



# CENTRAL CITY PLAZA 3

## 1747 N. 6TH STREET

DR. GEORGE HILLIARD HEALTH CENTER

PERMANENT HISTORIC DESIGNATION STUDY REPORT

CCF 241405

FEBRUARY 3, 2025

# CENTRAL CITY PLAZA BUILDING 3

## TEMPORARY HISTORIC DESIGNATION REPORT AND PRESERVATION GUIDELINES

JANUARY 2025

### PROPERTY NAME

Historic Central City Plaza Building 3 / George Hilliard Health Center  
Common Pago Liquor; Yellow Cab

### LOCATION

Address 1747 N. 6<sup>th</sup> Street  
Legal Description CERTIFIED SURVEY MAP 1676 IN NW & SW 1/4 SEC 20-7-22 PARCEL 3

### NOMINATION DETAILS

Owner Salvation Army  
11315 W Watertown Plank Road  
Wauwatosa, WI 53226  
Nominator Krystal Meisel & 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

## DESCRIPTION

Central City Plaza 3 is presently addressed as 1747 N. 6th Street and was originally part of the three-building complex of Central City Plaza, which had a main address of 600 W. Walnut Street. The complex and its related surface parking cover the block bounded by 6th, Walnut, 7th, and Vine. 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 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.

## 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.

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<sup>1</sup> Longstreth, *The Buildings of Main Street*, 118.

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.

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 where Neo-Classical design would retain Modernism's much-derided structurally 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>5</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 precedent culminating in Oscar Niemeyer's Brasilia.<sup>6</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. Typically, the smallest examples of this style are branch banks, which, while still modest in size, are generally twice the size of the subject building.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the CCP 3 building is a rare example of such a small-scale commercial building in this style.

The most prominent local example of the style was Donald Grieb's Union Train Depot on St. Paul (Figure 1). 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

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<sup>2</sup> Chester Nagel quoted in Roth, *American Architecture*, 411.

<sup>3</sup> Roth, 416, 475–83.

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

<sup>5</sup> Handlin, *American Architecture*, 247–48.

<sup>6</sup> Whiffen, *American Architecture since 1780*, 260–66.

<sup>7</sup> Department of Archaeology & Historic Preservation, "New Formalism."

County War Memorial Performing Arts Center (PAC) is a partially surviving example downtown. Although the 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.



**FIGURE 1. DONALD GRIEB, MILWAUKEE UNION STATION, 1965, UNDATED POSTCARD.**



**FIGURE 2. GRASSOLD & JOHNSON, CATHEDRAL SQUARE BUILDING, 1966. 1984. HPC PHOTO**



**FIGURE 3. DONALD GRIEB AND LEFEBVRE & WIGGINS, ASSOCIATED GENERAL CONTRACTORS, 1968. GOOGLE MAPS, 2019.**



**FIGURE 4. PHILIP JOHNSON, LINCOLN CENTER, 1969. AJAY SURESH - LINCOLN CENTER OVERVIEW, CC BY 2.0, 2019.**

Finally, architect 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 sociocultural reasons.<sup>8</sup>

## 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

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<sup>8</sup> Blackwell, “Afro-American Style for Architecture.”

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>9</sup> The number of Black architects in Wisconsin is still low; there were only three at Robinson's retirement in 1998.<sup>10</sup> Current Wisconsin statistics are unavailable, but as of 2019, less than two percent of architects nationally identify as Black.<sup>11</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>12</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, airport remodels, the Kosciuszko Park Community Center, interior remodels at the Domes, and several small park buildings.<sup>13</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>14</sup> It displaced communities, tore impenetrable barriers through

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<sup>9</sup> "Alonzo Robinson"; Miller et al., "Milwaukee Houses Of Worship, 1920-1980"; Blackwell, "Afro-American Style for Architecture."

<sup>10</sup> Johnson-Elie, "Pioneer in Architecture Still Stands Nearly Alone."

<sup>11</sup> Wellington, *Black Built*, 1.

<sup>12</sup> Miller, Benson, and Vogel, "The Architecture of Alonzo Robinson, Jr. [Unpublished Draft]."

<sup>13</sup> Miller, Benson, and Vogel, 73.

<sup>14</sup> Roth, *American Architecture*, 461.

