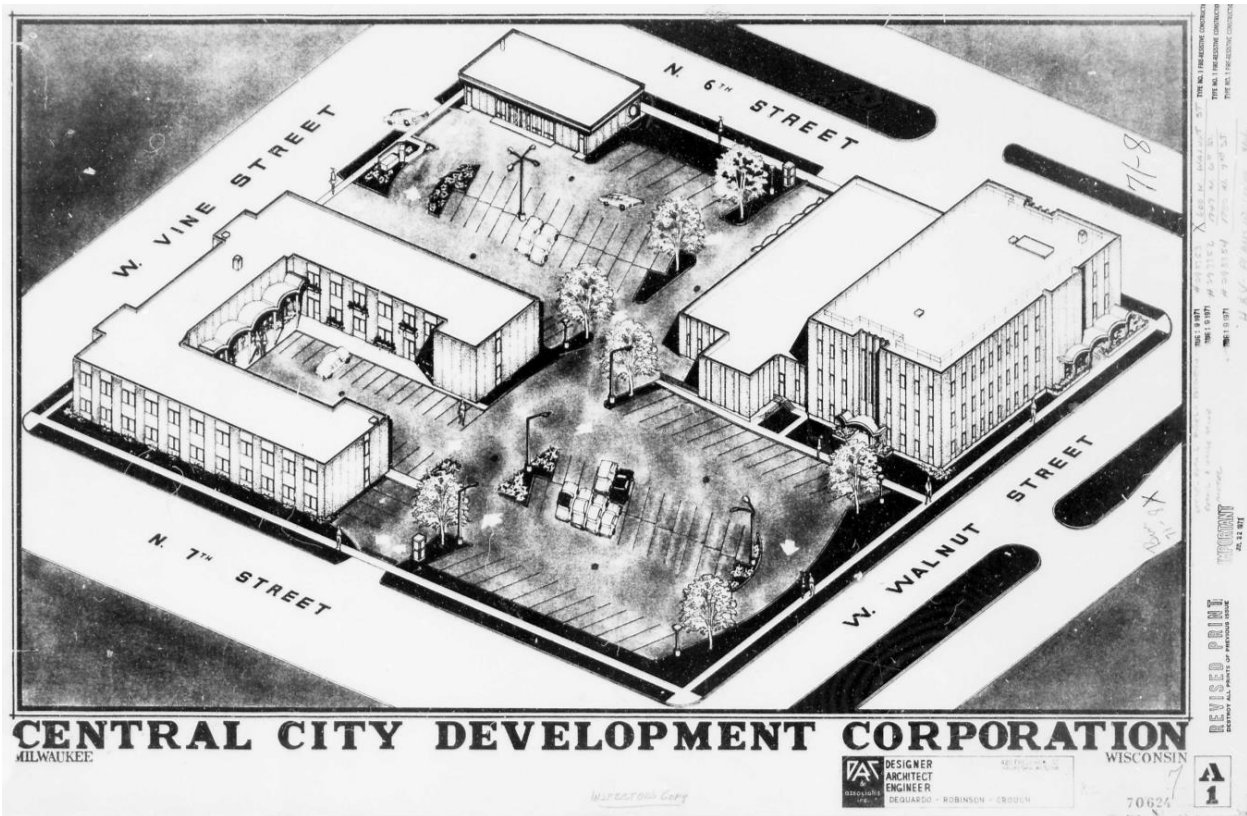
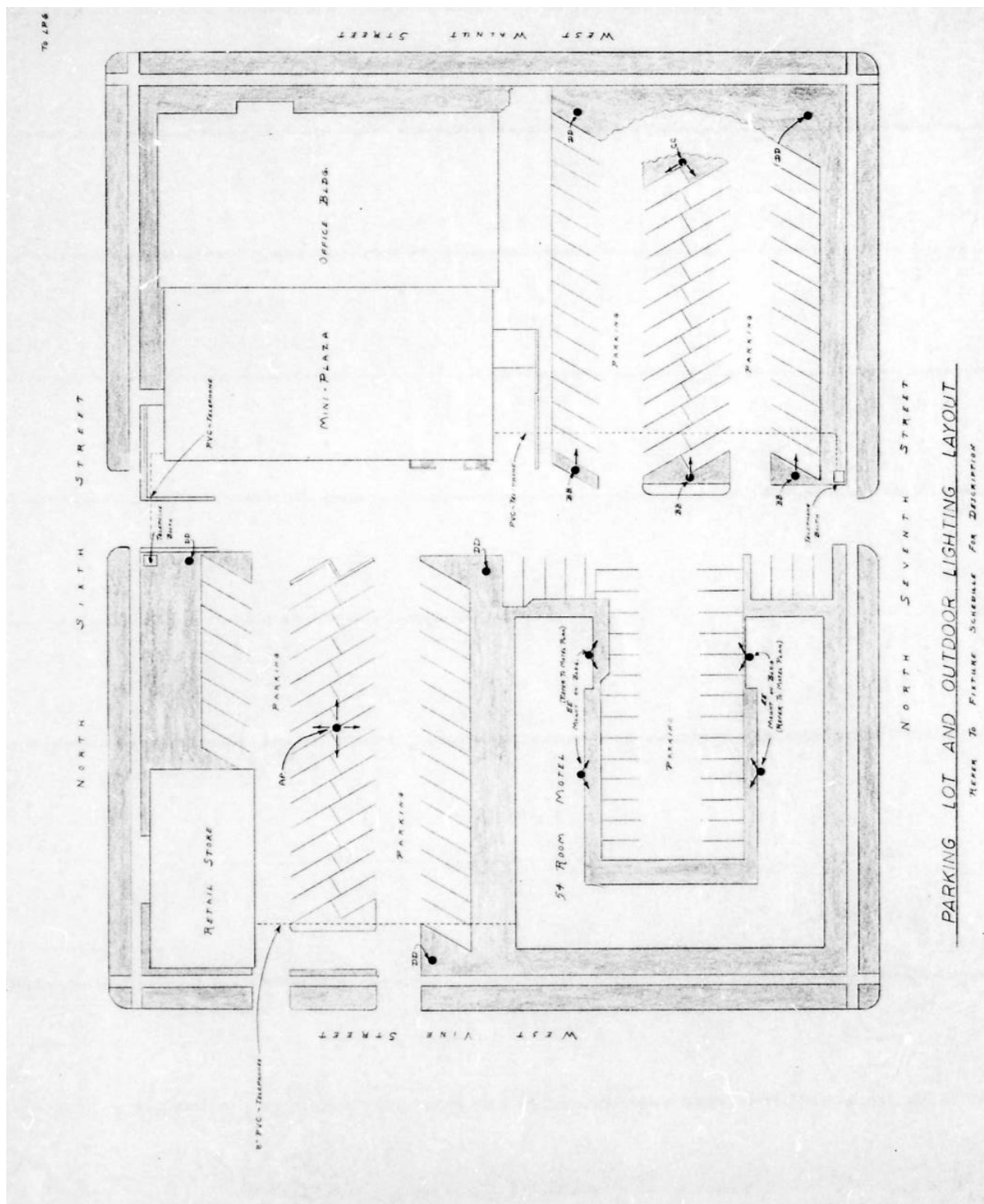
