

THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS



Urban Design Assistance Team
Lynn, Massachusetts

THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS



Report of the
URBAN DESIGN ASSISTANCE TEAM TO LYNN, MASSACHUSETTS
6-7-8 December 1969

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BACKGROUND

Lynn is the seventh American city to be visited by an AIA Urban Design Assistance Team since the program was initiated in 1967, and the first in the New England area. The Urban Design Assistance Team program is a function of the Committee for Urban Design, a national committee of the American Institute of Architects.

What a team is and does

Each Urban Design Assistance Team is made up of experts in the various professional fields required by the particular problems of the city under study. Members of a team are not compensated for their service and are expected not to accept commissions. The function is advisory rather than design; the team makes a study and presents an analysis with recommendations for action, what has been described as a "plan for planning".

Preparation

Efforts to bring a team to Lynn were begun in June, 1969, by the Boston Society of Architects, a chapter of the American Institute of Architects, the arrangements being coordinated by James H. Ballou, AIA, of Salem, and Lowell L. Erickson, Executive Director of the B.S.A. A formal request was made on 23 September by the Lynn Area Chamber of Commerce, Edward G. Connolly, Executive Vice President, with supporting letters from ten city offices, municipal organizations and business leaders. A reconnaissance visit was made on 31 October by Henry Steinhardt, AIA, of Mercer Island, Washington, chairman of the team.

Sponsorship

The team visit was sponsored by the Lynn Area Chamber of Commerce, Vernon A. Martin, President. The Chamber share the expense of the visit with the American Institute of Architects and served as hosts to the team. Strong assistance was given by Mayor Irving E. Kane and Planning Director William E. George.

TEAM VISIT

The AIA Urban Design Assistance Team for Lynn consisted of:

Henry Steinhardt, AIA, chairman of the team, architect and urban designer, of Mercer Island, Washington.

Clarence E. Moran, AIA, Director, Regional Development Authority of Charleston, Kanawha County, West Virginia.

William Sheveland, AIA, AIP, Director of Planning and Design, Great Southwest Corporation, Arlington, Texas.

Alan M. Voorhees, AIP, President of Alan M. Voorhees & Associates, transportation and planning consultants, Washington, D. C.

- Survey The team met in Lynn on 6, 7, and 8 December 1969. They were first briefed by Mayor-elect Cassidy and the planning staff, and subsequently surveyed the study area by microbus, on foot and by helicopter. The team took over 300 colored slides of the study area, some of which were used in their final presentation.
- Interviews Interviews were held, in private, with approximately 45 persons of varying positions and interest in both municipal and private sectors, including Mayor-elect Cassidy and representatives of the City Council, Redevelopment Authority, Planning Board, Chamber of Commerce, merchants of Munroe, Market and Union Streets, manufacturing, commerce, banking, Citizens Advisory Council, Model Cities, Citizens for better Lynn, and North Shore Labor Council.
- Study Area The study area was defined as the area bounded by the harbor, industrial and urban renewal areas on the southwest, the Common at the northwest corner, the Model Cities area on the North, and commercial and residential areas on the East. The study area contains the Central Business District of Lynn and it is bisected by the

railroad. Land uses include the civic center at the north end, commercial activities to the north of and around the railroad, and manufacturing and residential uses in the southern sector.

Presentation

The team held a press and television conference on the final day, followed by a presentation of its report orally. The material in this report is extracted from these presentations. The observations and proposals of the team received wide coverage in the media; two channels carried the event on television and there was extensive press coverage in local Boston and other newspapers.

Patient, capable and invaluable assistance was given to the team by Edward G. Connolly, Executive Vice President of the Chamber of Commerce, William E. George, Planning Director, and Hans Bleiker, Associate Planner.

REGIONAL AND CITY PLANNING

William Sheveland, AIA, AIP

Lynn is a part of the Boston metropolitan region and has a lot of interdependency with other areas and other conditions. You are about ten miles from Boston, and it takes you about a half hour to get there by automobile. You have a very advantageous relationship to Logan Airport, about 20 minutes away. Lynn has traditionally been the largest community on the North Shore north of Boston, the major employment and commercial center for the North Shore.

Coming Changes

Some things which are proposed will have a bearing on the future relationships of Lynn to the region. One, of course, is the coming Interstate 95 which is going to go through your city somewhere. Hopefully it is going to connect with Lynn. A second is that you have the possibility of a rapid transit extension from Boston northward to Lynn. This may come in 1990. Another factor is the relationship of Lynn to the water and to the Harbor. You have a tremendous potential here for waterfront development, which should return more benefits to the city than the beach front activities you now have.