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>15</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>16</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 private rather than public housing developments.<sup>17</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>18</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>19</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:

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<sup>15</sup> *City Within a City: When Pretty Soon Runs Out.*

<sup>16</sup> “Hillside Renewal Project Gets U.S. Green Light.”

<sup>17</sup> Milwaukee Department of City Development and Housing Authority of the City of Milwaukee, *Milwaukee's Community Housing*, 12–17; Franks, “The History of Urban Renewal in Milwaukee,” 16–19.

<sup>18</sup> Franks, “The History of Urban Renewal in Milwaukee,” 27.

<sup>19</sup> “Progress Reports Given on Projects.”

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>20</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>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Franks, "The History of Urban Renewal in Milwaukee," 28.

<sup>21</sup> Franks, 27; Sanborn Map Company, Inc., *Sanborn: Milwaukee, Wis.*, 3: 248; "Progress Reports Given on Projects"; "City to Seek US Loans for Roosevelt Project."



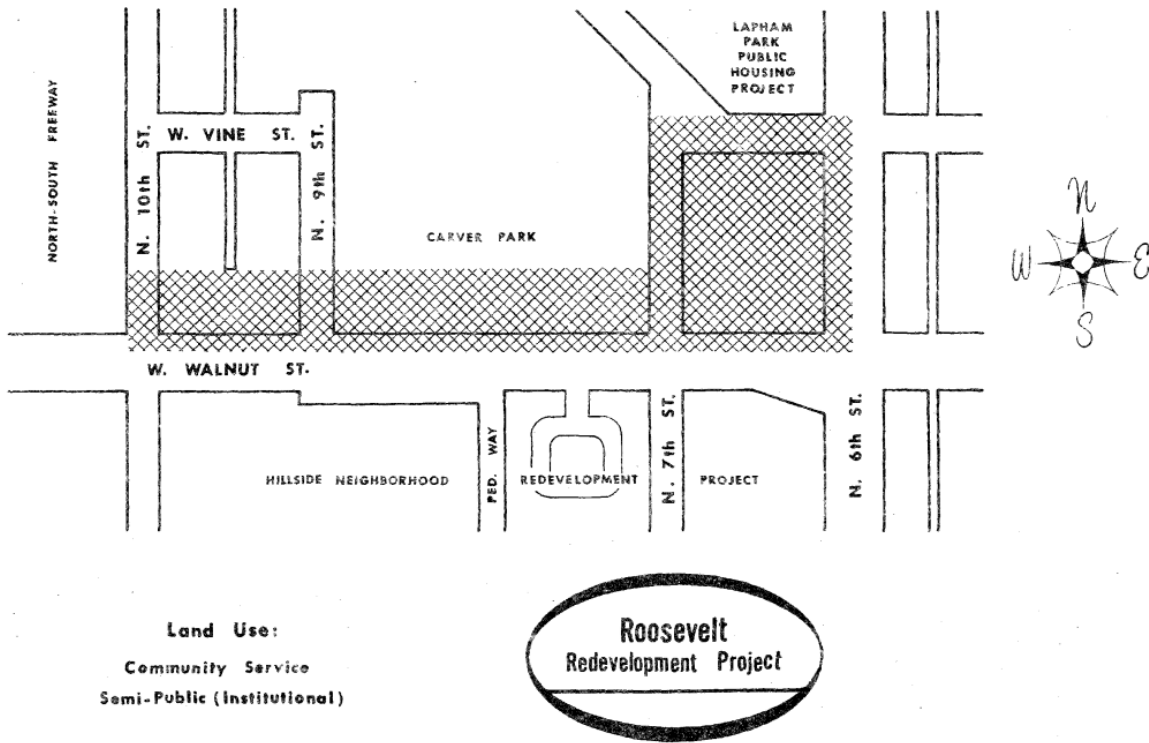
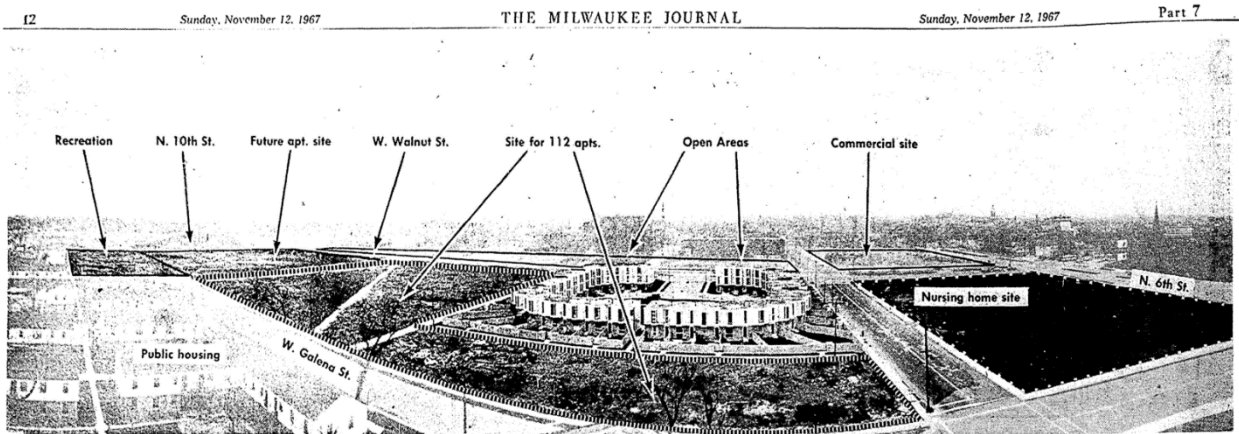


