

AN EVALUATION OF AN URBAN SERVICE POLICY:
A CASE STUDY OF THE GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN
METROPOLITAN AREA

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· ABSTRACT

AN EVALUATION OF AN URBAN SERVICE POLICY:
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by Charles Larry Tompkins

One of the most prevalent and important ecological changes in American society during the past three decades has been the increased concentration of people on the periphery of existing urban centers. This concentration has gained predominance as an urban problem since 1950. The problem area has been commonly labeled "the urban fringe." Fringe development has, to a large extent, represented attempts to avoid the deficiencies and drawbacks of the central cities as development sites, yet the continuation of peripheral concentration has precipitated still other problems, both for the central cities and for the fringe areas themselves. The City of Grand Rapids, Michigan, and the surrounding fringe area are confronted with typical problems as a result of peripheral concentration. Most of these problems have resulted from haphazard land use development and inadequate water and sewer services within the urban fringe. In an attempt to remedy these conditions and hence eliminate the problems they precipitate, the City of Grand Rapids initiated a unique informal agreement with the surrounding governmental units in 1951 for the dual purpose of controlling land use development and providing adequate water and sewer service. It was known as the urban service policy.

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the urban service policy, it was first necessary to establish the nature of land use development, land use controls, and service extension needs and practices in the fringe prior to the urban service policy of 1951 as a background for the evolution of the final Declaration of Policy. This was done through the use of data concerning changing land use patterns, subdivision platting activity, changing population settlement patterns, utilization of land use controls by fringe-area governmental units, and the way in which water and sewer services were provided in the fringe. Sources of data included published material, public documents and records, personal interviews, and unpublished materials such as minutes, maps, reports, and letters.

The urban service policy was then described with regard to its legal basis, premises upon which it was based, goals it was intended to achieve, and the way in which it operated. The land use development, land use controls, and service extension needs and practices in the fringe in the nine-year period from 1942 to 1951 during which the urban service policy was in effect were next examined for purposes of comparison with the decade prior to its enactment. Data for this study were similar to those used to evaluate the fringe area conditions prior to 1951 and were gathered from similar sources.

The final evaluation of the urban service policy was made in the context of its premises, the goals it was designed to accomplish, and the way in which it was applied in the Grand Rapids metropolitan area. While the urban service policy was found to have made certain positive achievements as a metropolitan planning device, it was shown that some of the premises upon which it was based were not entirely valid, it was not en-

tirely successful in achieving its intended goals, and the way in which it was applied was not as effective as it might have been. The following recommendations were made regarding the use of an urban service policy as applied in the Grand Rapids metropolitan area:

1. The specific provisions of any service policy must be dependent upon the problems and conditions characteristic of the area in which the policy is to be implemented.

2. Although an urban service policy should not be used as a substitute for more thorough and comprehensive metropolitan planning, it can be effective as a temporary or interim means of achieving certain goals or alleviating certain metropolitan problems.

3. To be most effective, an urban service policy should be developed on the basis of a metropolitan master plan.

4. An urban service policy should be accompanied by a financing plan adequate to provide for future expansion of existing water and sewer plant facilities.

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INTRODUCTION

American society has undergone many ecological changes during the past three decades. One of the most prevalent and important changes has been the increased concentration of people on the periphery of existing urban centers. This concentration, while being recognized as early as 1910, has gained predominance as an urban problem only since 1950.¹

The problem area has been commonly labeled "the urban fringe." The urban fringe, for the purpose of this study, begins immediately outside of the legal boundaries of a central city and may extend to the outer limits of the realm of influence of the central city. It is difficult to determine the exact boundaries of any urban fringe. The area of demarcation is generally where a predominance of non-agricultural land use development ends and agricultural use begins, although pockets of agricultural land use may occur within the fringe. Both incorporated and unincorporated suburbs also may lie within the fringe. Because of the location of the urban fringe, it is possible for the policies of the central city to stimulate, discourage, or directly regulate urban fringe development.

The United States Bureau of Census recognized the urban fringe phenomenon in 1920 and in the succeeding census years attempted to provide more statistics on core cities and their fringe areas together as complete

¹Proceedings of the National Conference on Metropolitan Problems held at Kellogg Center, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Mich., April 29-May 2, 1956. New York: Government Affairs Foundation, Inc.

entities.² In 1940 the U. S. Census determined the scope of the "metropolitan districts" for all cities of 50,000 or more population. The Bureau of Census defined a metropolitan district for such cities as "all adjacent and contiguous minor civil divisions or incorporated places having a population density of 150 or more persons per square mile.... A metropolitan district is thus not a political unit but is rather an area including all of the thickly settled territory around a city or group of cities."³ Following this definition, the metropolitan district of Grand Rapids consists of the City of Grand Rapids, the cities of East Grand Rapids and Grandville, and the townships of Paris, Wyoming, Walker, and Grand Rapids, all located within Kent County, Michigan.⁴

The extent of urban fringe development is indicated by the U. S. Census figures for 1950 and 1960. In 1950, 41 percent of the total 83.8 million residents of the 169 standard metropolitan statistical areas lived outside the central city.⁵ In 1960, within the 212 standard metropolitan statistical areas containing 112,885,000 persons, 48.5 percent of the population lived in areas outside the central city.⁶ Within the total standard metropolitan statistical areas, the population outside the central cities increased 48.6 percent between 1950 and 1960, whereas the population within the central cities increased only 10.7 percent.⁷

²Joseph A. Warren, Jr. The Problem of Government in Metropolitan Areas as Applied to the Area Surrounding the City of Grand Rapids, Michigan (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Bureau of Government, University of Michigan, 1947), p. 2.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵U. S., Bureau of Census, Statistical Abstract of the United States, 81st Annual Edition, 1960, p. 15.

⁶Ibid., 84th Annual Edition, 1963, p. 13.

⁷U. S., Bureau of Census, U. S. Census of Population: 1960. Number of Inhabitants. Final Report PC (1)-24A.

The total percent of population increase within the standard metropolitan statistical areas between 1950 and 1960 was 26.4 percent.⁸ It has been estimated that by 1975, 63.6 percent of the population of the United States will be contained within the standard metropolitan statistical areas.⁹

The causes of the phenomenon of peripheral concentration have been the topic of numerous studies. In brief, the causative factors most commonly indicated have been the increased mobility offered by the automobile, availability of cheap land outside the city limits, lack of acceptable land for development within the city, improved road systems that reduce both time and distance, changing living patterns, and changing needs of industry.¹⁰ Fringe development has, to a large extent, represented attempts to avoid the deficiencies and drawbacks of the central cities as development sites, yet the continuation of peripheral concentration has precipitated still other problems, both for the central cities and for the fringe areas themselves. Problems of the central cities include decreased tax base as residents, businesses and industries move to the fringe; incompatible land uses at the city limits where city jurisdiction ends; increased demands on city services as poorly developed fringe areas are annexed to the city; health hazards to the city as a result of inadequate sanitary services in the fringe; and the exchange of blight between the city and the fringe areas. Typical of the fringe area problems are deficient legislative powers, inadequate financing ability,

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Committee for Economic Development. Guiding Metropolitan Growth (New York: Committee for Economic Development, 1960), p. 46.

¹⁰ Betty Tableman, "How Cities Can Lick the Fringe Problem," Public Management, XXXIV (1952), p. 50.

political apathy, haphazard development, lack of development policies and goals, inadequate public service facilities, differences in rural and urban social and economic attitudes, and lack of public awareness of emerging problems.¹¹ Hence, it is in the best interests of both the central cities and the urban fringe areas to take corrective and preventive measures for the problems created by urban fringe development.

Attempted solutions vary from one metropolitan area to another, depending upon the nature of the most pressing fringe problems. Some approaches used in the past as possible solutions to urban fringe problems have included annexation, governmental consolidation, federations, the exercise of extraterritorial powers by the central cities, agreements for sale of services, governmental reorganization, interstate compacts, creation of special districts, and intergovernmental cooperation. Intergovernmental cooperation has been achieved through joint enterprise, the furnishing of services by one unit of government to another, mutual aid, or parallel action which is undertaken by formal or informal agreements between governmental units.¹² Often, however, because of the competitive relationship of the city to the fringe area, measures which offer solutions for the city create problems for the fringe area and vice versa.

The Grand Rapids standard metropolitan statistical area in Kent County, Michigan, includes a typical central city and surrounding urban fringe development, and is confronted with typical problems as a result of peripheral concentration. Most of these have resulted from haphazard

¹¹Richard W. Cutler, "Can Local Governments Handle Urban Growth?" Wisconsin Law Review, ed. Ernest T. Kaufman, Charles D. Patterson, Wayne R. La Vave, and William R. Smith (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin, 1959), I, pp. 7-9.

¹²Donald H. Webster, Urban Planning and Municipal Public Policy (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958), p. 70.

land use development and inadequate water and sewer services within the urban fringe. In an attempt to remedy these conditions and hence eliminate the problems they precipitate, the City of Grand Rapids initiated a unique informal agreement with surrounding governmental units for the dual purpose of controlling land use development and providing adequate water and sewer service. It was known as the urban service policy.

CHAPTER I
THE GRAND RAPIDS URBAN FRINGE
PRIOR TO THE URBAN SERVICE POLICY

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the urban service policy as a means of guiding land use development and providing water and sewer services to the Grand Rapids urban fringe, it is first necessary to establish the nature of land use development, land use controls, and service extension needs and practices in the fringe prior to 1951 as a background for the evolution of the final Declaration of Policy.

Land Use Development in the Grand Rapids Metropolitan Area

Changing Land Use Patterns

The use of land, in terms of agricultural and non-agricultural development, has been steadily changing in Kent County over the past two decades. While approximately 90 percent of the land area of the county continues to be devoted to agricultural uses, large portions of land have been converted from agricultural uses in areas surrounding incorporated areas, water bodies, and areas along existing roads and highways.¹³ Between 1940 and 1950 the number of farms in Kent County decreased from

¹³Stewart Marquis. The Need for Comprehensive Physical Development Planning in Kent County Michigan (East Lansing, Mich.: Continuing Education Service, Michigan State University, 1961), p. 19.

5,623 to 4,302, a total decrease of 23.5 percent. This decrease was due primarily to the availability of urban employment and high wages which resulted from the increase in manufacturing between 1937 and 1947. The number of manufacturing establishments in the Grand Rapids metropolitan area increased 48 percent in that 10-year period.¹⁴

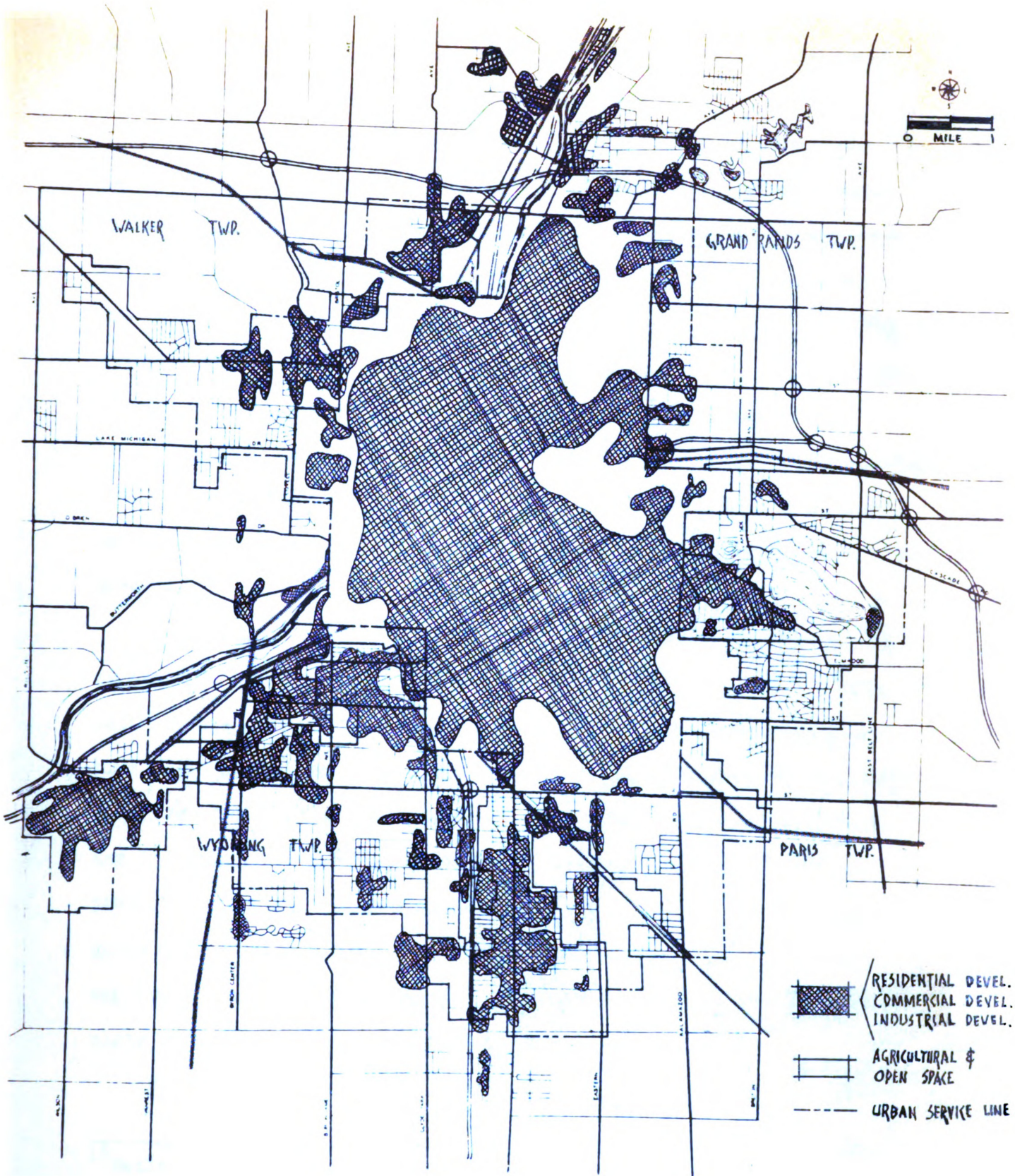
The non-agricultural development in the periphery of Grand Rapids occurred primarily along the major circulation routes. A random filling-in of development between these major access routes was in evidence between 1940 and 1950 (Figure 1). The greatest concentrations of non-agricultural land use development prior to 1950 occurred in the south and southwest sections of the metropolitan area in the direction of the incorporated areas of Grandville and Cutlerville. Similar development was occurring to a lesser extent to the north and northwest of the central city of Grand Rapids.

Large portions of the City of Grand Rapids remained open for various types of development during the early 1940's. After World War II, however, the industrial and residential development trend was toward suburban locations. The causal factors contributing to the location of industry in the urban fringe area were the continual decrease in suitable vacant land for industrial development within the city, changing industrial space needs requiring single story structures, off-street parking demands, and relatively cheap land in the fringe areas. The direction of industrial growth was to the south and southwest, particularly Wyoming Township.¹⁵ Although the bulk (908,685 sq. ft.) of the industrial building up to 1950 took place within the central city of Grand Rapids, such

¹⁴Howell Gilbert, Jr. Industrial Survey (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Grand Rapids City Planning Commission, 1958).

¹⁵Ibid.

FIGURE 1



NON-AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT 1940

SOURCE: ADAMS AERIAL SURVEY - 1940, GRAND RAPIDS CITY ENGINEER

development was increasing most rapidly in Wyoming Township, followed by Grand Rapids Township, then Paris Township.