Changing Functions

One of the events of the past twelve years is that the traditional posture of Lynn as the commercial trading center of the North Shore has slipped. In 1958 the first large competing shopping center was opened, and since that time additional competing retail commercial square footage has been added until you now have well over 2 million square feet out there which is competing for regional shopping. Within that same period the Central Business District experienced a 26% reduction in retail space while it was significant to note that on the other side there was about 27% increase in service space. This is not unusual in cities of varying sizes in other parts of the country. So you actually have a changing function of your Central Area. The question is not really whether or not to buck or encourage the trend; it may be that the best thing for Lynn would be to recognize and accept this trend.

- Population** Since 1945 Lynn has lost population, roughly 15,000 people during that period. You also lost some industry. There are a lot of people in Lynn of lower income. There is a serious situation here in which the largest employer, General Electric, has about 14,000 people working of whom 55% live in Lynn. Roughly 45% live outside of Lynn and many of these are managerial people. In addition it is well known that most of the other leaders of the city live outside of Lynn. Just why this condition exists and what its effect is are important questions.
- Some Assets** The study area itself is of significance within the framework of the city. It has at present a very general relationship to the Harbor. It has a definite relationship to industrial development. It has the railroad running through it, which may one day become the route of the modern rapid transit system of the future. You have Lynn Woods which is a precious community resource we all recognize. Lynn seems to have a tremendous position, but it does not seem to be capitalizing on that position nor on its opportunities.
- Linear Spine** One of our conclusions is that the linear spine, the pattern of commercial retail development in the study area, is not compact as in a shopping center. It is a linear thing. It is very well established, and it is not likely to change substantially unless affected by some type of large scale public or private renewal program. We are unable to see how it would be reasonable to suggest that you plunge right into redevelopment trying to make it into a regional shopping center such as the ones being built in outlying areas. We think that what really ought to happen is that the present linear pattern of the commercial retail land use should be reinforced and enhanced, with a marked improvement of the vehicular access, parking, pedestrian accomodation, and the visual amenity conditions.
- Private Redevelopment** One technique that has been talked about in other parts of the country, and in some places tried, is the idea to syndicate land owners in downtown areas for the purpose of going into private redevelopment without the use of federal funds on a sound

economic, financial investment basis. This may have a great deal of promise in Lynn. You ought to keep in the back of your minds the notion that if you are going to do anything with the downtown area you don't necessarily have to rely entirely on a federal urban renewal program, which at this time is turning its back almost completely on retail and commercial redevelopment and toward lower income housing.

Office Uses

A second conclusion is that there is a relatively small quantity of general office type uses which normally in most downtown areas are reinforcing through commercial and retail activities. The quantity that does exist occupies deteriorating or undistinguished buildings. There are retail establishments on Munroe Street and on other streets which have a great deal of vacant space above them. There is not much mixture of land uses, the kinds of things which tend to help the activity pattern and the buying power and the flow of pedestrian traffic in and around commercial areas. This is one of the things that hurts the image of Lynn because you have the image of being a deteriorating city. You don't have the image of a city which produces new things, new office buildings, and just a few would be very helpful to change the image. So we suggest that you look right now and make efforts to get an increased quantity of general office uses in close proximity to this commercial, retail spine, and that these be attractive and well designed so they can help establish an improved public identity for the business district as a whole.

Loft Buildings

The concentration of Lynn Realty Trust holdings, the so-called loft buildings, represents a special problem area for Lynn. Whether or not this area continues to be used for manufacturing or is to be converted to some more appropriate use, this is going to require a great deal more intensive study that it has been given so far. Whatever happens in this area, its future is intrinsically related to the overall future of industrial development in the city and you can't consider one without considering the other. The ground occupied by these loft buildings also happens to represent an extremely strategically located piece of property with respect to

Architectural
Study
Proposed

the commercial cores, the commuter rail use, Lynn Shore Drive, and the Harbor. It is a piece of property which in any city would be considered a prime piece of real estate. The buildings themselves have considerable architectural merit and historic interest, and we think that you need to undertake a study to determine the present potential use of the loft buildings for manufacturing and for other purposes such as offices and residential uses. Specific architectural studies should be made pinpointing the structural conditions, the degree of functional obsolescence, the suitability or adaptability to other uses, and the approximate magnitude of financial investment required to accomplish such an adaptation. Concurrently a combined development plan and urban design study should be undertaken to determine the area's potential for renewal through a combination of clearance and rehabilitation; the latter study must consider the relationship of the present manufacturing functions to longer range city, industrial development in general, a matter which we feel has not been handled adequately to date.