Figure 5. Map of Roosevelt Redevelopment Project



This panoramic view of the Hillside urban renewal project sandwiched between two public housing projects in the inner core shows the bleakness of the site, except for the well designed Plymouth Hill rowhouses built by a private developer after the city cleared the four blocks and sold them to him. No more rowhouses were built when the first 40, shown above, failed

to sell quickly enough. The nursing home site, right, was originally planned for use as a small shopping center but this plan was dropped with the rest of the townhouses. The next stage of the project will be 112 apartments built on the L shaped site next to the rowhouses. Further construction of apartments would be possible on the block at the far left. A portion of the

Hillside public housing project is visible at the left. To the north of the renewal project is the recently completed Lapham Park public housing project. The open areas across Walnut st. and the block which may become a motel-bowling alley were cleared by the city under the Roosevelt urban renewal project.

FIGURE 6. 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.

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

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>22</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>23</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>24</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>25</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 May and was formally rejected in December.<sup>26</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

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<sup>22</sup> Baldassari, "Developer Tries to Salvage Languishing Project in Core."

<sup>23</sup> "Redeveloping Unit Keeps Same Priority."

<sup>24</sup> "Redevelopers OK Walnut St. Job"; Dishon, "Our Exploding Slums: Peril Lives There Now"; "Renewal Site Values Slashed by Vandalism"; Gumbrell, "Vandalism Rife at Roosevelt Project."

<sup>25</sup> Bessert, "Park Freeway."

<sup>26</sup> "Publisher Tells Plans for 3 New Buildings"; "Core Site Draws Only One Bid"; "City Rejects Renewal Bid by Publisher."

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>27</sup>

By this time, Felmers Chaney had taken over as President of CCDC.<sup>28</sup> Chaney was Milwaukee's fourth Black police officer and the first to reach the rank of sergeant. Early in his 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 neighborhood development. He also founded North Milwaukee State Bank. He formally retired from the police in 1972.<sup>29</sup> His achievements after 1972 were also significant but beyond the scope of this designation.

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.<sup>30</sup>

In the three years of attempting to purchase the property, CCDC built a complex capital stack with loans from Northwestern Mutual, the SBA, and Sears Roebuck. Business owner equity accounted for 10% of the financing. The project was heavily dependent on the SBA for loans and loan guarantees.<sup>31</sup>

On April 1, 1973, the project finally opened, supported by 152 equity partners and hosting 13 Black businesses on a 9-acre full block.<sup>32</sup>

CCP soon fell into financial trouble. 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>33</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

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<sup>27</sup> Iglitzen, "Black Project in Core Plans an Unveiling"; "Auto Shop Offered for Negro Training"; Tatarsky, "OK Urban Renewal Sale"; Stanford, "Residents Explain Why They Go Elsewhere to Shop."

<sup>28</sup> Tatarsky, "OK Urban Renewal Sale."