Causal factors contributing to the increase in residential development in the urban fringe after World War II included an enormous demand for housing as a result of wartime shortages, decrease in suitable land for residential development (especially large-scale development) within the central city, relatively cheap land in fringe areas, federal mortgage credits making possible inexpensive single-family houses, improved transportation routes and increased mobility, and higher incomes.¹⁶

Commercial development followed the residential development into the urban fringe. Prior to 1950, it spread out from the central city along major thoroughfares, notably Division, Twenty-Eighth, Fulton, and Leonard Streets.

Subdivision platting activity within the four-township fringe area is one indicator of changing land use patterns. Prior to 1950 platting activity was erratic. This activity dropped from a 30-year (1920-1950) high of 88 plat approvals for the five-year period between 1925 and 1930 to a low of no plat approvals during the depression years between 1930 and 1935. Only one subdivision plat (in Grand Rapids Township) was approved between 1935 and 1940. Subdivision plat approval was also negligible during the war years of 1940 to 1945 when only eight plats were approved. After the war, however, platting activity accelerated. Sixteen plats were approved between 1945 and 1950.¹⁷

From 1920 to 1930, the decade of greatest platting activity, 110

¹⁶Cutler, Wisconsin Law Review, I, p. 6.

¹⁷Michigan, Office of the Auditor General, Plat Division, Land platting records, 1974-1963.

subdivision plats were approved. During that period Paris Township led with 39 plat approvals, followed by Grand Rapids Township with 29, Walker Township with 25, and Wyoming Township with 17. Similar land platting patterns were seen during the period of increased activity between 1945 and 1950. Paris Township led with 8 plat approvals, followed by Walker Township with 5, Grand Rapids Township with 2, and Wyoming Township with 1. For the entire 30-year period between 1920 and 1950, Paris Township experienced the greatest platting activity with 49 plats approved, followed by Grand Rapids Township with 33, Walker Township with 31, and Wyoming Township with 22.¹⁸

To accurately illustrate the changing land use patterns in the Grand Rapids urban fringe prior to 1950, the number of plats approved must be supplemented with the quantity and location of land platted. The total gross area platted in the four townships between 1920 and 1950 was 3,234 acres. Quantity of land platted by individual townships during the same period was Paris Township 1,039 acres, Walker Township 1,000 acres, Grand Rapids Township 839 acres, and Wyoming Township, 356 acres. Paris Township had the greatest number of plats approved and the greatest total area of land platted. Although Grand Rapids Township was second in total number of plat approvals, Walker Township was second in total area of land platted.¹⁹

Approximately 66 percent of a total 135 subdivision plats approved during the 30-year period from 1920 to 1950 were for lots within an average size range of from 5,000 to 10,000 sq. ft. Within this size range, lot widths ranged from 42 to 80 feet, the mode being 50 feet. Only 19

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Ibid.

lots of less than 50 feet in width were platted, and these were platted between 1924 and 1927. Four percent of the plats between 1920 and 1950 were for lots within an average size range of from 2,500 to 4,800 sq. ft. Within this size range, lot widths ranged from 25 to 53 feet. The land platted within this small lot range was in Wyoming and Paris Townships and was platted in 1925 and 1926, prior to the 1929 State Plat Act requiring a 40 foot minimum lot width. Eleven percent of the total plats approved were for lots within an average size range of from 10,000 to 15,000 sq. ft. The remaining 19 percent of the subdivision plats between 1920 and 1950 were for lots within an average size range of from 15,000 to 103,000 sq. ft. Within this size range, lot widths were from 50 to 242 sq. ft.²⁰

Changes in Population Settlement Patterns

Land use development patterns over time are reflected to a great extent by rate, quantity, distribution, and direction of population growth within a given area. In the Grand Rapids metropolitan area (as defined by the U. S. Census of Population of 1960), the urban developed land area has increased greatly since World War I. In 1920, 86.2 percent of the total metropolitan population lived in the central city of Grand Rapids. In 1930, 1940, and 1950 the central city population as compared to urban fringe population decreased to 79.5, 76.8, and 71.0 percent, respectively.²¹ By 1960, 57 percent of the total population existed within the City of Grand Rapids. Although the city increased its population

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Grand Rapids Metropolitan Area Study. Final Report (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Grand Rapids Metropolitan Area Study, 1958), p. 1.

by 39,679 or 28.6 percent during the four decades since 1920, the central city's proportion of the total metropolitan area population decreased 27.2 percentage points. The part of the metropolitan area outside the central city grew by 108,597 persons or 52.5 percent for the 40-year period between 1920 and 1960. Hence, the growth of the urban fringe area was 1.8 times the growth within the central city.²²

Of equal importance with the rate and quantity of population growth are the distribution and direction of population growth. The following table shows the population gains from 1940 to 1950 in the seven governmental units in the Grand Rapids metropolitan area.²³

TABLE I. POPULATION BY UNIT, 1940 AND 1950

Unit	1940	1950	Percent Increase
Grand Rapids	164,292	176,515	7.5
East Grand Rapids	4,899	6,403	30.8
Grandville	1,566	2,022	22.5
Grand Rapids Twp.	6,069	9,241	52.3
Paris Twp.	6,414	9,578	49.4
Walker Twp.	6,237	9,028	28.8
Wyoming Twp.	20,396	28,977	42.2

Land Use Controls in the Urban Fringe

Land use planning on a metropolitan basis is frequently suggested as a solution to the problems of urban expansion. Physical patterns, once developed, tend to last for long periods of time unless great amounts of human and physical resources are expended to change them. Land use planning helps to guide policies, plans, and programs for the development

²²U. S. Census of Population: 1960.

²³Metropolitan Grand Rapids Development Association. Population Data: City, Metropolitan Area, County, State, United States - 1940-1950 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Metropolitan Grand Rapids Development Association, 1950).

of adequate circulation systems, traffic control, water and sewer facilities, fire stations, schools, recreation facilities, and residential, commercial and industrial uses. It is obviously necessary to forestall serious problems of incompatible uses, traffic congestion, high maintenance costs for urban services, and development of future slum areas. Rapid land development in the fringe area of Grand Rapids prior to 1951 gave rise to many such problems as a result of a lack of or ineffective application of land use planning and land development controls.

Prior to the adoption of the urban service policy in 1951, there was little formal or official planning cooperation among the various governmental units of the Grand Rapids metropolitan area. Planning coordination was urged by planning consultants, and in the 10-year period from 1942 to 1952, a voluntary, unofficial citizens' group known as the Metropolitan Grand Rapids Planning Association (later called the Metropolitan Grand Rapids Development Association) actively promoted the idea of metropolitan planning coordination and cooperation. As the urban fringe development accelerated in the late 1940's, its attendant problems became increasingly apparent to the general public. The citizens demanded that steps be taken to remedy the situation on a metropolitan level, but little agreement could be reached among the various governmental units. Most planning prior to 1951 was done individually and independently by the separate governmental entities.

There has never been a master plan for the entire Grand Rapids metropolitan area. Hence, no area-wide guide existed for the location or quantity of land to be allocated for the various land uses. Moreover, the City of Grand Rapids was the only independent governmental unit to have a master plan prior to 1950. This master plan was developed in 1923. As a result of the lack of both a regional master plan and individual

master plans, the land use controls enacted by the various units were uncoordinated and lacked purpose and direction.

Many legal controls, such as zoning, subdivision controls, state health codes, and building codes were available prior to 1951 for use by the governmental units under Michigan law to prevent haphazard development and its resultant problems. The governmental units of the Grand Rapids metropolitan area adopted such controls and put them into effect with varying degrees of success. All the units had zoning ordinances. The earliest zoning ordinances were those of Grand Rapids and East Grand Rapids, adopted in the early 1920's. The zoning of the City of Grandville and Wyoming and Paris Townships was established in the 1930's. The two remaining governmental units of Walker and Paris Townships set forth their ordinances in 1939 and 1940, respectively. East Grand Rapids, Grand Rapids, Wyoming Township, Walker Township, and Grand Rapids Township included lot area requirements in their ordinances, but Grandville and Paris Township did not.

The cities of Grand Rapids and East Grand Rapids were the only units to have formally adopted subdivision regulations prior to 1951. The remaining units in the metropolitan area relied upon the lot area requirements of the zoning ordinances and county platting requirements to determine subdivision standards. While townships had been granted the power to review subdivision plats and approve or disapprove of them under the Plat Act of 1929, many of the criteria by which plats were judged within the different townships were set forth by the Kent County Road Commission rather than the township boards.²⁴

²⁴Kenneth Verberg. A Study of the Legal Powers of Michigan Local Governments (East Lansing, Mich.: Institute for Community Development and Services, Michigan State University, 1960), pp. 20-21.

The City of Grand Rapids first adopted a building code in 1924 as a means of achieving higher construction standards which in the long run could help to provide for the maintenance of a better man-made physical environment. The building code was also used by the City of East Grand Rapids and the townships of Walker, Wyoming, and Paris. The building code and zoning ordinances were closely correlated in Walker and Paris Townships and considered together for adoption by the people in 1940 and 1941, respectively.

Land development controls in existence in the Grand Rapids metropolitan area during the two decades between 1930 and 1950 provided minimal development standards to a limited extent. These minimal standards were an indication that the various units considered land use controls important. However, these controls were inadequate and sporadic in their application with little consideration given to their relationship to the total metropolitan area.

Utility Service Extension Practices

An often-used approach to the problem of providing various utility services to an entire metropolitan area is the municipal service contracting plan. There are three variations of this plan, the Lakewood plan by which cities contract with the county for services, the use of the public utility, and the sale of services by the core city to outlying areas.²⁵ The last has been the general means by which water, sewer, and fire protection services were provided to various portions of the fringe area by

²⁵Human Resources Research Center. Community Leaders Conference on Providing Urban Services to the Kalamazoo Community (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Western Michigan University, 1963), pp. 26-28.

the City of Grand Rapids prior to 1951. The Grand Rapids city charter limited city contracts to three years' duration.

Water and sewage disposal rates to users outside the city were based upon formulas involving operation, maintenance, taxes, depreciation, and profit. The formulas were designed to treat the services as utilities owned and operated by the city residents, on which the residents could make a profit as though the services were privately owned.²⁶

Water

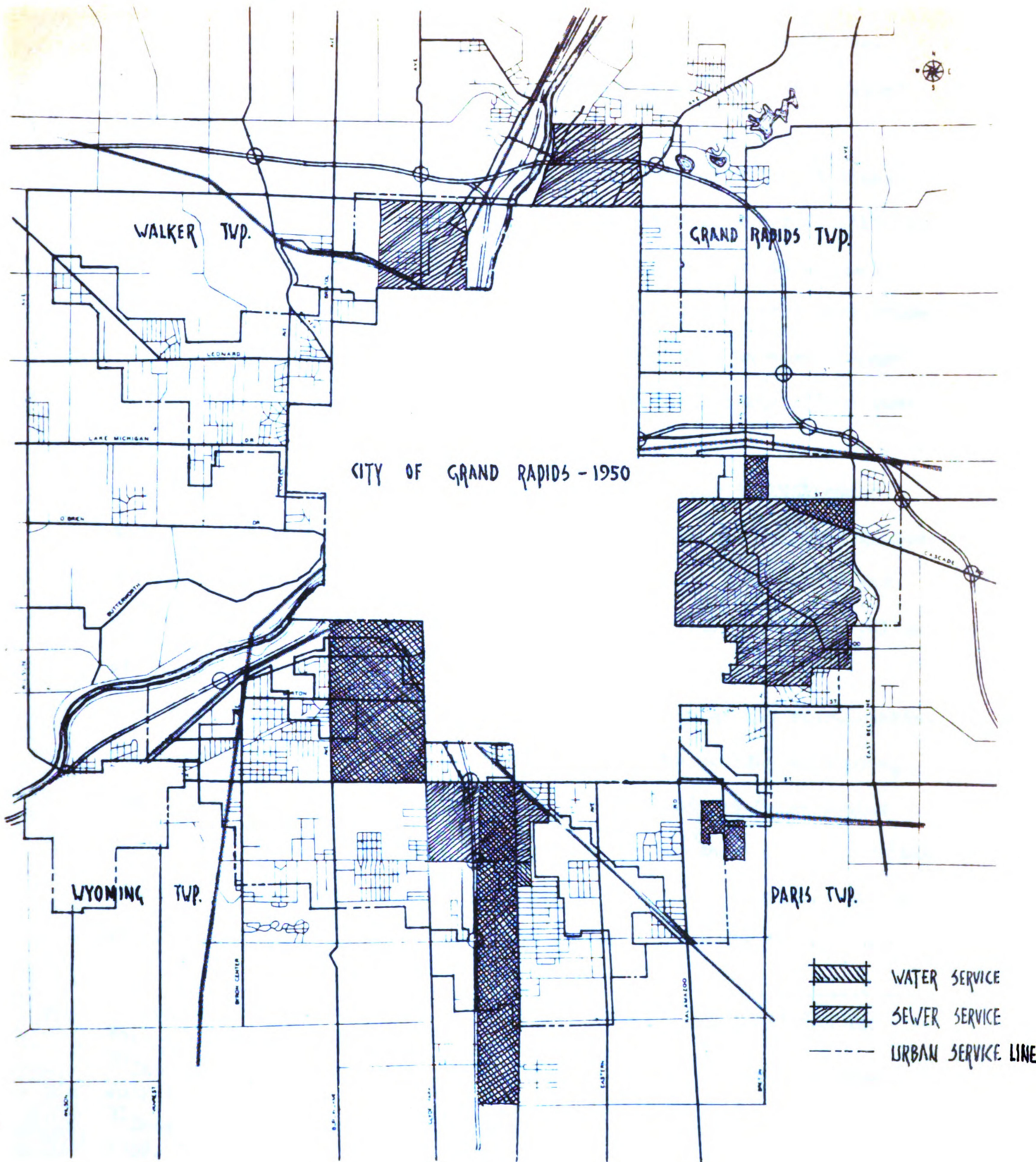
Grand Rapids water is taken from Lake Michigan via a pipeline built in the 1930's. The supply is supplemented by water from the Grand River on peak demand days in the summer. The City of Grand Rapids began selling water to outlying governmental units in 1931, when contracts were made with Wyoming and Grand Rapids Townships. Water service to Walker and Paris Townships began in 1939 and 1940, respectively.²⁷ The franchises with these two units were established for 30 years, but were later contested as violating the three-year limitation and were declared invalid by the Grand Rapids city attorney in 1952.²⁸ Walker and Grand Rapids Townships were the only units which depended solely upon the City of Grand Rapids for public water supply. Wyoming and Paris Townships maintained independent wells and water systems, but depended upon water purchased from Grand Rapids in times of shortage (Figure 2). The cities of Grandville and East Grand Rapids also maintained independent water supply

²⁶Grand Rapids Herald, Oct. 25, 1952.

²⁷Minutes of the Grand Rapids City Commission meeting Jan. 27, 1959, Grand Rapids, Mich. No. 8254.

²⁸Grand Rapids Herald, Oct. 20, 1952.

FIGURE 2



AREAS SERVED BY CITY SERVICES BEFORE 1950

SOURCE: GRAND RAPIDS CITY ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT

systems. The water distribution systems were owned by the individual governmental units and were neither planned, financed, nor constructed on a metropolitan scale.²⁹

Water rates for users outside Grand Rapids were 1.5 to 1.6 times the rates for city residents.^{30,31} In a 1946 report on water facilities, the engineering firm of Consoer, Townsend and Associates stated that the Grand Rapids water rates both for residents and outside users were below the average for cities of comparable size.³² The rates were maintained at the same percentage levels until after the urban service policy came into effect.