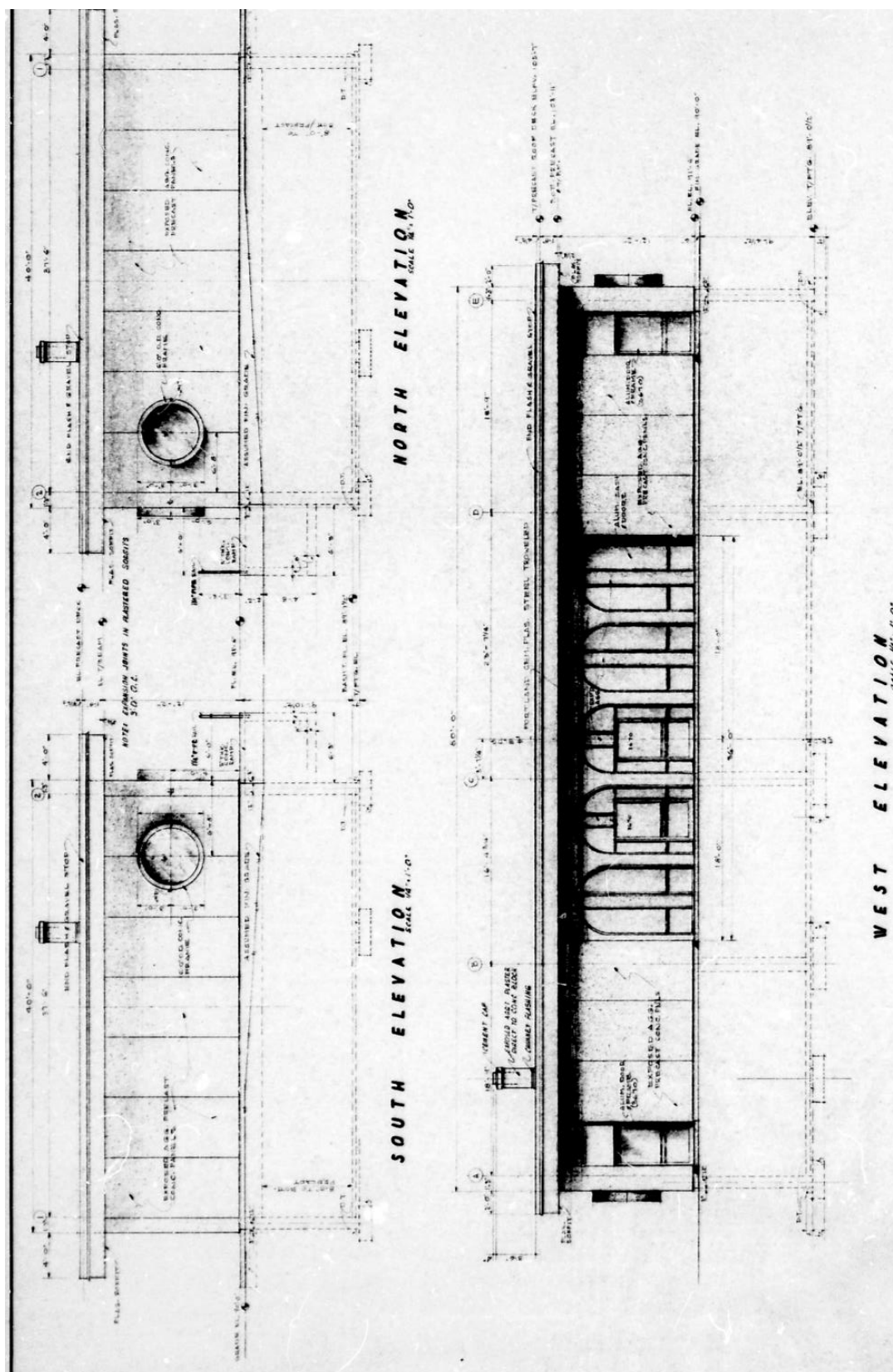


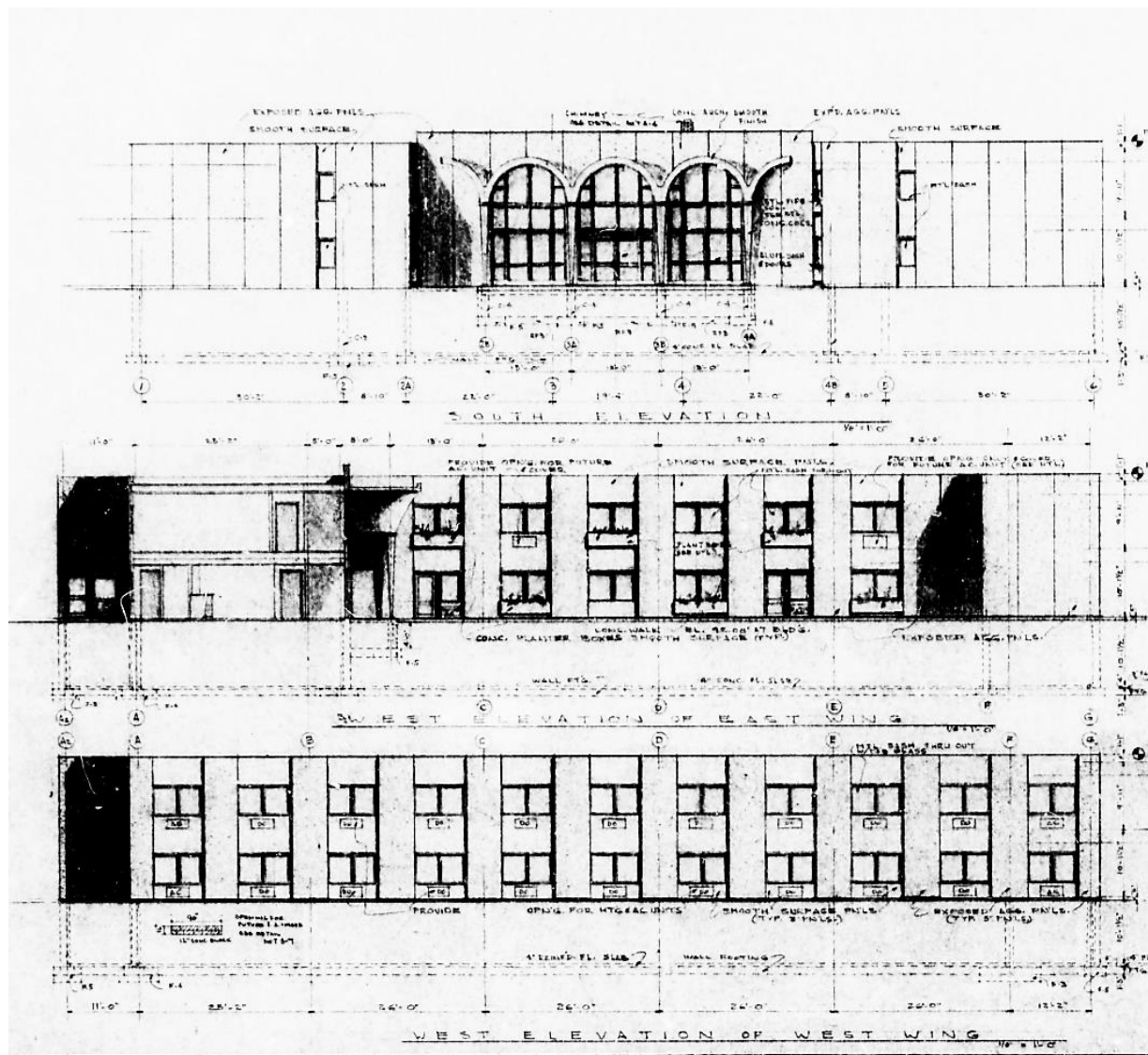
FIGURE 