<sup>29</sup> "Tribute to Local Civil Rights Activist, Felmers O. Chaney."

<sup>30</sup> "It's Block, Brick, Black, Business."

<sup>31</sup> "Defaults Avoided in City Land Sale"; "Black Milwaukee Business Group Seeks Funds for \$1.7 Million Business Project."

<sup>32</sup> Lecos, "Project of Blacks Becomes a Reality."

<sup>33</sup> "SBA Aid for Plaza Pledged"; Stanford, "Residents Explain Why They Go Elsewhere to Shop."

forced to take over ownership in 1975 and the complex was vacant by 1977.<sup>34</sup> The SBA sold the complex to the City in May of 1979.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Hammer, "Plaza Faced Collapse before Aid"; Rummeler, "Shopping Center in Inner City Ailing"; Stanford, "Residents Explain Why They Go Elsewhere to Shop"; "Project Delayed by Equity Issue"; Johnson Clevert, "Future Uncertain for Once Busy Plaza."

<sup>35</sup> "20 Cent per Mile Hike in Taxi Rates."

## PAGO LIQUOR STORE 1973-1977

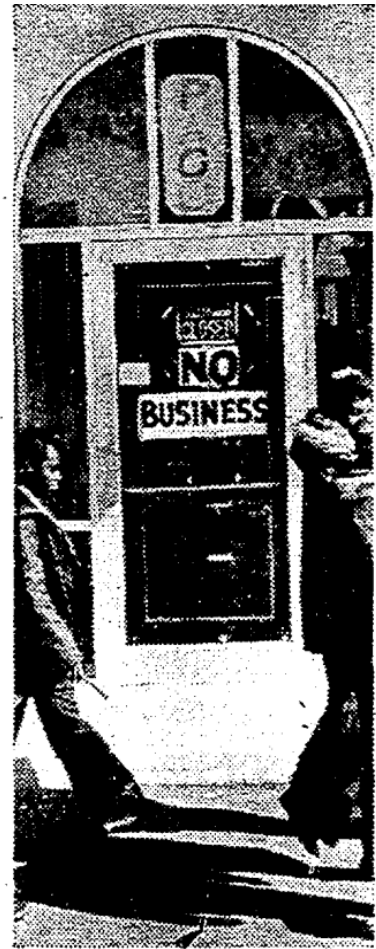
Little information could be uncovered on this original tenant of the building. It was a retail liquor store. It is unknown if it had any relationship to the liquor wholesaler elsewhere in the Plaza. No advertising for Pago was found in the Journal or Sentinel, except a passing mention of their participation in a holiday promotion for Canada Dry in December 1973.<sup>36</sup> Due to time constraints, Black media was not searched as period publications are only on microfilm.

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, as detailed by the Journal. The store furnishings and contents were auctioned that same year.<sup>37</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>38</sup>

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>39</sup> The clinic accepted Medicaid and Medicare and allowed a sliding fee



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

FIGURE 7. MILWAUKEE  
JOURNAL. PAGO'S LIQUOR  
STORE, AFTER CLOSING IN 1977.  
IN JOHNSON CLEVERT, "FUTURE  
UNCERTAIN FOR ONCE BUSY  
PLAZA."

<sup>36</sup> Canada Dry, "This Beautiful Holiday Punch Bowl Set [Ad]."

<sup>37</sup> Rummler, "Shopping Center in Inner City Ailing"; David S. Gronik and Company, "Another Gronik Auction [Ad]"; Johnson Clevert, "Future Uncertain for Once Busy Plaza."

<sup>38</sup> "Work on Health Center to Start."

<sup>39</sup> "Inner-City Health Center Slated to Open Monday."

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>40</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>41</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. 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 Miscopy in 1951, although his family relocated to Beloit 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 2<sup>nd</sup> and North. The clinic was named in his honor, as he had been one of the first Black surgeons in the community.<sup>42</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>43</sup> From 2012 until 2023 or 2024, Yellow Cab was based out of the building.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> "State Funds Program on Teen Pregnancy."

<sup>41</sup> Rosenberg, "Audit Faults Workings of Holloway Agency."

<sup>42</sup> "Dr. George Hilliard."

<sup>43</sup> Pabst, "Getting out the Vote: Organizations, Businesses, Schoolchildren Work for a Big Turnout."