A developer desiring a city water extension prior to 1951 could submit a request for a connection to the city system to the Grand Rapids City Commission. If approved, the developer would pay the cost of the connection. However, prior to 1951, the city generally followed a policy of "no extensions without annexation."³³

By 1948 the City of Grand Rapids was well aware of the ever-increasing demand for city water and sewer services by the rapidly developing urban fringe. In August of that year Mayor Welsh and the Grand Rapids City Commission approved appointment of a committee to study the possible establishment of a metropolitan district as a means of supplying the services. The committee contacted representatives of the six fringe area

²⁹"Metropolitan Water Authority Vital to Area," Metropolitan Planner, Vol. IV, Dec. 1947, p. 6.

³⁰Interview with Bernard Smith, Grand Rapids City Planning Commission, July 11, 1963, Grand Rapids, Mich.

³¹Interview with Donald Oakes, Grand Rapids City Manager from 1955-1959, July 19, 1963, Lansing, Mich.

³²Joseph A. Warren, Jr. The Revenue Problem of the City of Grand Rapids, Michigan (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Bureau of Government, University of Michigan, 1947), p. 8.

³³Interview with Scott Bagby, former Director of Grand Rapids City Planning Commission, Jan. 27, 1964, Grand Rapids, Mich.

governmental units and requested brief presentations on each unit's water and sewer problems. Following is a summary of the presentations concerning water service made at the October 13, 1948, meeting of the study committee.³⁴

Paris Township: Two areas seem to be satisfactorily served by the city. The rest of the congested areas need water but do not wish to pay for it. The industries located there need water.

Wyoming Township: Two areas seem to be satisfactorily served by the city. But there is pressing need for expansion and no possibility of agreement with the City with regard to rates. The chief reason why rates to the user would be so high is the necessity of paying debt service on existing mains. Wyoming now has bonded itself to build its own water system, using wells as the source of water....

City of Grandville: Owns its own water system, using wells as a source. The people are satisfied, though the firm of Winters and Crampton want Grand Rapids water as the Grandville water is too hard.

Walker Township: The Lake Michigan Drive area is satisfactorily served by the City. The rest of the township is growing rapidly and many districts need water.

Grand Rapids Township: In the southeast section City water has been satisfactory, but due to rapid growth, pressure is becoming too low. In the North Park area there is an old private water distribution system, and there are wells. Both are not inadequate. There is special need for water for fire protection for the 400 homes. The people who are serviced by City water are uneasy under the brief three year contract.

East Grand Rapids: Owns their own water system with Reeds Lake as a source. The system is good but becoming inadequate for further growth of the community. EGR would like Grand Rapids water under a Metropolitan District Authority.

These comments indicate a degree of dissatisfaction with the Grand Rapids contract arrangements and an area-wide need for improved water service.

³⁴ Minutes of the Metropolitan District Study Committee meeting Oct. 13, 1948, Grand Rapids, Mich.

Sewer

In 1950 the City of Grand Rapids was the only unit in Kent County operating a complete system of sanitary sewage collection, treatment, and disposal.³⁵ The sewage plant was constructed in 1931 after a peremptory order by the State Board of Health to install a modern sewage disposal plant. It was designed to provide primary treatment of 32.5 million gallons a day.³⁶ Between 1931 and 1940, the treatment plant and sewers were periodically improved through bond issues and public works programs. Between 1940 and 1950, however, changes consisted mainly of extensions of the existing system.³⁷

A court decree in 1932 established East Grand Rapids as a partner in the Grand Rapids sewage plant.³⁸ It paid its share of the cost of the original sewage plant in 1931 and the trunk sewer from East Grand Rapids to the plant. It also paid maintenance and depreciation costs and the cost of treatment of its sewage.³⁹

Prior to 1951 the Grand Rapids sewage plant received and treated sewage from the cities of Grand Rapids and East Grand Rapids, the only two units completely served by sanitary sewers, and from the parts of Walker, Paris, Wyoming and Grand Rapids Townships which were served with sanitary sewer systems. The City of Grandville owned its own sewer sys-

³⁵Marquis, p. 29.

³⁶Grand Rapids Metropolitan Area Study. Sanitary Sewage and Storm Water Disposal (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Grand Rapids Metropolitan Area Study, 1958), Report No. 9, p. 1.

³⁷City of Grand Rapids, Mich., Engineering Division. A Study of the Grand Rapids Sewer System, 1958, p. 4.

³⁸Grand Rapids Press, Dec. 14, 1955.

³⁹Grand Rapids Metropolitan Area Study, p. 14.

ten and city septic tank. Sewage in the remaining metropolitan area was disposed of by means of individual septic tank systems.⁴⁰

The sewage rate of \$57.20 per million gallons, established in 1942,⁴¹ was in effect prior to the urban service policy. The bill for sewage treatment, based on metered bulk flow, was paid by each governmental unit receiving service.⁴²

A developer desiring a city sewer extension could submit a request for a connection to the city system to the Grand Rapids City Commission. If approved, the developer would pay the cost of the connection. As with water service extensions, however, the city generally followed the policy of "no extension without annexation."⁴³

As development accelerated in the urban fringe in the late 1940's septic tanks became increasingly unsatisfactory. In large portions of the metropolitan area soils were unsuitable for individual sewage disposal systems⁴⁴ (Figure 3). Many individual systems discharged contaminated fluids onto the surface of the ground, into nearby wells, into county drains, and into streams and rivers. In many sections, homes were built on lots which were too small to accomodate absorption of septic tank fluids.⁴⁵

Following is a summary of the presentations on sewage needs made by representatives of the governmental units of the Grand Rapids urban

⁴⁰Grand Rapids Metropolitan Area Study, p. 1.

⁴¹Grandville Alliance, Feb. 28, 1952.

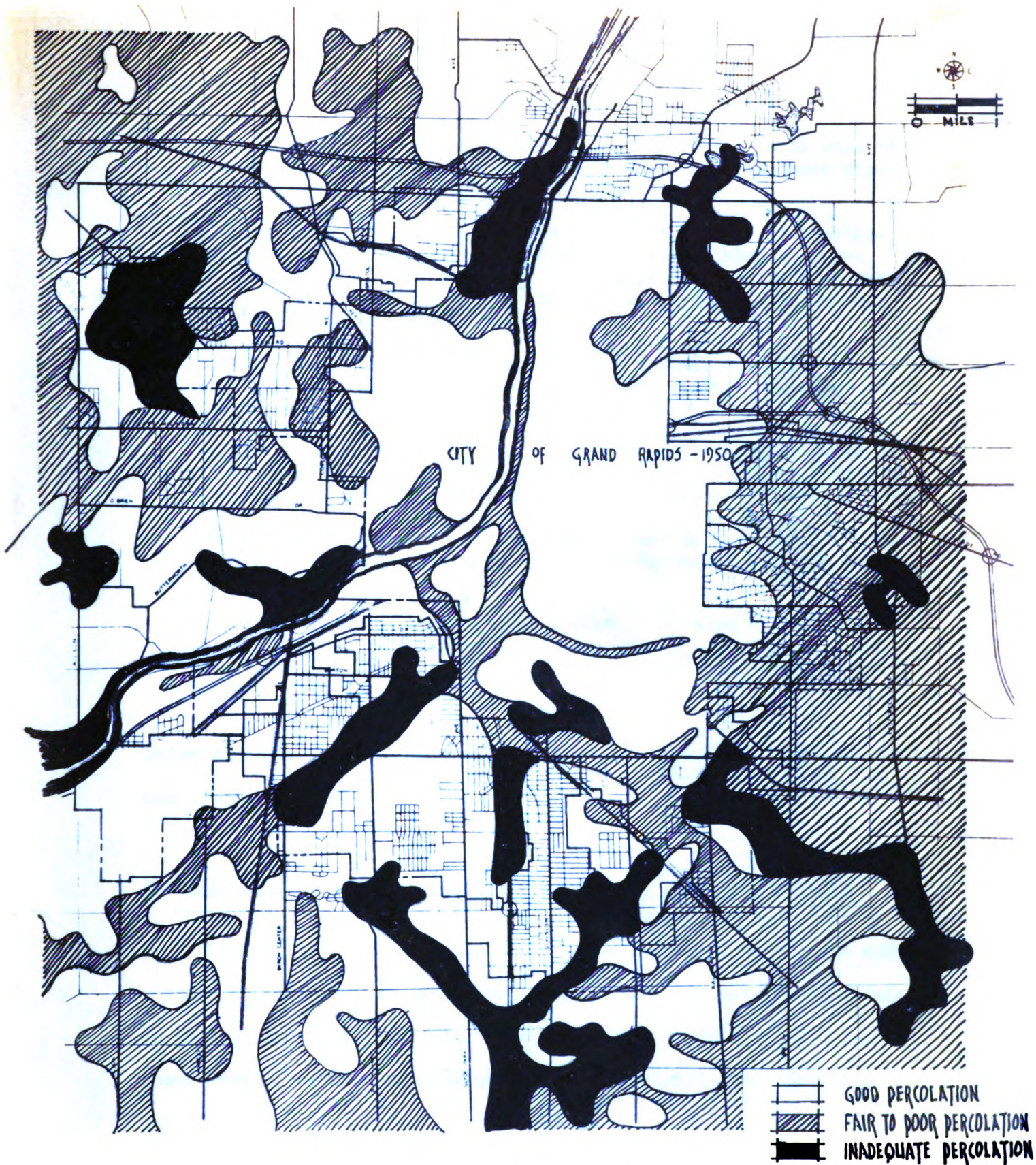
⁴²Grand Rapids Metropolitan Area Study, p. 14.

⁴³Interview with Scott Bagby, Jan. 27, 1964.

⁴⁴Marquis, p. 24.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 27.

FIGURE 3



GENERALIZED SOIL PERCOLATION MAP

SOURCE: STEWART MARQUIS, THE NEED FOR COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING IN KENT CTY. MICH.

fringe at the October 13, 1948, meeting of the Metropolitan District Study Committee.⁴⁶

Paris Township: Sewage service exists only on the north side of the airport and around the County Infirmary. Even in these districts the seepage and drainage is bad.

Wyoming Township: Sewage service, where it exists, is unsatisfactory. The mains, built by the WPA, admit too much seepage. Because of this, the City rates for sewage disposal service were too high for Wyoming residents to pay, so they now dump their raw sewage into Plaster Creek.

City of Grandville: Owns its own sewer system, which is apparently adequate, with a secondary treatment plant where it is dumped into the Grand River.

Walker Township: All but a small area on Lake Michigan Drive and the Haskelite Plant (both served by the City) are in need of both drainage and sanitary sewer systems. The areas are growing rapidly.

Grand Rapids Township: All sections appear to have satisfactory sewage service from the City except the Mayfair area which does not drain properly.

City of East Grand Rapids: Has satisfactory service through the City. There is one problem area where part of the City of Grand Rapids drains into East Grand Rapids and thus increases the East Grand Rapids sewage costs.

These comments indicate an area-wide need for improved sewage collection and treatment facilities.

Evolution of the Declaration of Policy and the Urban Service Line

The utility service problem in the Grand Rapids urban fringe had reached serious proportions by 1948. Mayor Welch of Grand Rapids stated in July of that year that "the present means of providing water and sewer service on the metropolitan level is limited and not definite

⁴⁶ Minutes of the Metropolitan District Study Committee meeting Oct. 13, 1948, Grand Rapids, Mich.

enough."⁴⁷ The metropolitan district plan of providing services on a metropolitan level was the first area-wide solution proposed. It was suggested and promoted by the Metropolitan Grand Rapids Planning Association and was studied by the mayor's Metropolitan District Study Committee from August to December of 1948. City officials objected to the plan on the grounds that (1) the city would lose control of its already established waterworks and sewage facilities to other units⁴⁸ and (2) under a charter commission, provided for by state law for the administration of metropolitan districts, the city would have only three of the nine members and proper weight would not be given to the interests of Grand Rapids residents.⁴⁹ The Metropolitan District Study Committee finally rejected the plan because it would "result in the setting up of one or several new authorities in addition to our present governmental units" and because there were "a number of obstacles in the way of effectuating the metropolitan plan, such as the setting up of a charter commission, possible constitutional revision, and majority voter approval in each of the areas involved."⁵⁰

The committee recommended an alternative plan for the provision of water and sewer services on the metropolitan level. Under the provisions of Act No. 342 of the Public Acts of 1939, the County Board of Supervisors is authorized to acquire, construct, maintain, and operate water, sewer, and sewage disposal systems within or between cities, villages,

⁴⁷Grand Rapids Press, July 14, 1948.

⁴⁸Ibid., July 19, 1948.

⁴⁹Ibid., Aug. 6, 1948.

⁵⁰Metropolitan District Study Committee. Final report to Mayor and City Commission of Grand Rapids, Mich., Dec. 17, 1948, p. 3.

and townships. The county would contract with the City of Grand Rapids for water and sewer services for all the surrounding cities, villages and townships. The committee believed that this plan, utilizing an already existing governmental unit, would circumvent most of the difficulties of the metropolitan district plan.⁵¹

Although the Grand Rapids City Commission, the Metropolitan Grand Rapids Development Association, and county and township officials indicated approval of this plan, no action was taken on it by the Kent County Board of Supervisors, the body that had to act to put the plan into effect.⁵² The supervisors felt they could not act until the townships knew what the City of Grand Rapids intended to do about expanding water and sewage facilities. City officials felt they would not know how much to expand the facilities until the amount of outside demand was determined.⁵³

Because the City of Grand Rapids could not economically plan waterworks and sewage plant expansion without knowing how big the market area would be, where it would be, and what its service requirements would be, the city commission indicated in 1951 that the city faced an economic necessity of setting up a service area limit around the city.⁵⁴ This need gave impetus to the development of the urban service policy by Scott Bagby, Grand Rapids City Planning Director, and the City Planning Commission.

The development of the urban service policy was also influenced by the "Working Plan" adopted in 1950 by the Grand Rapids City Planning Com-

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Grand Rapids Press, April 16, 1949.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Ibid., March 12 and 13, 1951.

mission. This plan indicated that future development and prosperity of the Grand Rapids area depended upon solving two basic problems, first, incipient blight in the central city and, second, uncontrolled spread development in the outskirts of the urban area resulting in wasteful demands for urban services.⁵⁵ As a solution to the latter problem, the "Working Plan" suggested the establishment of an urban service district.

As a first step in creating an urban service policy, the Grand Rapids City Planning Commission studied the type, value, and density of all existing development in the entire metropolitan area and probable future land needs for the 60,000 population growth anticipated in the next 20 to 30 years. Developable areas adjacent to areas which would have to be served in any case were checked and their feasibility for development discussed with the Federal Housing Authority, mortgage and banking concerns, and the local governments involved.⁵⁶

After completion of the basic studies, the Planning Commission wrote a tentative urban service policy calling for (1) a definite service line beyond which the city would not extend water or sewage service; (2) uniform township zoning beyond this line calling for larger lots; (3) uniform subdivision regulations which would require minimum lot areas per family, with the minimum varying according to whether the lot is provided with both, either, or neither water and sewage service, and (4) submission of all subdivision plats to the Service Committee of the City of Grand Rapids prior to official approval (Appendix I).⁵⁷ The City of Grand

⁵⁵Grand Rapids City Planning Commission. "Area Planning Can Be Accomplished" and "The Urban Service Policy." (In the files of the Commission.)