10. DEQUARDO, ROBINSON, AND CROUCH. ORIGINAL DESIGN SKETCH FROM MILWAUKEE CITY RECORDS CENTER. C. 1970







### FIGURE 12. ORIGINAL DRAWINGS OF 1747 BUILDING



### FIGURE 13. MOTEL BUILDING ELEVATIONS



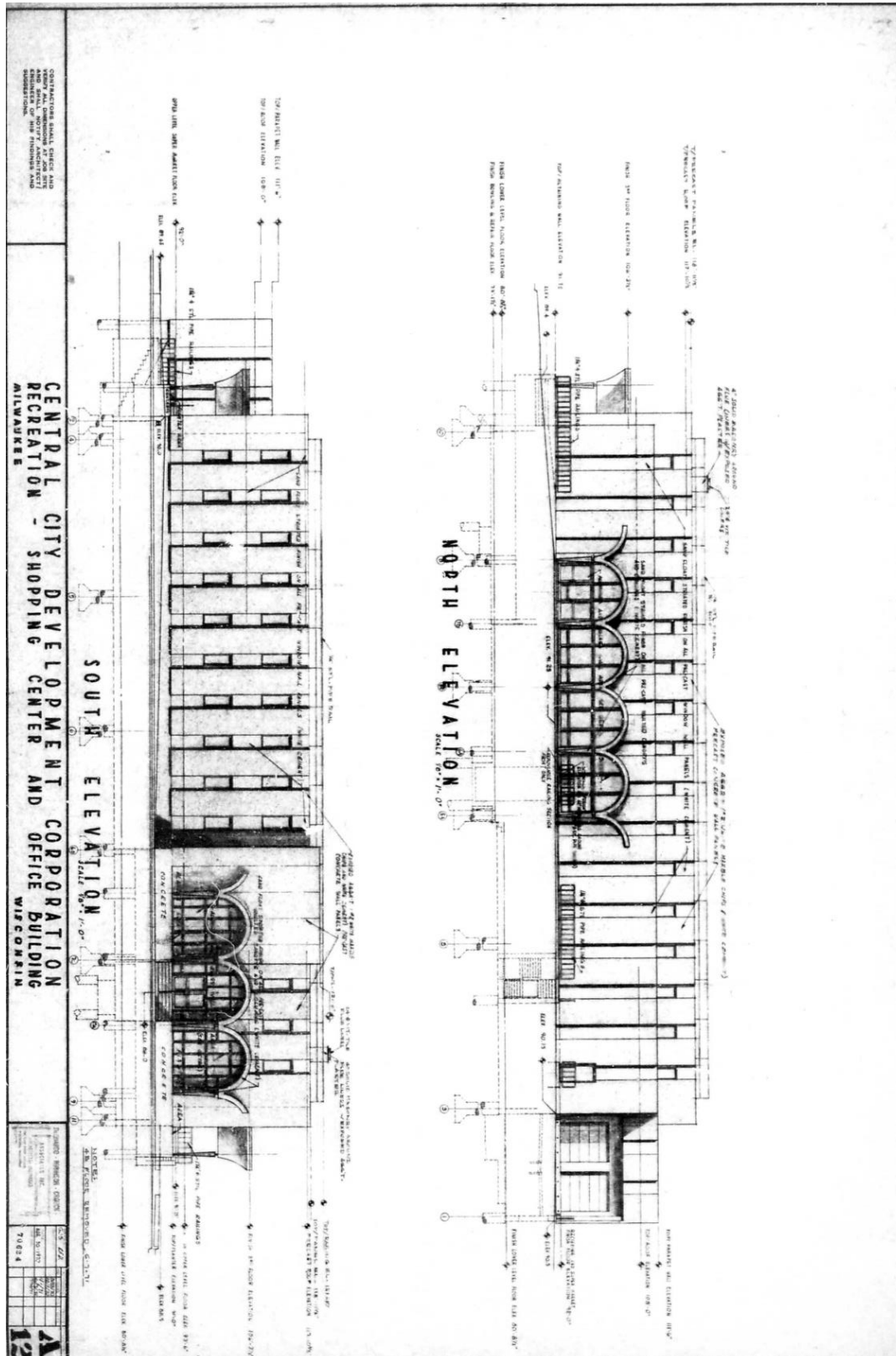


FIGURE 14. ELEVATIONS OF MAIN BUILDING