Harbor
Shoreline

The Harbor shoreline immediately adjacent to the study area represents a uniquely strong resource for the Lynn community. It is presently in a state of underutilization, but has great potential for a combination high intensity residential and water oriented recreational development, such as marina type activities, as well as for a limited amount of quality commercial development. It must be recognized that the potential of this area is vulnerable to destruction unless strong community interest related planning and urban design guidance is somehow applied to the area. The type, quantity, form, and architectural character of development in this area should be of particular concern. For example, extreme care must be exercised in regard to the height and spacing of buildings along the shoreline so as not to unreasonably preempt the visual relationship of the remainder of Lynn with the Harbor. The market analysis reuse study now underway for the Harbor shoreline area under sponsorship of the Lynn Planning Department is highly endorsed as a significant first step toward effecting control over development of the

Urban Design
Study
Proposed

shoreline. It is recommended, however, that this initial study be followed up closely with an intensive urban design study aimed at establishing specific desirable guidelines for physical development of the property in consideration of both community and private sector interests. The city should seek to influence the eventual participation of private developers who are committed to producing well-designed, constructed, and managed final products. It is further recommended that any proposals for filling along the shoreline be given the most careful scrutiny in terms of the potential environmental impacts of such action.

TRAFFIC AND TRANSPORTATION

Alan M. Voorhees, AIP

The Downtown area is somehow changing in its activities; it is no longer going to be predominantly retailing. Its future lies also in service and office function. When you think of these kinds of activities, you must recognize that they are very sensitive to access and parking conditions, as the function of the Downtown area.

Access and Circulation

In the case of access and circulation in the Downtown area, you could introduce more one-way street systems approaching the Downtown area. I am not sure if it should be Washington and Franklin which has been suggested or whether it might be Franklin and Willow from the south. In a kind of east-west direction Oxford and Liberty are good potentials, but you must understand that this must be studied and analyzed before a decision can be made. Efforts should go ahead into this direction because it can improve service into the Downtown area and improve your circulation. Certainly the issue of access from I-95 must be cleared up. A decision has to be made and you have to make sure it doesn't slip through the cracks, and that you do have good access from I-95 to some kind of road connection with road improvement.

Simplified Street Pattern

You have to simplify your street pattern by perhaps closing and reducing some of the streets in the Downtown area. There are several options. Right now you have so many streets that it is confusing to get around and this really retards your circulation. The street system is very complicated, and some streets can be combined with parking and closed off; in other cases they can be combined with other activities. An alarming condition related to the amount of space you have devoted to streets is south of the railroad in the Harbor area, where the mammoth space dedicated to highways is outrageous. What you have here is a rural highway design in an urban setting and when you develop plans for the loft building and the Harbor area, you should look into this.

Central
Square

Certainly, within the study area, Central Square is one of your knottist problems and a detailed study must be made. Not only from an urban design point of view, but from a transportation point of view. From Munroe to Union we think it is important to have a pedestrian continuity and redevelopment of this area might be the critical link. If you make certain streets one-way, for example one to the north and one to the south, you might be able to work in a much better bus service system which could be tied into the future development of the transit system on the railroad right-of-way.

Traffic
Engineering

You have a major need for an up-grading of the traffic engineering measures and procedures you are using. Your signal system -- what you have and where you have it -- is often lacking and is certainly not very modern. You don't have things like pedestrian controls and walk lights which are often used in other cities. Signing is poor and certainly the street markings could be improved. Your pedestrian control is weak. In complicated intersections like Central Square, you have to install certain things like fences along the sidewalk and pedestrian crossing where they can work effectively. You have probably gotten into this situation because your city government lacks expertise, and we recommend that you hire a traffic engineer to work in matters of planning and operational procedures. Parking controls should be considered in light of traffic needs and in some cases, parking prohibited. You need better enforcement of the traffic control at intersections, and this will come about with a better relationship between the police department and a professional, like a traffic engineer.

Hire a Traffic
Engineer

Enforcement

TOPICS

You have already initiated steps to get involved in the so called TOPICS Program, a new federal program which is aimed at matters such as upgrading your traffic signals developing channelization, and putting in pedestrian controls. It is important that you take an active part in this program when the state gets ready to initiate it.