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Ibid.

Rapids used this policy as a temporary guide for the extension of water and sewer services until August 31, 1951.⁵⁸

Once the tentative urban service policy had been written, the City Planning Commission appointed a special Urban Service and Subdivision Committee composed of representatives of the City of Grand Rapids, the townships of Walker, Paris, Wyoming, and Grand Rapids, and the Metropolitan Grand Rapids Development Association to study the policy and submit recommendations which would lead to agreement on a final, uniform declaration of policy. The committee in turn named subcommittees to analyze and evaluate the particular points called for in the declaration.⁵⁹

Subcommittees were named on township planning and subdivision regulations. They each suggested revisions in the subdivision regulations proposed by the City Planning Commission and submitted a consolidated report stating their conclusions to the Urban Service and Subdivision Committee in May of 1951 (Appendix II). The conclusions, which had been unanimously approved and adopted by the majority of the members of the township boards of Walker, Wyoming, Paris, and Grand Rapids Townships,⁶⁰ were unanimously adopted by the Urban Service and Subdivision Committee as an expression of their thinking to the Grand Rapids City Planning Commission.⁶¹ The Planning Commission then drew up a finalized form of the declaration of policy which was submitted to the Urban Service and Subdivision Committee for approval. The committee made deletions and

⁵⁸Minutes of the Grand Rapids City Commission meeting July 9, 1951, Grand Rapids, Mich. No. 94059.

⁵⁹Minutes of the Urban Service and Subdivision Committee meeting May 23, 1951, Grand Rapids, Mich.

⁶⁰Consolidated report of the Township Planning Committee and Technical Committee to the Urban Service and Subdivision Committee meeting July 25, 1951, Grand Rapids, Mich.

⁶¹Minutes of the Urban Service and Subdivision Committee meeting July 25, 1951, Grand Rapids, Mich.

corrections (see Appendix I) and carried a motion to submit the revised declaration of policy to the township boards and the Grand Rapids City Commission.⁶² The Townships of Paris, Grand Rapids, and Wyoming formally adopted the declaration. Walker Township first only approved the general principles, but later formally adopted the declaration.⁶³ The City of Grand Rapids never formally adopted the declaration of policy.⁶⁴⁻⁶⁶

Another subcommittee of the Urban Service and Subdivision Committee was appointed to determine the specific urban service line boundaries. It was composed of representatives from the City of Grand Rapids, Grandville, East Grand Rapids, the four surrounding townships, and professional engineers.⁶⁷ The urban service boundary line was to be considered in light of (1) how much land would be needed for residential and industrial use, (2) where land would be located in relation to existing small lot residential development, (3) the fact that small lot development, unless properly located, would be an economic loss, particularly to the townships, and (4) relationship to existing industrial areas.⁶⁸ The Planning Commission prepared a tentative urban service line as a possible guide to the establishment of the final line, and each of the governmental units drew up its own service line. The lines proposed by the individual units were then presented and discussed by the full Service Line Committee. A final Urban Service and Subdivision Committee meeting was held October 24, 1951, at

⁶²Ibid., Aug. 22, 1951.

⁶³Minutes of Urban Service Line Committee meeting Sept. 20, 1951, Grand Rapids, Mich.

⁶⁴Interview with Keith Honey, former Director of Grand Rapids City Planning Commission, June 28, 1963, Lansing, Mich.

⁶⁵Interview with Donald Oakes.

⁶⁶Grand Rapids Press, June 20, 1958

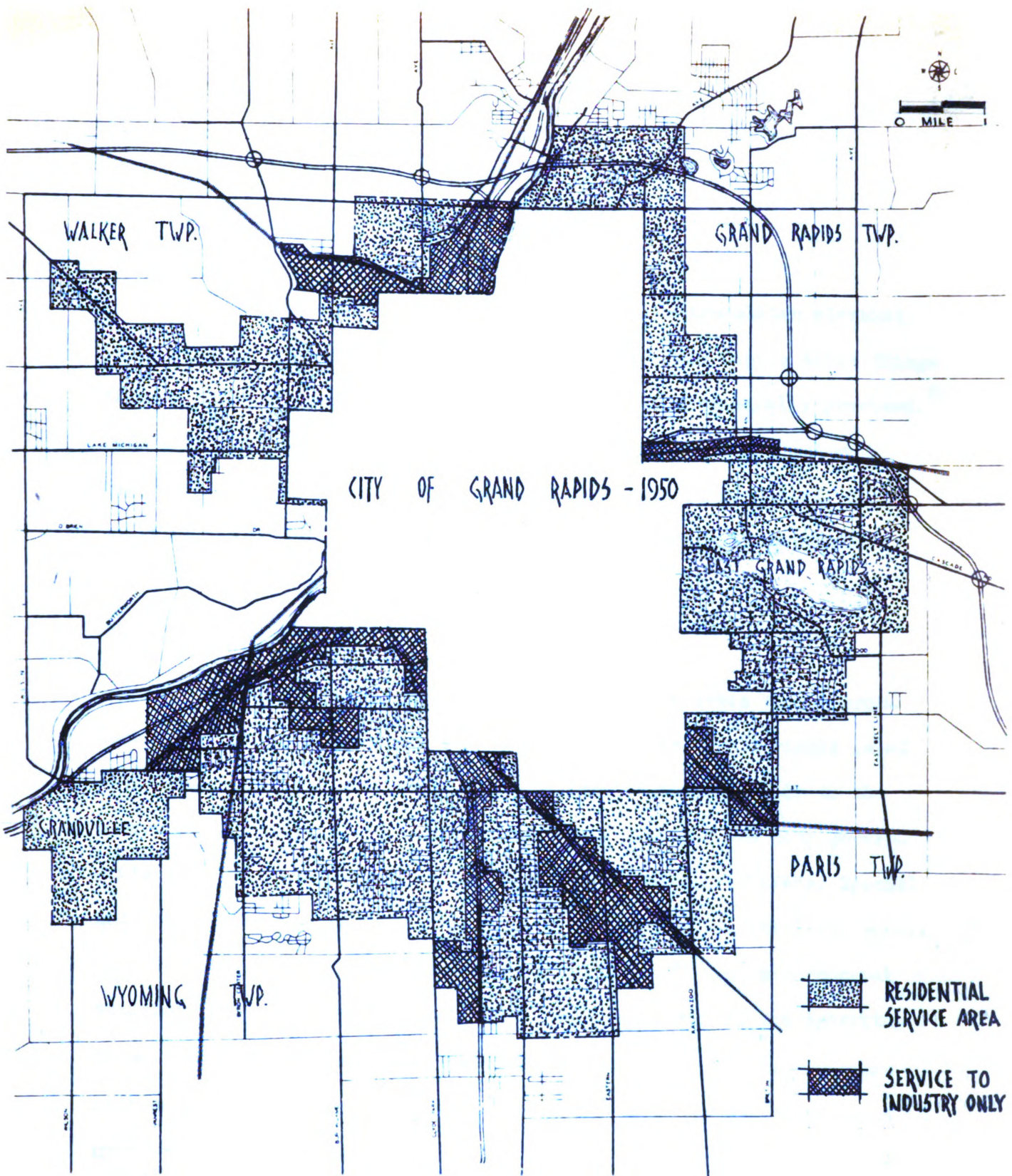
⁶⁷Minutes of Urban Service Line Committee meeting Sept. 20, 1951.

⁶⁸Ibid.

which time the final urban service line was presented and agreed upon by all participants (Figure 4).⁶⁹

⁶⁹Minutes of Urban Service and Subdivision Committee meeting Oct. 24, 1951, Grand Rapids, Mich.

FIGURE 4



URBAN SERVICE AREA

SOURCE : GRAND RAPIDS CITY ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT

CHAPTER II

THE URBAN SERVICE POLICY

The urban service policy was conceived as a metropolitan planning instrument to insure orderly development of the Grand Rapids urban fringe area so that city services to the fringe could be economically provided.⁷⁰ Before its effectiveness can be determined, it must be analyzed with regard to its legal basis, the premises upon which it was based, the goals it was intended to achieve, and the way in which it operated.

Legal Basis of the Urban Service Policy

One of the major hindrances to the solution of urban fringe problems is the fact that metropolitan areas do not constitute single legal entities. Hence, the provisions of state constitutions pertain to the powers of the state and the county, township, village, and city governments within it, and do not encompass entire metropolitan areas. Special metropolitan area-wide authorities can be created by the state for specific purposes, but these, rather than supplanting existing governmental entities, are superimposed upon them.⁷¹ Moreover, many of the constitutional provisions relating to the various governments and their powers lack connotations which would make them significant in the formulation

⁷⁰ Scott Bagby, "Urban Service District Policy Aids Planned Area Development," The American City, LXVI, Dec. 1951, p. 86.

⁷¹ Charles W. Barr. Planning the Countryside (East Lansing, Mich.: Michigan State College Press, 1950), p. 15.

of legislation on metropolitan area problems.⁷² Express and implied constitutional limitations are the framework within which any governmental activity for the solution of metropolitan problems must work.⁷³

It is basic legal doctrine that cities can exercise only those powers granted them by state constitutions and that those powers may be exercised only within the corporate limits of the city unless specifically granted for extraterritorial use.⁷⁴ The Michigan constitution of 1908 gave the legislature power to prescribe how any city or village might sell or deliver water outside its corporate limits. Act 34 of 1917, as amended,⁷⁵ authorized municipal corporations to furnish water, fix rates, enforce collection, and construct water mains through highways outside their territorial limits. This act also authorized contracts for water with other cities, villages, or townships having the authority to provide a water supply for their inhabitants. Act 47, 1941,⁷⁶ authorized the township to contract with municipalities for the provision of water for domestic and fire protection service. In 1951 the authority for cities to contract for sewage services outside their corporate limits was found in Act 316 of 1931, section 5.2714, as amended.⁷⁷ Act 129 of 1943⁷⁸ as amended authorized contracts between political subdivisions relative to systems of sewers and sewage disposal and to validate existing contracts of such nature.

⁷²John M. Winters. State Constitutional Limitations on Solutions to Metropolitan Area Problems (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Legislative Research Center, University of Michigan Law School, 1961), p. 2.

⁷³Ibid., p. 1.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 4.

⁷⁵Michigan, Revised Statutes Annotated (Rice, 1959), Vol. 4A, p. 188.

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 191.

⁷⁷Ibid.

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 245.

The power of a governmental unit to enter into voluntary cooperative agreements is a ramification of its power to enter into contracts. When immediate solutions to fringe area problems must be found in the face of legal or political obstacles, voluntary cooperation between governmental units may be the most feasible solution. This particular solution lends itself well to the provision of urban services by the central city to the urban fringe for two reasons. First, it permits the maximization of physical and human resources by the elimination of the duplication of effort and services which can often be more readily provided by a single agency or facility. Second, it permits the coordination and planning of the metropolitan area as a single entity while acknowledging the autonomy of existing governmental units.

The urban service policy was a voluntary cooperative agreement. It did not constitute a contract or franchise for services with other governmental units, nor did it alter the city's existing contracts and franchises for services to other units (see Appendix I, IV). It was a statement of the conditions under which the city would extend these services to new areas of the surrounding governmental units. The policy in itself did not have the force of law as an instrument of land use control. The township boards could not legally delegate authority to the Grand Rapids City Planning Commission to approve or disapprove subdivision plats.⁷⁹ The policy was a means of achieving agreement between the city and the fringe area townships as to the specific land development regulations needed. The power to enter into such agreements is inherent in a city's ability to extend services for collaborative purposes.⁸⁰ On the basis of

⁷⁹Minutes of Urban Service and Subdivision Committee meeting June 6, 1951, Grand Rapids, Mich.

⁸⁰Telephone conversation with John Damon, former Assistant City Attorney of Grand Rapids, Mich., Jan. 10, 1964.

this agreement, the regulations called for were incorporated into the zoning ordinances of Grand Rapids,⁸¹ Wyoming,⁸² Paris,⁸³ and Walker⁸⁴ Townships. The urban service policy did not, however, obligate the City of Grand Rapids to provide service extensions even though the regulations might be complied with. The Declaration of Policy stated that the city would provide the services "within the limits of its ability and consistent with its obligations to its residents" if the standards were legally in effect and complied with. Although the Declaration of Policy was never formally adopted by the Grand Rapids City Commission, it was used as the city's policy for extension of services to the fringe area from 1951 to 1959.

Premises and Goals of the Urban Service Policy

The underlying goal of the urban service policy was to maintain the health, safety, and general welfare of the inhabitants of Grand Rapids and the governmental units of its urban fringe. The Grand Rapids City Planning Commission, which framed the urban service policy, believed that the city and adjoining townships together constituted one metropolitan area and that conditions affecting the health, safety, and general welfare of one part of the community similarly affected the entire community. (see Appendix I, 1). The Planning Commission also believed that the townships were steadily increasing in population and residential development and for that reason the health and welfare of the inhabitants required

⁸¹Minutes of the Grand Rapids City Commission meeting Oct. 15, 1951.

⁸²Ibid., Oct. 22, 1951.

⁸³Ibid., Oct. 29, 1951.

⁸⁴Ibid., Feb. 18, 1952.

water service and sanitary methods of sewage disposal (see Appendix I, 2). Assuming that the City of Grand Rapids, because of its existing facilities and contracts, was the logical unit to provide such services, the Planning Commission's goal was to devise means by which this could be accomplished economically (see Appendix I, 3 and 4). The means are set forth in the first two resolutions of the Declaration of Policy (see Appendix I, I and II).

It was assumed that annexation to the city would not be a feasible means.⁸⁵ Therefore, the first resolution was for the establishment of a service area, "in scale with the needs of the metropolitan community based upon the amount of residential land needed to serve a reasonable metropolitan population growth for the next 20 to 30 years," outside of which the city would not extend services. It was assumed that since "80 percent of the future suburban fringe development would be done by developers who would prefer to have city services,"⁸⁶ development would be most likely to occur within, rather than outside of, the service area. Consequently, the development would be in a location economically accessible to the city services. Widely scattered development, which the City Planning Commission believed to be uneconomical for the provision of city services, would be kept to a minimum.

The second resolution was for the establishment of uniform minimum township subdivision regulations calling for (1) a minimum lot width of 50 feet on the building or setback line and a lot area of not less than 6,000 sq. ft. for future residential subdivisions served with both public water and sewer, (2) a minimum width of 60 feet at the building or set-

⁸⁵Grand Rapids City Planning Commission, "Area Planning Can Be Accomplished."

⁸⁶Ibid.

back line, a minimum lot area of 7,500 sq. ft., and an average lot area of not less than 8,000 sq. ft. for lots in future residential subdivisions served with public water but not sewer, and (3) a minimum lot width of 70 feet on the building or setback line and minimum lot area of 10,000 sq. ft. for future residential subdivisions served with neither public water or public sewer. The City Planning Commission believed that these regulations would prevent small-lot development which it considered a cause of congestion and overcrowding, as well as a health hazard when services are not provided. The regulations were intended to be an incentive for development to occur within the service area because a developer could offer more desirable lots to buyers by providing public water sewer services, and because a developer could get more lots per subdivision within the service area where public services could be provided than he would get outside where absence of public services would mean larger lots were required.