<sup>44</sup> Permits, city directories, and staff site visits.

## RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that Central City Plaza 3 at 1747 N. 6<sup>th</sup> Street be given temporary historic designation because it fulfills the criteria in MCO 320-21-3-f: 1, 3, 5, 6, 8, and 9.

### F-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.

### F-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.

### F-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 building is part of a complex of three buildings 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.

### F-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.

F-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 3 is part of 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. 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>45</sup>

F-9. ITS UNIQUE LOCATION AS A SINGULAR PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTIC WHICH REPRESENTS AN ESTABLISHED AND FAMILIAR VISUAL FEATURE OF A NEIGHBORHOOD, COMMUNITY OR THE CITY.

This building and the Central City Plaza complex are noted landmarks of the Hillside neighborhood. They 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>45</sup> Miller, Benson, and Vogel, "The Architecture of Alonzo Robinson, Jr. [Unpublished Draft]."



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## PRESERVATION GUIDELINES FOR CENTRAL CITY PLAZA 3

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 design 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.

### II. Exterior Finishes

#### A. Concrete

- (i) If repainting, 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.
- (ii) 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, such as the use of acid on limestone or marble.

- (iii) 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.

B. Stucco

- C. Repair stucco with 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.

III. Windows and Doors

- A. Retain existing window and door openings that are visible from the public right-of-way. 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.
- B. 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. New metal storefront systems that match the original in size and proportion may be appropriate. Avoid the filling in or covering of openings with materials like glass-block. Avoid using glazing configurations not appropriate to the style of the building.

IV. 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. Avoid altering porches and steps by enclosing open porches, replacing wooden steps with cast concrete steps, or removing the original architecturally appropriate to the building. 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.

V. Additions

Additions are not feasible on this building. They would severely undermine the architectural integrity of this small commercial building.

VI. Guidelines for Streetscapes

VII. Signs/Exterior Lighting

- A. Plastic internally illuminated box signs with a completely acrylic face (and most other Type B signs) are not permitted as wall signs.
- B. Unlike other buildings so far designated, this building has a history of one 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 building from occupancy until 2024. If a new tenant desires, one such Type B box sign matching the design, materials, and size of the original may be permitted.
- C. Type A monument signs are the recommended approach for additional signage
- 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

No new construction has been completed in the Central City Plaza complex since 1973. Therefore, it is important that additional new construction be designed to harmonize with the district's character.

- A. 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.
- B. 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.
- C. 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.
- D. 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.

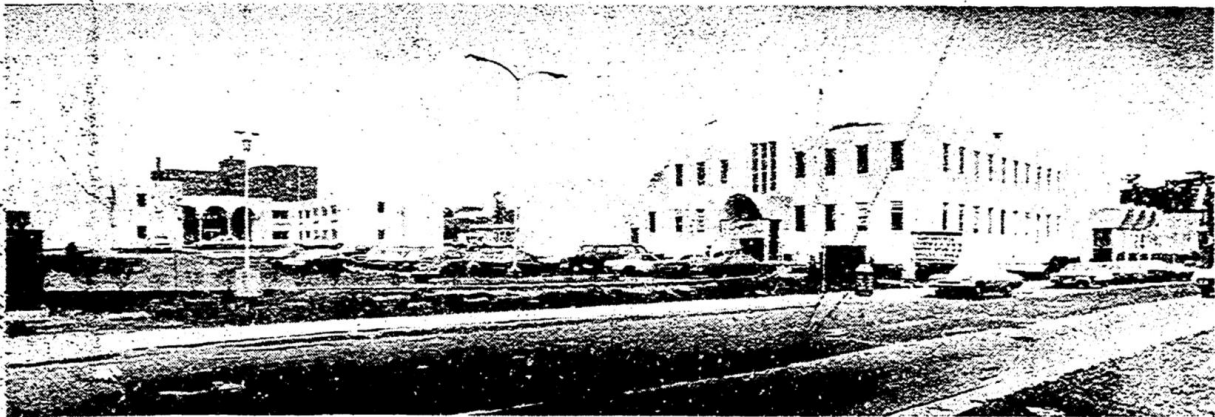
#### IX. Guidelines for Demolition

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.

- A. 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.