Parking

You have made significant progress in your parking. You still need maybe 500 more parking spaces related to the shopping district, which can be done over a period of time as you get better plans for the entire Downtown area. These parking improvements must be related to the one-way street pattern and the access that you provide into the Downtown area. As new offices and new service activities come in, it is critical that you provide parking for them. If you don't take care of the needs of the worker who is downtown all day, he will foul up your shopping parking program, so you have get to provide for both needs -- the all day needs of employees and the shorter term needs of the retail and service activities -- and if you don't take care of both, then both are going to suffer. In areas where you need rapid turnover for shopping and in other areas where you need one hour or two hour parking, your meters must be so designated. A study should be made and your parking meters changed accordingly. After you do that you should have better enforcement. The revenues you are deriving from your parking meters are very low; throughout the country cities are getting more than \$100 per meter per year, and you are far below that. With better enforcement, you could not only improve parking and traffic, but you certainly can get a better income.

Enforcement

Loading

Loading regulations have been poorly handled. Necessary studies have not been made, and you should look at your loading needs as related to different blocks and then establish loading zones and control practices. This again will require some enforcement, but that must come if you are going to prevent this double parking which does not help anybody. Hiring a traffic engineer will help in this direction, also.

Railroad

It has been suggested several times to put the railroad into a tunnel. Due to the costs, this is not really feasible at present. We do think, however, that the railroad can be made an asset, certainly much more than it is today, by tying in effective design of buildings related to it. Allow for the day when you will have rapid transit on this right-of-way tied into the design for redevelopment of Central Square, which will take care of bus service and pedestrian movement through that area.

In many cities they have more severe capacity problems where streets just can not handle the traffic, but this is not really the problem in downtown Lynn. Your problem is to get some order into the traffic circulation. This takes good operations, good enforcement, good traffic engineering, and time.

URBAN DESIGN

Henry Steinhardt, AIA

The team was unanimous in feeling that the downtown of Lynn is lacking in as much character as we feel it should have, that it is gloomy and cluttered. You may have been accustomed to these conditions, but the team finds them depressing and we have tried to point these out through the slides.

Pedestrians

Pedestrian circulation within the study area is hampered by frequent and dangerous street crossings and discouraged by narrow sidewalks, wide intersections, and a lack of continuity. We recommend that you adopt a policy of separating as completely as possible the movement of pedestrians and vehicles. You should work toward the goal that all aspects of the pedestrian environment should be improved to approach the standards of a planned shopping center. Such an environment for the circulation of people should be developed along the retail line of Market-Munroe-Central Square-Union.

Central Square Study

You have at Central Square a key activity node which is congested, dirty, disorderly, ugly, and in general discouraging to the Central Business District. A special Urban Design Study of this particular precinct should be undertaken by a well qualified and carefully selected professional team, including an architectural firm and a traffic engineer, and possibly an economist and a planner. The aim of this study will be to propose solutions of the conflict and deficiencies of Central Square, leading to its integration into the Central Business District as a safe, attractive and lively link in the pattern of downtown Lynn.

Commercial Design Standards

The quality of building design in the last few decades has generally been low. Ugly and unsympathetic materials, forms and signing have been used together resulting in conflict, and competition adjoining stores and buildings has been the visual result rather than warmth and harmony. We urge that a continuous effort be made by the

business community to develop those qualities of charm and harmony which are to be found in shopping centers. Architectural design should be directed less toward raw impact and more in the direction of high quality and the development of a distinctive character for downtown Lynn. To accomplish the latter, we suggest the use of traditional local materials such as red brick and painted wood, avoiding imitations of the past and utilizing contemporary forms.

**A Sign
Ordinance**

The oversized, overlit, and underdesigned signs prevalent throughout the CBD are a deterrent and exercise a cheapening and degrading effect on downtown Lynn. We urge that you execute and enforce a strict sign ordinance.

Landscaping

There is a lack of trees and landscaping throughout the study area, which contains plenty of open space which is presently bare and untreated. The depressing effect which results seems to be particularly tragic in a part of the country which has a tradition of gracious landscaping and in a downtown which is suffering from competition with landscaped shopping centers. The city and business interests should cooperate in a long term landscaping program to provide greenery, variety, resting places, works of art, and in general a charming atmosphere. This long term landscaping program should be organized on the basis of annual goals which aim toward specific tree plantings and landscaping projects for each year.

**Street
Furniture**

The townscape of Lynn suffers from unrelated, shabby and ugly street furniture, such as lighting standards, pavings, trash receptacles, street signs, and newspaper stands. The team recommends that the city government recognize this as a problem and adopt a policy of continuously replacing the street furniture with items which are coordinated and attractively designed.