The Operation of the Urban Service Policy -- 1951-1959

General Administrative Procedure

The administrative framework for implementation of the urban service policy was similar to the plat approval procedure of the townships. A plat was first sent to the township board for approval or disapproval. If approved, it was then forwarded to the Kent County Road Commission and the State Auditor General. Although the City of Grand Rapids did not have the right to approve or disapprove subdivision plats outside its legal boundaries, the Declaration of Policy required that "there shall be submitted to the City of Grand Rapids, a copy of each plat submitted

to the Township for approval" (see Appendix I, III). A plat was therefore submitted to the Grand Rapids City Commission's Service Committee, which in turn sent it to the Grand Rapids City Planning Director and City Engineer. They determined whether or not it complied with the provisions of the urban service policy, recommended it approved, conditionally approved, or disapproved accordingly, and sent it back through the Public Service Director to the Service Committee. The committee reported the plat to the Grand Rapids City Commission which approved, conditionally approved, or disapproved it according to the recommendations of the City Planning Director and City Engineer. The resolutions used for this purpose stated:⁸⁷

The City Engineer and the Planning Director have approved (disapproved) _____ Plat, which complies (fails to comply) with the requirements of the Urban Service Policy and recommend that the proposed plat be approved (disapproved).

If a plat failed to comply with the requirements of the urban service policy, it was disapproved by the City Commission. It could, however, be approved on condition that water or sewer service or both be installed, thus putting the platted lot sizes in the proper category as provided in the lot size regulations set forth in the Declaration of Policy. For example, if a plat were submitted for a subdivision in which the average lot area was not less than 8,000 sq. ft., the minimum lot area not less than 7,500 sq. ft., and the minimum lot width not less than 60 feet, but for which no public services were indicated, the City Commission could approve the plat on condition that public sewer service be provided.⁸⁸

Approval of the subdivision plat as complying with the requirements

⁸⁷Minutes of Grand Rapids City Commission meeting Jan. 27, 1951, No. 8254.

⁸⁸Ibid., June 5, 1956 and April 9, 1959.

of the urban service policy by the Grand Rapids Planning Director and City Engineer did not guarantee that such extension would be carried out. It was the option of the City Commission's Service Committee to determine whether or not the extension was within the limits of the city's ability and consistent with its obligations to its residents (see Appendix I, III). For example, there were many instances in 1958 and 1959 when a plat would be approved by the Planning Director and City Engineer. The Service Committee would then report to the City Commission recommending approval but stating that the city was not willing to extend services at that time, and the City Commission would approve the Service Committee's report.⁸⁹

Once a plat had been approved by the City Commission, the developer submitted a request for service extension together with proof of funds sufficient to cover the cost of the extension to the Commission. This in turn was approved or disapproved.⁹⁰

Financing Service Extensions in the Urban Service Area

The provision of water and sewer is often the most expensive service maintained by a governmental unit. As a result, a central city furnishing these services to the fringe area is concerned over extension policies which could create an undue economic burden upon its residents. This economic burden is the dilemma created in part by increasing municipal service costs in relation to a stable or decreasing economic base of a city which has a property tax as its primary source of revenue. The reasons suggested for the increase in service costs are the demand for more

⁸⁹Ibid., May 5, 1958 - May 4, 1959 and May 4, 1959 - May 2, 1960.

⁹⁰Interview with Keith Honey.

and better services, the central city bearing costs of providing facilities and services to a total region without receiving commensurate revenue contributions, rapid increases of expenditures due to mass population migration, changing living patterns, and technological advances such as mass production of housing.⁹¹ The urban service policy was intended to keep the economic burden upon the City of Grand Rapids to a minimum by encouraging development to occur within an area accessible to city service extensions.

Once a plat had been approved under the urban service policy, a developer was required to submit a request for installation of service to the Grand Rapids City Commission along with proof of funds sufficient to cover the total cost of the installation or connection of water or sewer services. The amount was determined by the Public Service Director. Thus the actual extension to the new development was paid for by the developer, rather than by the city or township in which the subdivision was located. Construction and maintenance were carried out by the City of Grand Rapids.

The costs to the City of Grand Rapids increased, however, as the number of new users increased and put heavier demands upon water and sewage plant facilities and sewer trunk lines. The financing of larger trunk lines could be achieved by two methods. One was to establish an agreement with the township whereby the benefitting area could finance the cost of additional trunk sewer capacity in addition to the cost of the installation of the local sewer. The other was financing by the city from sewage disposal funds as they became available in anticipation of

⁹¹Ruth L. Mace. Municipal Cost-Revenue Research in the United States (Chapel Hill, N. C.: Institute of Government, University of North Carolina, 1961).

additional revenues from added areas served.⁹² Additions to water and sewage disposal plant facilities could either be paid for in anticipation of additional revenues from added areas served or by bond issues after a referendum.

⁹²City of Grand Rapids, Mich.; Engineering Division. A Study of the Grand Rapids Sewer System (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Department of Public Service, 1958), p. 6.

CHAPTER III

THE URBAN FRINGE FROM 1950 TO 1960

As a basis for the evaluation of the urban service policy, it is necessary to examine the period during which it was in effect for purposes of comparison with the decade prior to its enactment. The effect of the urban service policy on urban fringe conditions, as well as the effect of urban fringe conditions upon the urban service policy, can then be analyzed.

Land Use Development

Changing Land Use Patterns

The ecological pressures affecting the entire Grand Rapids metropolitan area become statistically evident when the U. S. Census of 1950 is compared with the Census of 1960. During the decade between 1950 and 1960 the use of land for agricultural purposes and the number of farms continued to decrease in Kent County. The lands converted into non-agricultural use, while a relatively small proportion of the total area of the county, were generally large portions of the Grand Rapids urban fringe, lands along major highways, and lakefront areas. Between 1950 and 1960 about 16 sq. mi. were changed to non-farm use in the cities and townships of the Grand Rapids urban fringe.⁹³ In 1960 between 50 and 60 percent of

⁹³Marquis, p. 22.

the total area of the four townships surrounding Grand Rapids was in non-farm use.⁹⁴ Land use development within the fringe area took the form of a filling-in of buildable open space near Grand Rapids between the existing developed areas which generally bordered the major access routes to the central city (Figure 5). The factors which had caused the trend for development in the late 1940's to occur in the fringe rather than in the central city continued to operate between 1950 and 1960, but at an accelerated pace.

Approximately 81 percent of the total number of dwelling units in Kent County in 1960 were located within the four cities of Grand Rapids, East Grand Rapids, Grandville, and Wyoming (incorporated in 1959), and the three townships of Grand Rapids, Paris, and Walker.⁹⁵ Fourteen percent were in the three townships and 67 percent were in the four cities.

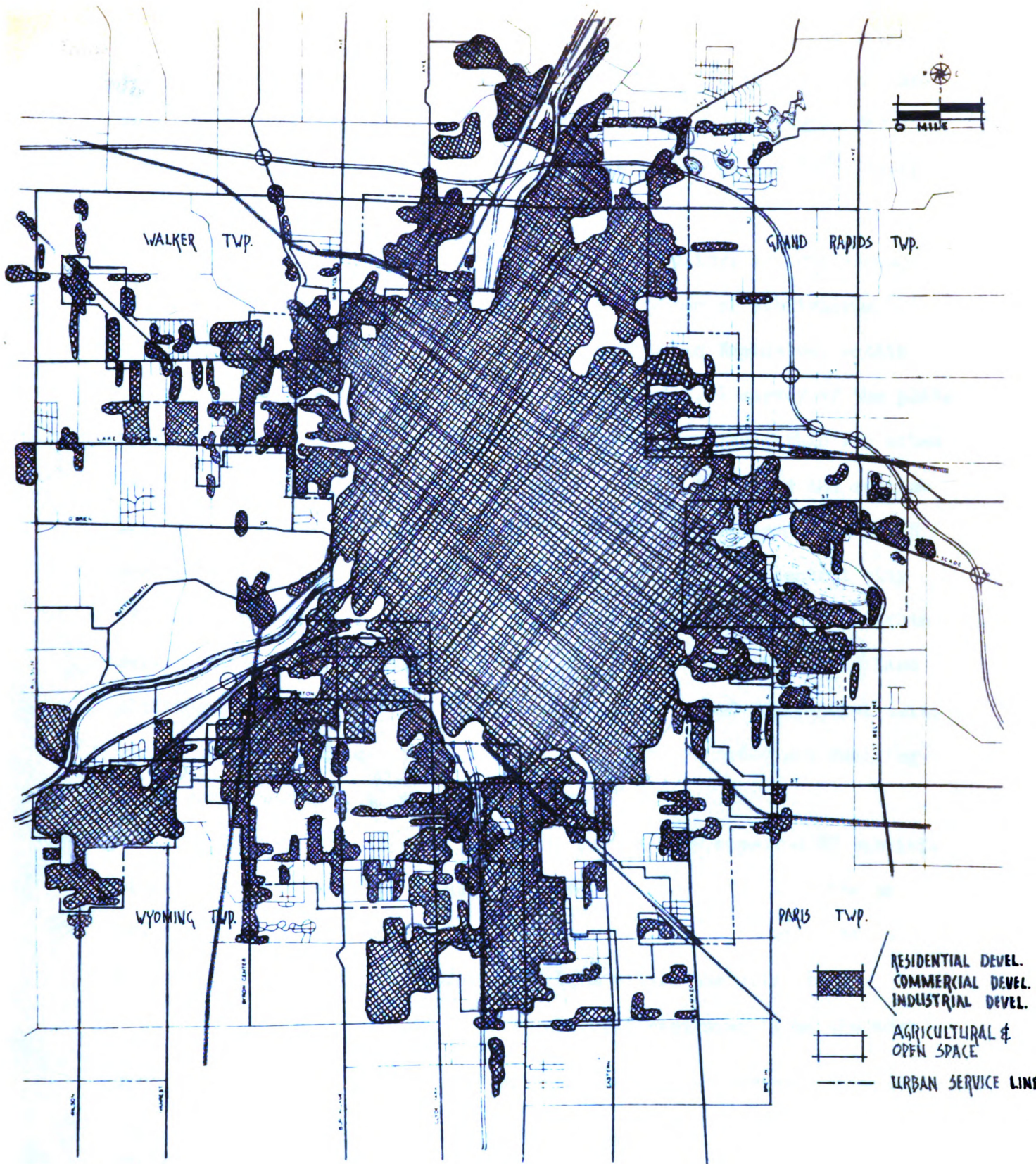
Residential subdivision platting activity in the fringe area during the nine-year period from 1951 through 1959 reached an all-time high with 345 plats approved under the urban service policy.⁹⁶ Subdivision plat approvals for the four townships during that period totaled 102 for Wyoming Township, 81 for Paris Township, 46 for Walker Township, and 49 for Grand Rapids Township. In total gross land area platted, Walker Township led with 970 acres, followed by Paris Township with 903 acres, Wyoming Township with 809 acres, and Grand Rapids Township with 514 acres.⁹⁷ Thus, while platting activity in terms of number of plats was greatest to the southwest and southeast of Grand Rapids, platting activity in terms of

⁹⁵Ibid., p. 20.

⁹⁶Grand Rapids City Planning Commission, Annual Report 1958 and Annual Report 1959 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Grand Rapids City Planning Commission, 1958 and 1959).

⁹⁷Ibid., supplemented with platting records from Office of Auditor General, Plat Division, for 1957-1957..

FIGURE 5



NON-AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT 1956

SOURCE: ABRAMS AERIAL SURVEY - 1956, GRAND RAPIDS ENGINEERING DEPT.

acres platted was greatest to the northwest and southeast of the city. A comparison of the total gross area platted from 1940 to 1950 with the with the total from 1950 to 1960 shows that in the former period 242 acres were platted as opposed to 3,196 in the latter period^{98,99} (Table II).

During the nine years of the urban service policy, an interesting locational pattern was evidenced in the total number of subdivision plats approved outside the corporate limits of Grand Rapids but within the four-township area surrounding the central city. A survey of the plats approved indicated approximately 47 percent were located within the urban service area, 42 percent outside the urban service line, and the remaining 11 percent were divided by the urban service line. Approximately 85 percent of these plats lay within a $1\frac{1}{2}$ mile radius of the central city (Figure 6). In terms of area, 1,753 acres were platted outside the urban service line and 1,443 were platted within the line. Supplementing land platting activities with actual construction records of residential units during the period from 1951 through 1959, a total of 8,600 new dwelling units were begun in the metropolitan area.¹⁰⁰

The City of Grand Rapids from 1951 through 1959 approved 67 subdivisions within its corporate limits totaling 517 acres. The city had no new subdivisions recorded during 1958.¹⁰¹ This absence of activity reflects the lack of vacant, undeveloped land within the city limits.

Water supply, sewers, and sewage disposal continued to be the most

⁹⁸Ibid.

⁹⁹Michigan, Office of the Auditor General, Plat Division, land platting records from 1940-1950.

¹⁰⁰Grand Rapids City Planning Commission, Annual Report 1958.

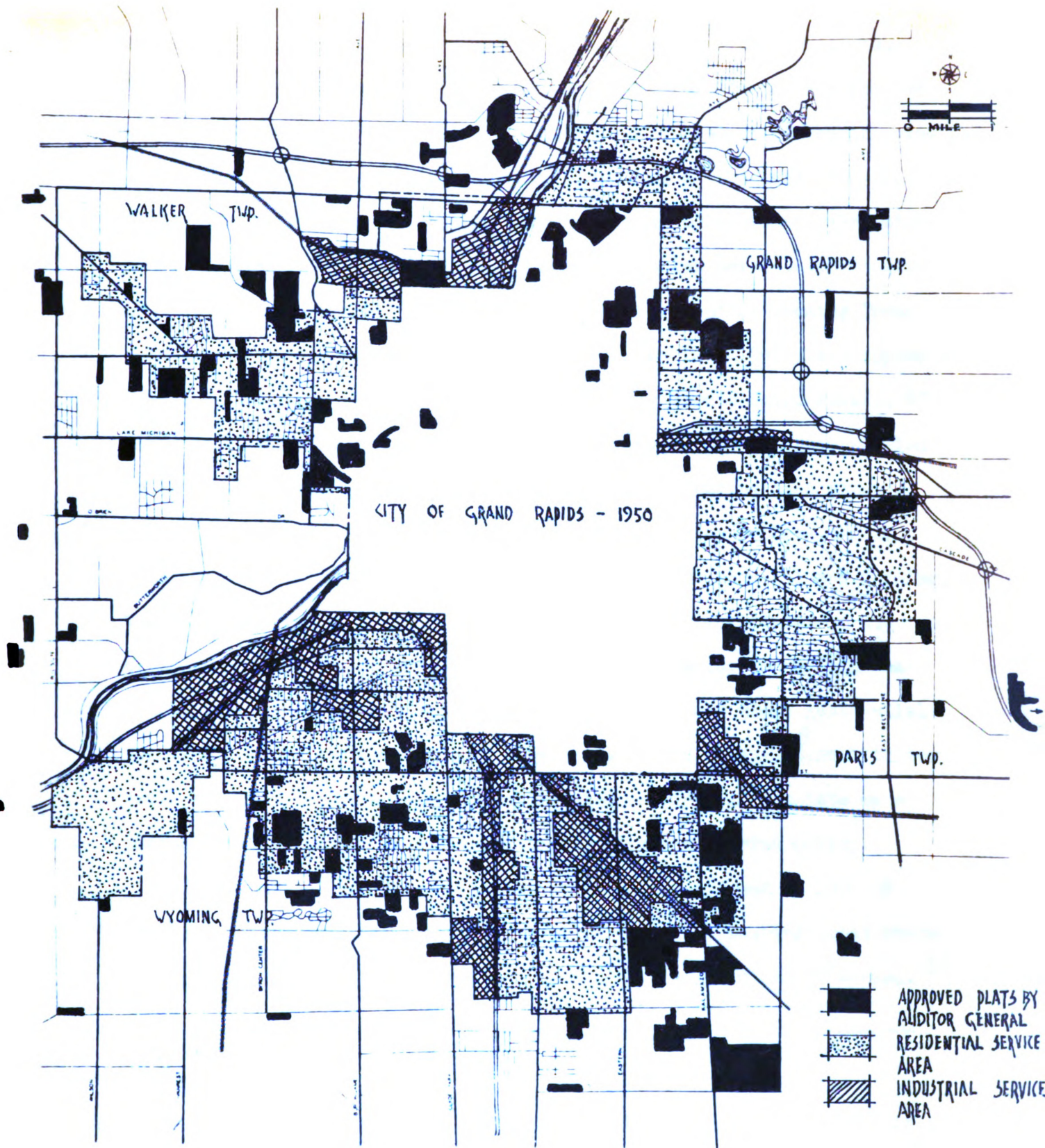
¹⁰¹Ibid.