- B. Importance. Consideration will be given to whether or not the building is of historical or architectural significance. 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 lived.
- C. 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.
- D. 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.
- E. Replacement. Consideration will be given to whether or not the building is to be replaced by a compatible building of similar age, architectural style, and scale (see New Construction Guidelines).

# HISTORIC IMAGES



—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 8. OVERDAHL, RONALD. MILWAUKEE JOURNAL PHOTO IN AN ARTICLE REPORTING ON THE OPENING OF THE COMPLEX. 1747 IS AT THE CENTER OF THE PHOTO. IN IGLITZEN, “BLACK PROJECT IN CORE PLANS AN UNVEILING.”

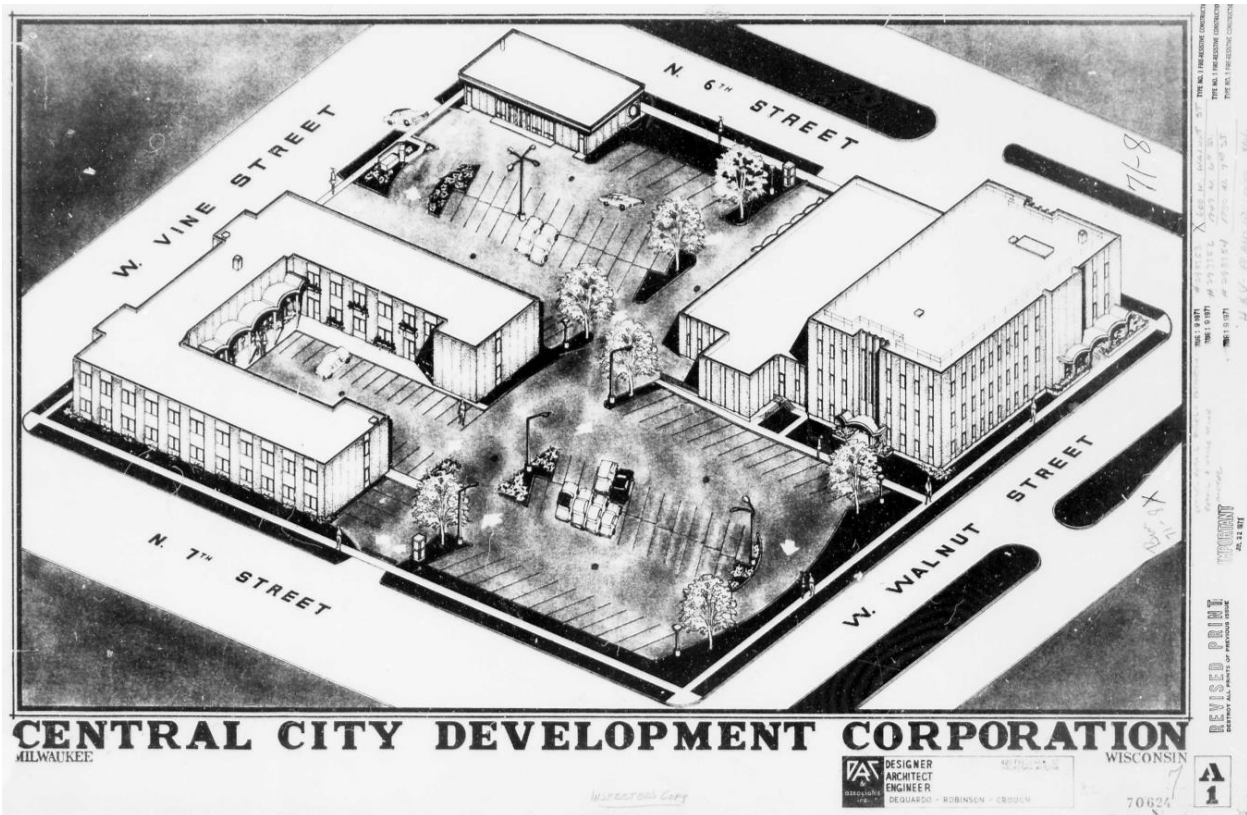


FIGURE 7. ORIGINAL DESIGN SKETCH FROM THE OFFICES OF DEQUARDO, ROBINSON, AND CROUCH.

PHOTOGRAPHS



East façade



South façade





N. 6<sup>th</sup> Street façade