**Civic
Design**

Civic concern with matters of architectural and urban design has been weak, and as a result Lynn suffers from an unsatisfying and unattractive environment. You need to raise your standards. The team urges that the design process be reorganized to more careful selection of consultants, strict monitoring of all public works projects with

respect to their design and effect on the environment, and the continuous enforcement of higher standards for design approval. In order to achieve these goals you should consider increasing the planning staff by the addition of a specialist in urban design and you might also consider the formation of a design commission to approve all selections of architects and designs by the city.

CITY GOVERNMENT

Clarence E. Moran, AIA

The community should understand that urban redevelopment is an undertaking of enormous complication; the process of translation of public objectives into physical projects, which must be worked through multiple layers of government, each with its own concerns, objectives, and unique motives, is of staggering challenge to governments. When these processes must reconcile with private objectives which in most cases are requisite to the success of public development, the hazards and the difficulties are apparent.

Joint
Effort

This team has intensively scanned your city's resources as well as sounding out your will to do, and we feel that Lynn collectively possesses. The team feels that the old relationships between public and private sectors, and indeed within the public sector must be extensively reordered if any realistic development goals and programs can be formulated and implemented. It must be understood that successful urban development programs happen neither spontaneously nor painlessly. A realistic over-view must concede the limitations of private efforts single handedly to revitalize large city areas which implicate many public interests and functions. A partnership effort - private investment objectives that satisfy publicly formulated goals - may offer the most economical mode of revitalizing your problem areas, and local governmental participation will most certainly be essential in the process.

Communication

It was in the area of public-private interaction - interface, if you will, between private ambitions and City Hall's response to them - that the past system appears to have been mutually unsatisfying to nearly everyone. Unsatisfactory communication - whatever the reasons - between the government and the governed may well account for failure to achieve such development objectives as heretofore have emerged. The urban design processes - planning, redevelopment, and housing - have fallen short of expectations, and in the process, have generated not an inconsiderable segment of disillusion and cynicism.

Goal
Setting

We received from nearly all community groups significant expressions of doubt, suspicion, and negativism; while collectively, there is a reservoir of local pride and identity with the City of Lynn, separately inter-group hostility and reservations are very evident and constitute a barrier which must be overcome if successful development programs are to be achieved. In the process perhaps of pursuing too many broad-scaled objectives at the expense of more modest goals which if achieved might have sustained confidence, the City's development agencies may have left unattended Lynn's more vital needs and resources, economic and human, essential to a sound longer-ranged program. In short, mutual communication and cooperation in goal setting between public and private sectors must be restructured, and the process of defining goals and objectives refined to produce mutually satisfying and reinforcing programs and projects.