TABLE II. LAND PLATTING ACTIVITY 1920-1960

	Number of Plats Approved				Number of Lots Within Approved Plats				Total Acres Platted			
	1920-1929	1930-1939	1940-1949	1950-1959	1920-1929	1930-1939	1940-1949	1950-1959	1920-1929	1930-1939	1940-1949	1950-1959
City of Grand Rapids	--	--	--	67*	--	--	--	1,894*	--	--	--	518*
East Grand Rapids	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Grandville	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Wyoming Township	16	0	6	102	1,480	0	143	3,828	325	0	31	809
Walker Township	28	0	6	46	3,307	0	140	872	907	0	92	970
Paris Township	41	0	9	81	3,237	0	206	2,337	979	0	60	903
Grand Rapids Township	26	1	3	49	2,334	11	63	1,057	777	3	59	514
Total	111	1	24	298	10,358	11	552	8,094	2,988	3	242	3,196

*Not included in total.

FIGURE 6



SUBDIVISION PLATTING ACTIVITY 1951-1959

SOURCE: GRAND RAPIDS CITY PLAN COM. ANNUAL REPORT, 1958 AND AUDITOR GENERAL PLAT RECORDS

critical fringe area problems between 1950 and 1960¹⁰² Because of the importance of the potential public health problem within the metropolitan area, it is useful to note land development trends and practices in relation to soil conditions. Approximately 50 percent of the land area of Grand Rapids and Walker Townships is covered with soils which have fair to poor percolation characteristics. Similar problem soils cover 75 percent of Paris Township¹⁰³ and approximately 33 percent of Wyoming Township (see Figure 3). Of 167 plats surveyed of the total 345 plats approved from 1951 through 1959 in the four-township area around Grand Rapids, 67 plats or 49 percent were located wholly or in major portion upon problem soils of fair to poor percolation characteristics. During that period, Paris Township approved 79 percent of its new plats on problem soils, Grand Rapids Township 75 percent, Walker Township 44 percent, and Wyoming Township 18 percent.¹⁰⁴ Thus, because the lot size regulations of the urban service policy contained no special provision for development on problem soils, there were sections of the urban fringe where residential construction without public sewer service could have occurred on lots too small to sufficiently accommodate septic tank effluent if the lots were platted to the minimum size allowed under the urban service policy.

The result of building on problem soils was evidenced in 1958 by the Kent County Health Department report on 60 health problem areas where septic tank drainage field overflow constituted a public health hazard.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰²Marquis, p. 6.

¹⁰³Ibid., p. 20.

¹⁰⁴To obtain these data, plat locations from 1957 through 1959 from the Office of the Auditor General, Plat Division, land platting records, and plat locations from 1951-1956 from the map "Location of Plats Approved," Grand Rapids City Planning Commission, Annual Progress Report 1956, were superimposed upon the soil condition map in Marquis, p. 25.

¹⁰⁵Marquis, p. 27.

Approximately 50 percent of the problem areas existed within the four cities and three townships of the Grand Rapids urban fringe.¹⁰⁶ Although approximately 5,210 fringe area dwelling units were served by the City of Grand Rapids sewer system in 1958,¹⁰⁷ there were 27,700 individual septic tank systems in operation in Kent County.¹⁰⁸ Of this total, 18,600 or 68 percent existed within the City of Wyoming and the townships of Grand Rapids, Paris, Walker and Plainfield. Many of the systems needed redesigning, cleaning, enlargement or replacement. Many of the new systems installed as late as 1955 were inadequate because of increased domestic water-consuming appliances.¹⁰⁹

Industrial land use development patterns evidenced changes during the nine-year period of the urban service policy. Between 1950 and 1954, Wyoming Township led in industrial building activity with 1,756,713 sq. ft. This almost doubled the central city's figure for the previous five years. The City of Grand Rapids was second in industrial square footage developed, followed by Paris Township, Walker Township, and Grand Rapids Township. Between 1955 and 1957, Paris Township led in industrial building activity with 1,277,490 sq. ft., followed by Wyoming Township, the City of Grand Rapids, Walker Township, and Grand Rapids Township.¹¹⁰

Changes in Population Settlement Patterns

The population settlement trends evidenced in the 1950 Census of Population were borne out in the 1960 Census. The 1960 Census classified

¹⁰⁶Ibid., p. 29.

¹⁰⁷Ibid.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., p. 27.

¹⁰⁹Ibid.

¹¹⁰Howell Gilbert, Jr.

the population of the State of Michigan as being 73.4 percent urban and 26.6 percent rural. As in the 1950 Census, all population residing in urban fringe areas and in incorporated and unincorporated places of 2,500 or more population was classified as "urban" in 1960. The population not classified as urban was "rural." The percentage of population living in Michigan cities of 50,000 or more from 1950 to 1960 declined from approximately 40 to 33 percent, while the number of people living in the fringe areas more than doubled.¹¹¹ Fringe areas in 1960 contained nearly 30 percent of the state's population.

The Grand Rapids metropolitan area, consisting of the four cities of Grand Rapids, East Grand Rapids, Wyoming and Grandville and the three townships of Paris, Grand Rapids, and Walker contained a population of 294,395 persons or 81.2 percent of the entire population of Kent County in 1960. This increase in population was the fourth highest in the state between 1950 and 1960.¹¹² The following table shows the population gains from 1950 to 1960 in the seven governmental units in the Grand Rapids urban fringe.

TABLE III. POPULATION BY UNIT, 1950 AND 1960

Unit	1950	1960	Percent Increase
Grand Rapids	176,515	177,313	0.5
East Grand Rapids	6,403	10,924	70.6
Grandville	2,022	7,975	294.4
Grand Rapids Twp.	9,241	16,738	81.1
Paris Twp.	9,578	19,235	100.8
Walker Twp.	9,028	16,381	81.4
City of Wyoming	28,977	45,829	58.2

¹¹¹Allan Beegle et al. Michigan Population 1960 (East Lansing, Mich.: Michigan State University, 1962), p. 9.

¹¹²U. S. Bureau of Census. U. S. Census of Population 1960: Number of Inhabitants.

Some of these changes are due in part to annexations which occurred after 1950. Parts of Grand Rapids and Paris Townships were annexed to the City of Grand Rapids, and parts of Wyoming Township were annexed to Grandville and the City of Grand Rapids. A study of past annexations to the city from April 2, 1859, to April 1, 1963, shows a history of piecemeal additions to the city.¹¹³ Three annexations occurred prior to 1916 which totaled 13.25 sq. mi. in area. From 1916 through 1927, five annexations took place which totaled 6.55 sq. mi. There were no annexations from 1927 to 1952. The annexations to Grand Rapids which occurred during the operation of the urban service policy totaled only 0.30 sq. mi.

Service Extensions Effectuated Under the Urban Service Policy

The central city extended water and sewer lines to areas outside its corporate limits only upon request and only if the area to be served lay within the urban service area and the plat met the lot size requirements of the urban service policy. Between May, 1951 and May, 1959, the Grand Rapids City Commission received a total of 166 requests for water and sewer extensions.¹¹⁴ Of this total, 119 or 72 percent were for water extensions and services. The remaining 27 or 28 percent of the total requests were for sewer extensions and services. Ten or 6 percent of the total requests were disapproved, primarily on the grounds that the lot size was inadequate. Grand Rapids and Walker Townships, which maintained no public water or sewer services of their own, requested and received

¹¹³Grand Rapids City Planning Commission, map of "History of Growth," 1963. (In the files of the Commission.)

¹¹⁴Minutes of the Grand Rapids City Commission meetings from May, 1951, to May, 1959.

the greatest number of water and sewer extensions (Figure 7). Ninety-one and 64 requests were approved for those townships, respectively. Paris Township requested and received 11 water and sewer service extensions. The cities of Grandville, East Grand Rapids, and Wyoming Township made no extension requests under the urban service policy. All of the extensions granted under the urban service policy were to plats adjacent to or close to the Grand Rapids city limits.

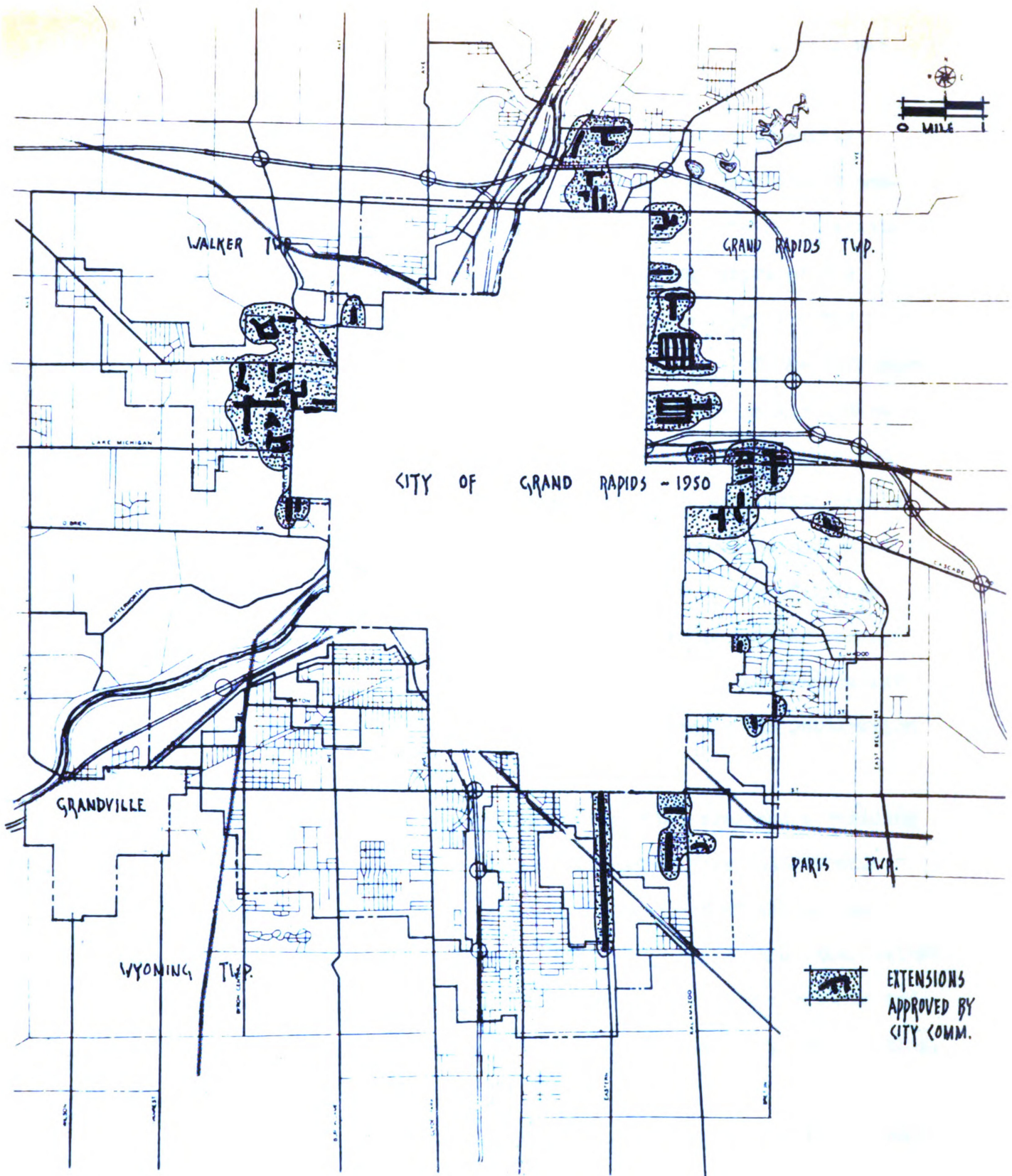
Land Use Controls in the Urban Fringe

Planning programs during the decade from 1950 to 1960 took on new emphasis within the individual governmental units comprising the Grand Rapids metropolitan area. While there was little formal or official cooperation among the seven units of the metropolitan area,¹¹⁵ the informal planning efforts increased through the efforts of the Grand Rapids City Planning Commission to assist surrounding units with planning activities and through the influence of private consultants and the County Road Commission.

Master plans to guide land use development, previously conspicuously absent, were developed for the townships of Walker and Grand Rapids and the city of Grandville by the same private planning consultant, Scott Bagby, former Grand Rapids Planning Director. Hence, a degree of planning uniformity and coordination existed among the master plans of those units. A master plan for Paris Township was prepared in June of 1958 by Charles E. Hatch and Associates of Toledo, Ohio. The master plan prepared for the

¹¹⁵Grand Rapids Metropolitan Area Study. Planning, Zoning and Building Codes in the Grand Rapids Metropolitan Area (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Grand Rapids Metropolitan Area Study, 1958).

FIGURE 7



CENTRAL CITY WATER AND SEWER EXTENSIONS 1951-59

SOURCE: GRAND RAPIDS CITY COMMISSION MINUTES 1950-60

City of Grand Rapids in 1923 by Harland Bartholomew and Associates was supplemented by a new plan in 1962.

Emphasis and recognition of planning as an important community activity also influenced the revision of existing land development controls and the adoption of new zoning ordinances. The revision of existing zoning ordinances of six of the seven governmental units of the metropolitan area occurred between 1954 and 1957. The City of Grand Rapids had revised its zoning ordinance in 1951. Because of the influence of Scott Bagby as a consultant in the preparation of the zoning ordinances of the cities of Grandville and East Grand Rapids and Walker and Grand Rapids Townships, the ordinances of those units were quite similar in major details and wording. The zoning ordinances were the controls through which the requirements set forth in the Declaration of Policy were effectuated. It is interesting to note that in the revised zoning ordinances of all seven fringe area governmental units, the minimum lot size requirements exceeded the requirements set forth in the Declaration of Policy.

Every governmental unit within the metropolitan area had a building code which was updated or adopted during the period from 1955 through 1957.¹¹⁶ There was similarity among the building codes of all units. Most units borrowed from the Building Officials Code and used other units' codes as models with alterations to suit newer ideas of construction and local needs. All units required building permits for any type of building, remodeling, or enlargement.

All units in the metropolitan area regulated subdivision development to some degree between 1950 and 1960. In the townships, limited regula-

¹¹⁶Ibid., p. 18.

tions were in effect and were enforced by the Kent County Road Commission. While the County Road Commission insured some degree of similarity of regulations regarding development, the regulations were limited to streets, gutters and storm sewers.

During the decade from 1950 to 1960, land use controls became more prevalent in all governmental units of the Grand Rapids urban fringe. Although there was still no master plan for the entire metropolitan area, unofficial coordination and cooperation among the various units had increased considerably since the preceding decade. The urban service policy was the only planning device operating on a metropolitan level.

Factors Contributing to the Elimination of the Urban Service Policy

Implementation of the urban service policy began to encounter difficulties in 1952. In April of that year the Grand Rapids City Commission had begun to table applications for water and sewer services pending establishment of revised rates for outside users by City Manager George E. Bean.¹¹⁷ The demand for revision of rates arose from a long-standing rate dispute between Grand Rapids and Wyoming Township. The controversy had begun in 1940, various attempts at settlement had failed, and Wyoming Township had discontinued use of Grand Rapids sewer service on November 1, 1943, thereafter dumping raw sewage into Plaster Creek. The State Stream Control Commission demanded the situation be corrected and after a series of deadlines and extensions, final action was called for by the end of March, 1952.¹¹⁸ In February of that year Grand Rapids offered sewer service to Wyoming Township at the 1942 rate of \$57.20. At this point the

¹¹⁷Grand Rapids Herald, April 22, 1952.

¹¹⁸Grandville Alliance, Feb. 28, 1952.

City Commission became concerned over the overloading of facilities¹¹⁹ and the costs of installing new trunk sewers to accomodate the township sewage.¹²⁰ Moreover, the city had been ordered by the Water Resources Commission in 1949 to discontinue discharging raw or inadequately treated sewage and industrial wastes into the Grand River. In April, 1952, the Superior Court of Grand Rapids upheld the order and required the city to remedy inadequacies in its existing treatment plant and to construct and operate a secondary treatment plant. Contracts for construction were to be made not later than January 1, 1954.¹²¹ Faced with the expense of providing the required facilities, the Grand Rapids City Commission became concerned over the low rates charged to outlying users. They felt it was unfair for the city residents to have to pay most of the cost of the new facilities, since they had been made necessary by the increased demands put upon the existing sewage treatment plant by the increasing number of users in outlying areas.¹²² By September, 1952, the city had passed an ordinance raising the sewage rate to \$110 per million gallons to outside users.¹²³ By October, 1952, the city had approved raising the water rate to outside users to the regular city rate plus 60 percent.¹²⁴ Applications for extension of city services were then accepted again in accordance with the urban service policy.

The townships of Grand Rapids, Paris, Walker, and Wyoming utilized

¹¹⁹Ibid.

¹²⁰Grand Rapids Herald, Feb. 28, 1952.

¹²¹Minutes of the Grand Rapids City Commission meeting April 28, 1952. No. 95632.

¹²²Grand Rapids Herald, April 22, 1952.

¹²³Grandville Alliance, Sept. 4, 1952.

¹²⁴Minutes of the Grand Rapids City Commission meeting Oct. 27, 1952.

city sewage disposal services to a minimal extent and relied mainly on individual septic tank systems. Wyoming and Paris Townships, however, maintained independent water systems, even though some water was purchased from the city. Disagreements with the city over rates, the suspensions of water and sewer extensions by the city, and local water shortages provided incentive in the early 1950's for the townships to improve and expand their own water systems. Paris Township sought a completely independent water supply in January of 1953.¹²⁵ Wells were found and bonds issued for a reservoir and 20 miles of mains. All Paris Township residents were to connect to the new water system so that only emergency water connections would be left with the City of Grand Rapids.¹²⁶ By fall of 1954 the system was in operation.¹²⁷

By 1955, however, the townships were having difficulty keeping up with their growing service demands. A pipeline to Lake Michigan had been proposed in 1953 by Wyoming Township as a joint solution to the water supply problems of Grandville, Hudsonville, Paris Township, Zeeland, Holland Township, and Holland, but implementation of the program had met with legal, political, and financial setbacks. Low pressure,¹²⁸ contamination of wells,¹²⁹ and dropping water tables plagued the individual townships' water systems as demand increased.¹³⁰ Plats continued to be submitted to the city from all parts of the urban fringe for approval of service extensions.

¹²⁵ Southkent News, Jan. 22, 1953.

¹²⁶ Grand Rapids Press, Feb. 25, 1954.

¹²⁷ Southkent News, Nov. 18, 1954.

¹²⁸ Grand Rapids Press, June 3, 1955.

¹²⁹ Southkent News, Dec. 1, 1955.

¹³⁰ Ibid., Oct. 18, 1956.

A request from Paris Township in March of 1957 for sewer service to a rapidly growing residential area touched off serious questioning by the City Commission of the city's ability to continue extending water and sewer lines.¹³¹ A sharp dispute also occurred at a Commission meeting in May of 1957 over extension of water to a part of Walker Township at a time when a sprinkling ban seemed imminent in the city. Mayor Paul G. Goebel requested a study on the advisability of extending services beyond the city limits.¹³² Water service extensions were held up beginning in July of 1957 on recommendation of the Public Service Director that service be limited to the present area until a new water supply could be found.¹³³ That same month City Manager Donald Oakes submitted a report to the Commission relative to furnishing additional water service to neighboring townships.¹³⁴ He recommended that the City Commission consider carefully the water requirements of present customers and the city's ability to fulfill them before making additions to the customer load. Although extensions of sewer services were to continue in accordance with the urban service policy, an area of Walker Township was denied such an extension in October of 1957 on the grounds that the trunk sewer to the area was already at capacity.¹³⁵ Extension of watermains was reinstituted in December of 1957 to 21 suburban residential developments which had had applications on file.¹³⁶ In June of 1958, Grand Rapids Township

¹³¹Grand Rapids Press, March 19, 1957.

¹³²Grand Rapids Herald, May 15, 1957.

¹³³Ibid., July 17, 1957.

¹³⁴Minutes of the Grand Rapids City Commission meeting July 23, 1957.

¹³⁵Grand Rapids Herald, Oct. 9, 1957.

¹³⁶Ibid., Dec. 18, 1957.

asked the Grand Rapids City Commission for a review of the urban service policy because of confusion arising from inconsistent application of the policy.¹³⁷

In July of 1958 the following resolution was adopted by the City Commission in an attempt to find a solution to the shortcomings of the urban service policy.¹³⁸

Whereas the City of Grand Rapids has been receiving numerous requests from areas outside the city for extension of water, sewer, and other services, and has been providing these services because of the inability of these areas to provide the services for themselves; and students outside the city have been attending schools in the city because of lack of educational facilities in areas in which they live; and Grand Rapids needs greater land area in order to provide facilities for industry seeking to locate here and for the expanding needs of its own citizens; and there is urgent need for thorough study of problems confronting the greater Grand Rapids area with respect to growth, education, public service, public safety, and the reciprocal needs of Grand Rapids and surrounding areas; therefore be it resolved that the mayor is hereby authorized to appoint a committee of two members of the Grand Rapids City Commission and three citizens at large to study the problems involving school district consolidations, annexations of areas surrounding Grand Rapids, and the benefits resulting from such consolidation and annexation.

In January of 1959 the Annexation Study Committee, chaired by Councilman Roman J. Snow, submitted a final report (thereafter known as the Snow Report). Its recommendation for extension of water and sewer service stated that no further commitments of sewer and water service should be granted at that time (Appendix III). This conclusion was based on the belief that (1) demands for services were increasing without a corresponding contribution to the Grand Rapids tax base and without provision for future capital outlays that may be required as a result of the demands, and (2) that the municipal facilities of Grand Rapids were paid

¹³⁷ Ibid., June 20, 1958.

¹³⁸ Minutes of Grand Rapids City Commission meeting July 8, 1958. No. 7441.

for or were bonded for by its citizens and any use of these facilities by people in the metropolitan area tended to depreciate the investment made by the people of the city. It was the opinion of the Annexation Study Committee that the solution to the need for sharing the burden of services in the metropolitan area was either annexation or formation of a metropolitan city.

The report was not adopted by the City Commission. The idea that elimination of service extensions would encourage annexation or consolidation was challenged and a dissenting report was filed calling for evaluation of all eventualities before a new policy would be adopted.¹³⁹ Requests for service extensions continued to be submitted to the City Commission, but no further extensions were made under the urban service policy after the presentation of the Snow Report.¹⁴⁰

Metropolitan Reaction to the Elimination of the Urban Service Policy

A review of the period from 1959 to 1963 when the urban service policy was no longer in effect affords a better understanding of what the policy accomplished during its years of operation. A comparison of the 1951 to 1959 period with the 1959 to 1963 period gives perspective to an evaluation of the effectiveness of the application of the urban service policy in the Grand Rapids metropolitan area.

The Snow Report of January, 1959, touched off a serious re-evaluation by the Grand Rapids City Commission of the city's role in extending water and sewer services to the urban fringe. Little new development was taking place within the central city, but the urban fringe was

¹³⁹Grand Rapids Herald, Jan. 28, 1959.

¹⁴⁰Grand Rapids Press, Dec. 16, 1959.

developing rapidly. The City Commission was particularly concerned about two factors. First, they doubted that the outlying units were paying enough in water and sewer rates to cover their share of the plant facilities necessitated by the increasing fringe area demand.¹⁴¹ Second, industries had moved from the city to fringe area locations, thus diminishing the city's tax base, but still desired city services.¹⁴² Since there was little open land left within the city limits in 1959, and thus no way for the city to augment its tax base through new development, there was considerable pressure within the City Commission in favor of the policy of "no services without annexation."

The Commission then faced a dilemma. Should services be provided to the fringe, annexation would be discouraged. Yet if they should refuse to provide services, problems would arise affecting the health, safety, and welfare of all citizens of the metropolitan area.¹⁴³ As a means of encouraging annexation, a "new city" consisting of Grand Rapids, East Grand Rapids, and Wyoming, and Walker, Paris, and Grand Rapids Townships was proposed, and the citizens of those units were to vote in December of 1959 indicating whether or not they wanted to become a part of the new city. By July of 1959, the independent water systems of the cities of Wyoming and East Grand Rapids and Paris Township had become seriously inadequate and all three units had requested to purchase Grand Rapids water. Grand Rapids replied that their distribution system could not supply them at that time. The requests were to be held in abeyance until the city could revise its total distribution system and determine

¹⁴¹Grand Rapids Herald, Feb. 10, 1959.

¹⁴²Ibid., Feb. 11, 1951.

¹⁴³Minutes of the Grand Rapids City Commission meeting Jan. 27, 1959.

the total area to be served under the proposed new city.¹⁴⁴ The new city, however, was unanimously voted down by all the governmental units except Grand Rapids,¹⁴⁵ and the units made renewed efforts during 1960 to provide their own services. Petitions were filed in Paris Township seeking incorporation as a city, and the township board authorized a sanitary sewer system survey by an engineering firm.¹⁴⁶ Wyoming undertook a topographical survey preliminary to designating routes for its own sanitary sewer system.¹⁴⁷ Walker Township, with the aid of federal funds, completed plans for a township-owned sewer and water system.¹⁴⁸ Petitions were filed in Grand Rapids Township seeking a vote on incorporation as a city and the township board began studying sanitary sewer needs.¹⁴⁹ The City of Grandville was well underway with plans for construction of a new sewage disposal plant and was discussing cooperative operation of the plant with Paris Township and Wyoming.¹⁵⁰ These efforts to provide services were not entirely successful. Consequently, in order to obtain services, thirteen annexations were made to the City of Grand Rapids from portions of Grand Rapids, Walker, and Paris Townships between August 2, 1960, and April 1, 1963. These annexations totaled 13,062.4 acres (Figure 8). Most of the remaining portion of Walker Township became incorporated as a city in 1962.

¹⁴⁴Ibid., March 10, 1959, April 7, 1959, and July 21, 1959.

¹⁴⁵Grandville Alliance, Dec. 10, 1959.

¹⁴⁶Grand Rapids Press, May 8, 1960.

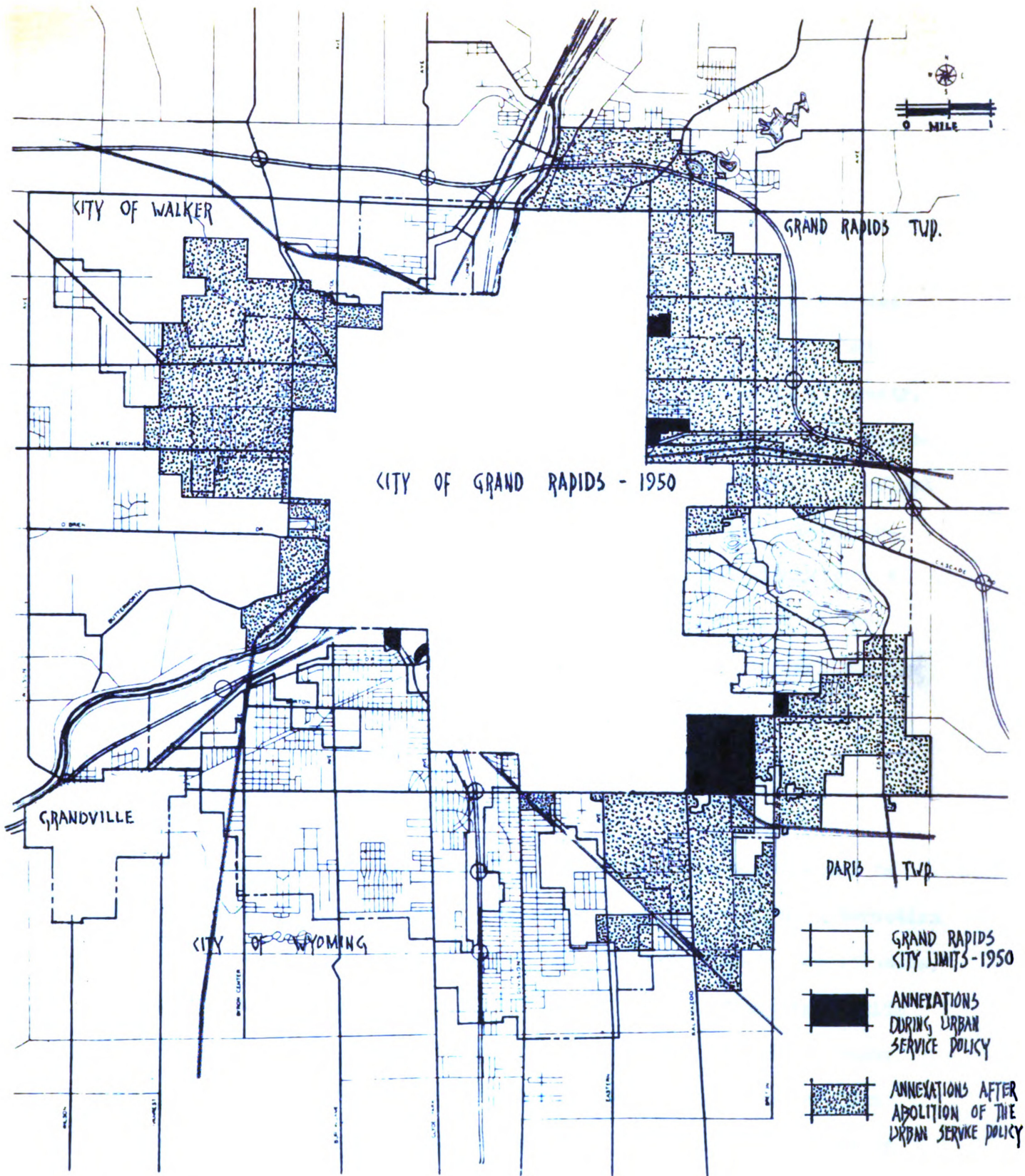
¹⁴⁷Ibid.