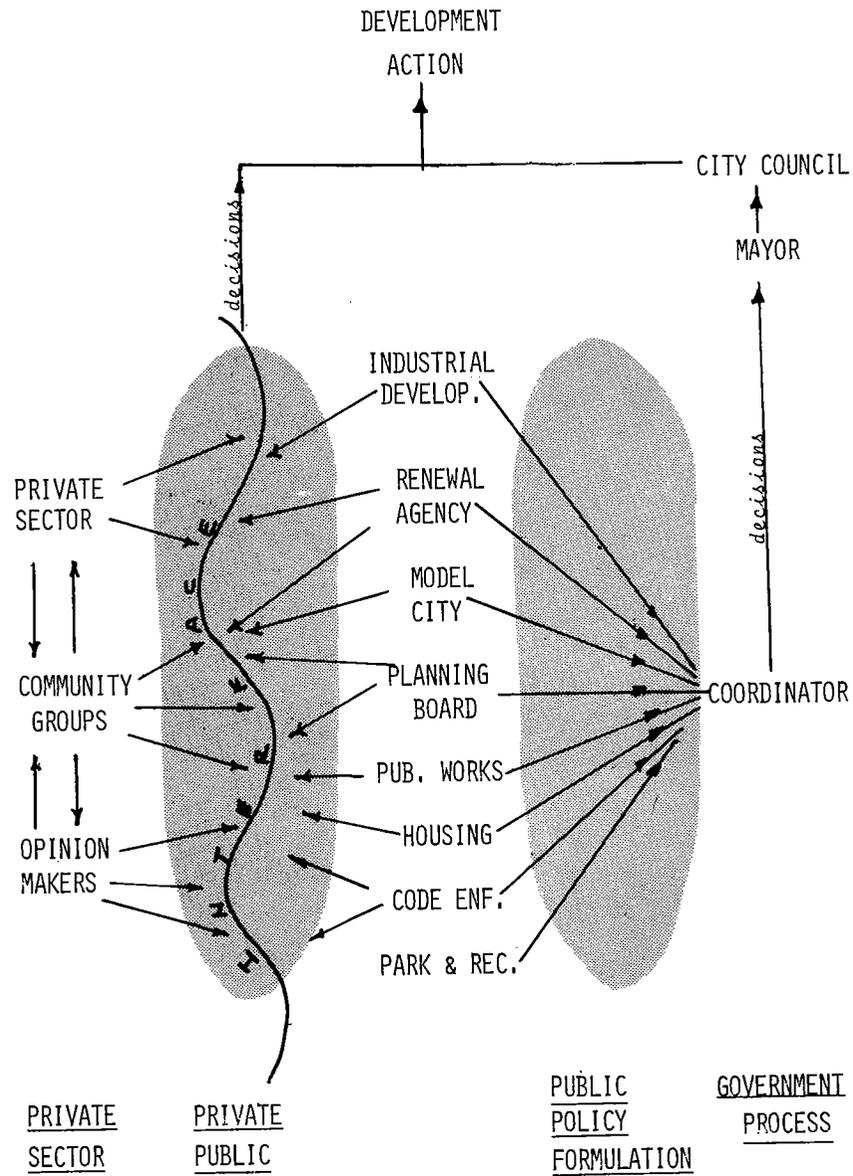
Agency
Roles

Internally at City Hall the situation is as bad if not worse. The functions of the different city agencies with vital roles in development are confused, overlapping, and ill defined. No single agency is truly satisfied with the situation and each recognizes the inherent inefficiency of the system, but none has either proposed a change or initiated discussions to rectify a most unsatisfactory situation. Accordingly, each agency pursues its own course, refines its own proposals and, as nearly autonomous agencies, furthers its own special interests and projects. Intercommunication is, at best, casual. While the ultimate fate of development plans and programs is the prerogative of City Council, it must be plain that urban development programs involving planning, housing, redevelopment, and Model Cities are susceptible to duplication and overlap. City Council members cannot be expected to acquire technical expertise in these fields, so the duplications often go unidentified. The results include real or potential interdepartment friction and suspicion, and of course, excess project costs.

The recommendations we offer for reorganization of the planning - development processes are as follows:

- Development
Coordinator
- A. Immediate restructuring of City Hall organization to refine and expedite public goal identification and decision making; to accomplish this, the position of Development Coordinator as a key city official should be established and filled by a competent, experienced professional. All city departments, agencies, and programs should report to the Coordinator, who would adjudicate personality and policy differences, and avert duplication.
- Communication
- B. Overcome lack of inter-communication between the community and the multiple City agencies and departments by establishing and improving techniques for dialogue, compromise and acceptance of community-city policy; suggestions for accomplishment include deliberate exposure and explanations of public programs and policies to various community groups, with the reaction serving to modify and refine public policy.
- Interface
- C. Refinement of interface between the legitimate objectives of the private sector (i.e., the profit motive) and the legitimate public objectives (i.e., extension of tax base and public fiscal resources); education in both sectors as to the proper functioning of private and public efforts and studied programs for reconciliation of both legitimate objectives is an important factor to expedite and enable operable public policy.

To illustrate these concepts a diagram follows.



SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The AIA Urban Design Assistance Team to Lynn made about 36 recommendations, which are summarized below without any attempt to list them in order of priority. There are two groups. Those in Phase 1. are suggested as appropriate for immediate action and are suitable for prompt implementation without much expense. Those in Phase 2. may be implemented in a more gradual program.

Phase 1.

1. Reinforcement and enhancement of the present linear pattern of commercial and retail land use.
2. Increase in the quantity of general office uses in close proximity to the commercial spine.
3. A special study to determine the present and potential usefulness of the loft buildings for manufacturing or other purposes such as office or residential.
4. An Urban Design Study for physical development of the Harbor Shore Line.
5. Better traffic regulation enforcement.
6. Hiring of a traffic engineer.
7. Undertaking the TOPICS Program.
8. Parking meter enforcement.
9. Separation of pedestrians and vehicles as completely as possible.
10. A prolonged and conscientious effort to improve commercial architectural design aimed toward developing harmony and charm in the CBD.
11. Execution and enforcement of a strict sign ordinance.