¹⁴⁸Ibid.

¹⁴⁹Ibid.

¹⁵⁰Ibid.

FIGURE 8



ANNEXATIONS TO CITY OF GRAND RAPIDS

SOURCE: GRAND RAPIDS CITY PLANNING COMMISSION, HISTORY OF GROWTH

CHAPTER IV

EVALUATION OF THE URBAN SERVICE POLICY

Many planning philosophies have been proposed in the past six decades and many programs executed with varying degrees of success, but few have been evaluated in terms of planning values and accomplishments. The urban service policy offers a unique opportunity to analyze an effectuated planning device. Since any planning program is designed to reflect the characteristics of the particular area in which it is to be implemented, it is only logical to evaluate planning programs within such a framework. Hence, the urban service policy will be considered in the context of its premises and the goals it was designed to accomplish, and the way in which it was applied in the Grand Rapids area.

Significance of the Declaration of Policy

The Declaration of Policy in itself is perhaps the key concept to be evaluated in a planning sense. The policy was the result of interaction by three important groups, (1) the public, (2) professional practitioners, and (3) governmental leaders. Although the citizens of the Grand Rapids metropolitan area had for years been seeking solutions to their common problems, they had not found satisfactory solutions on a metropolitan scale prior to the urban service policy. Many studies had been made by civic-minded citizens or their hired private consultants and many suggestions offered, but none had been acceptable to all governmental entities.

Hence, no coordinated, cooperative policy had been brought to bear, and the problems were handled independently by each governmental unit. The Grand Rapids professional planning staff defined the metropolitan problems, utilized planning methods to conceive a policy for their solution, and presented the policy in such a way as to make it acceptable to those who must implement it. The local decision-makers of the various fringe area units studied the policy, altered it in light of their respective units' needs, agreed unanimously upon the final Declaration of Policy, and took the steps necessary to enact its requirements. The Declaration of Policy, then, was an achievement in itself in that it brought all fringe area governmental units into agreement on a plan of action in the relatively short time of six months. Perhaps the greatest advantage of the urban service policy was that it could be quickly implemented to alleviate a problem which called for immediate action.

It was ironic in light of the role of the Grand Rapids City Planning Commission in creating the policy that the central city of Grand Rapids was the only participating unit which did not officially adopt the urban service policy. The only definite reason indicated by Grand Rapids for non-ratification was that the city charter limited water and sewer contracts to three years. Hence, it was felt by the city that agreements to furnish extensions to units where only three-year contracts existed would be unsatisfactory.¹⁵¹ Although the city charter was amended in 1956 to allow for long-range water and sewer contracts up to 40 years' duration, the urban service policy was still not adopted. This was due to the fact that by 1956 the Grand Rapids City Commission had begun to doubt the advisability of extending services at all.

¹⁵¹Grand Rapids Herald, June 20, 1958.

Since the City of Grand Rapids utilized the urban service policy as the basis for its decisions concerning service extensions from 1951 to 1959, the fact that it was not officially adopted was significant only in that it indicated a lack of faith on the part of the city in a metropolitan area-wide solution to the service problem and cast doubts as to the city's ability to provide service extensions. Hence, the township officials could not tell developers with certainty whether or not city services would be available to them.¹⁵² This weakened the effectiveness of the township officials in providing guidance to developers.

Validity of the Premises of the Declaration of Policy

The Declaration of Policy, the nucleus of the urban service policy, sets forth as its over-all goal the promotion of public health, safety, and general welfare in the Grand Rapids metropolitan area. Several general premises were used as a basis for developing the means of achieving this goal. One general premise stated in the Declaration of Policy was that the townships were rapidly and steadily increasing in population and residential development, and the health and welfare of the inhabitants required water, sewer, and sanitary sewage disposal service. This premise was valid on the basis of observation of existing conditions, population projections, and knowledge of public health considerations and requirements. A second general premise of the Declaration of Policy was that the City of Grand Rapids, because of its existing facilities and contracts, was the logical unit to provide water and sewer services to the entire metropolitan area. This was correct in that the city had the most com-

¹⁵²Ibid.

plete water and sewer facilities in the area, it was centrally located, and it had active contracts with most of the surrounding units for services. Moreover, the suggested use of a metropolitan district or Kent County as the unit to provide services had been rejected by the units concerned. The city services, however, could not supply the entire metropolitan area and considerable reliance was placed by developers upon the independent water systems of Paris and Wyoming Townships and individual septic tank systems. A third general assumption was that annexation would not be a satisfactory means by which the city could provide services to the fringe. This was valid in that as of 1951, no annexations had occurred since 1927. Moreover, annexation would be a solution to the service problems of the areas annexed, but not for the metropolitan area as a whole.

In order to make it economically possible for the city to provide services to the fringe area, two basic requirements were set forth in the Declaration of Policy; first, the creation of an urban service area outside of which no city service extensions would be made, and second, creation of uniform land use controls for the residential development within and outside of the urban service area. The need for these two requirements was determined on the basis of certain specific premises, some of which proved to be valid, and some not.

Effectiveness of the Urban Service Line

It was assumed that the scattered development would be uneconomical for the adequate provision of city services. This was true because scattered development would require more watermains and sewer lines of greater length and greater construction and maintenance costs than would

development adjacent to the city. It was also assumed that an urban service line outside of which no city services would be extended would encourage most development to occur close to the city because "80 percent of the future suburban fringe development would be done by developers who would prefer city services."¹⁵³ However, between 1951 and 1959, 42 percent of the land subdivided existed completely or in major portion outside the urban service line. While it may have been correct to assume that most developers would prefer to have services available, it did not necessarily follow that these services must be provided by the City of Grand Rapids. During the years of the urban service policy, the two townships of Wyoming and Paris which maintained independent water systems had almost twice as many subdivision plats approved and almost twice as much total gross land area platted as Walker and Grand Rapids Townships which depended solely upon the City of Grand Rapids for services.¹⁵⁴ Moreover, Wyoming Township submitted no requests for service extensions from Grand Rapids under the urban service policy and Paris Township made only 11 requests or 6 percent of the total number submitted. Walker and Grand Rapids Townships submitted 94 percent of the requests.¹⁵⁵

Since only 28 percent of the extension requests submitted to the City of Grand Rapids between 1951 and 1959 were for sewer services, it appears that water service was the main concern of developers. It therefore seems that the water systems of Wyoming and Paris Townships competed with the Grand Rapids city water system as a lure to development. The Grand Rapids water system was at a disadvantage because of the indefinite

¹⁵³Grand Rapids City Planning Commission, "Area Planning Can Be Accomplished."

¹⁵⁴Supra, p. 36.

¹⁵⁵Supra, p. 41.

nature of the urban service policy. First, it had not been adopted officially by the City of Grand Rapids. Second, a provision was made in the Declaration of Policy that services would be extended only within the limits of the city's ability and consistent with its obligations to its residents. The City Commission took advantage of this provision in 1952 when it suspended the extension of services until the rates to outside users could be raised, and again in 1957 when water was in short supply.¹⁵⁶ The three changes in city administration in Grand Rapids between 1951 and 1959 also contributed to the uncertainty in the application of the policy, since some administrations were less inclined to grant service extensions than others. Thus, a developer could not be certain that the City of Grand Rapids would extend services to his subdivision, even though the plat was within the service line and met all the requirements of the urban service policy. The urban service policy was thus not an adequate means of assuring water and sewer service to the urban fringe, and the bulk of development tended to gravitate toward the independent water systems of Wyoming and Paris Townships. These systems were constantly being expanded and improved between 1951 and 1959, while the application of the urban service policy became increasingly uncertain.

Another assumption regarding the need for an urban service line was that a reasonable metropolitan population growth for the next 20 to 30 years, based on projections by the Grand Rapids City Planning Commission, was 60,000 persons.¹⁵⁷ The urban service area was to be delineated on the basis of the amount of land needed to accomodate residential development

¹⁵⁶ Supra, pp. 31-32.

¹⁵⁷ Grand Rapids City Planning Commission, "Area Planning Can Be Accomplished."

for that many more people. As it happened, however, the metropolitan area population increased by 52,631 persons in only 10 years between 1950 and 1960. The city had hoped that by creating an urban service area, it could estimate the amount and location of demand for services and plan expansion of facilities accordingly. But since the growth occurred at a much faster rate than anticipated, the expansion of facilities which was expected to be needed over a 20- to 30-year period became necessary within a 10-year period. The urban fringe development which was eligible for city services under the urban service policy created demand so rapidly that the city believed it was being economically exploited by having to meet it. This belief was one of the main reasons why the City Commission suspended the urban service policy in 1959.

Effectiveness of Lot Size Regulations

It was assumed that the lot size regulations set forth in the Declaration of Policy would encourage and guide land use development into the urban service area for two reasons. First, a developer could offer lots which would be more desirable to a buyer if both water and sewer were provided. Second, a developer could obtain more lots to sell per subdivision within the urban service area than he could outside the area where larger lots would be required. This was true in Walker and Grand Rapids Townships which depended on Grand Rapids for services and in which no public services were available outside the urban service line. In Paris and Wyoming Townships, however, which maintained independent water systems, a developer could create a profitable subdivision outside the urban service line by using the local public water services because the participating townships did not agree to limit extensions from their

independent systems to within the urban service line. Even though the lot size requirements of the urban service policy had to be observed, the necessity of limiting the development to the urban service area in order to obtain services was avoided.

The regulations were also intended to eliminate small-lot development which could create a health hazard if public sewer services were not provided. The Grand Rapids City Planning Commission originally proposed one-acre lot sizes outside the urban service area. Likewise, the Declaration of Policy contained a provision for development on problem soils requiring a minimum lot area of 15,000 sq. ft. when neither water nor sewer services were to be provided. Both proposals were eliminated by the Urban Service and Subdivision Committee in its review of the Declaration of Policy and were not included in the final version adopted by the townships. The minimum lot size required by the urban service policy for lots with neither water nor sewer service was 10,000 sq. ft. If water but not sewer service was to be provided the minimum lot size required was 7,500 sq. ft. These sizes were assumed to be adequate for the disposal of effluent from properly functioning septic tanks in soils of good percolation characteristics. However, soils of fair to poor percolation characteristics covered 75 percent of Paris Township and 33 percent of Wyoming Township where most fringe-area development was occurring and where public sewer service was notably absent.¹⁵⁸ Of the plats approved in Paris Township between 1950 and 1960, 79 percent were on problem soils. In Wyoming Township 18 percent were on problem soils. Thus, the possibility of a health hazard existed in spite of the regulations of the urban service

¹⁵⁸Supra, p. 56.

policy where lots were platted to the minimum size required without sewer service on problem soils.

The elimination of small-lot development was not entirely attributable to the subdivision requirements adopted by the townships in accordance with the urban service policy. Prior to 1950, the State Plat Act of 1929 stated that lots could not be platted with widths less than 40 feet. Only four percent of the total subdivisions approved between 1920 and 1950 contained an average lot size between 2,500 and 5,000 sq. ft. and the majority of these were platted in 1925, 1926, and 1927. The State Plat Act of 1929 was amended in 1954 by Act 130 to read, "No residential lot shall be less than 60 feet in width at a distance of 25 feet from the front line," and further, that "lots may be less than 60 feet in width but not less than 50 feet in width at the setback line... where public sanitary sewer and water facilities are installed."

By 1957, all fringe-area governmental units had adopted or were proposing to adopt minimum lot area and lot width requirements for single family development, both with and without water and sewer facilities, which were far in excess of the standards set forth in the Declaration of Policy. As of 1956, average lot area requirements had increased from the original requirement of 5,000 sq. ft. to an average of 7,700 sq. ft. in Walker, Grand Rapids, and Wyoming Townships and the cities of Grand Rapids and East Grand Rapids. In Paris Township the average lot area requirement had increased to 6,000 sq. ft. The lot size requirements of the urban service policy, however, were not changed to conform to the 1954 amendment to the Plat Act.

The concept of relating lot size to provision of services was also put into the master plans of the fringe area governmental units in 1956.

While the urban service policy regulations applied the concept only to single family residential development, the master plans developed by Scott Bagby in 1956 for the City of Grandville, Walker Township and Grand Rapids Township applied the concept to three basic service areas known as (1) the primary residential service area, (2) the secondary residential service area, and (3) the industrial or non-residential service area. The primary service areas were where "the majority of the city-type development is proposed to be encouraged,"¹⁵⁹ and in general, they coincided with the two most restrictive residential zones. Within the primary service area, sliding-scale type subdivision standards regarding lot sizes were related to services provided as follows:¹⁶⁰

Where both water and sewer are available lots of at least 7,200 sq. ft. with a minimum of 60 feet width at the building line are permitted.

Where one utility, but not both, is available lots of at least 10,000 sq. ft. with a minimum 75-foot width at the building line are permitted.

When neither utility is available at the time of platting, lots of at least 13,600 sq. ft. with a minimum 90-foot width at the building line are permitted.

It became obvious in some parts of the primary service areas where water and sewer facilities were available, development at the minimum regulations of the service policy would be out of character with existing development. This situation was realized and as a result the zoning district was correlated with the urban service area in order that development of similar character would be encouraged.

¹⁵⁹Scott Bagby, Long Range Plans for the Township of Grand Rapids (Grand Rapids Township, 1956), pp. 10-12.

¹⁶⁰Scott Bagby, Walker Township Plans for Its Future, Long Range Plans for the Township of Grand Rapids, and A Long Range Plan for the Grandville Area.

Secondary service areas were locations "where existing development is of such character and density that a medium standard of service will have to be provided."¹⁶¹ To encourage similar development near it, proposed lot sizes were such that a public water supply, but not sanitary sewer service, would be required. Hence, the density standard, regardless of whether water was available or not, required "lots of at least 18,000 sq. ft. with a minimum 110-foot width at the building line."¹⁶² Utility services to residential areas in retail and industrial zones would be denied in order to promote development of compatible uses.

The master plan developed for Paris Township in 1958 was by a consultant other than Scott Bagby. While an urban service line was not established in this master plan as it was in the other townships, the concept of lot size to service relationship was evident. The lot area required, however, was 9,000 sq. ft. if both water and sewer were provided for single family development. Twelve thousand square feet was required if neither were provided.

Grand Rapids Township was the only unit participating in the urban service agreement to adopt a separate and complete ordinance which combined service extensions and subdivision controls as a tool in guiding land use development. This ordinance, adopted in October of 1957, was known as the "Land Subdivision and Utility Extension Ordinance." The ordinance prescribed minimum lot sizes and plat improvement regulations, limited density of population, and was to promote public health, safety, and welfare. It further was to relate the increasing density and concentration of population to the ability of the township to obtain water and

¹⁶¹Ibid.

¹⁶²Ibid.

sanitary sewer services from approved public utilities and to furnish all the other public services within the platted areas. The procedure for approval of subdivisions did not mention the submission of a copy of a preliminary or final plat to the City of Grand Rapids as set forth in the urban service policy. General provisions of the Land Subdivision and Utility Extension Ordinance did explicitly state its adherence to the previously adopted primary, secondary, and industrial and agricultural service areas, and these were made a part of the ordinance. Required improvements concerning water and sewer service depended upon the availability of services from the central city.

Although the townships had enacted more exacting land use controls between 1951 and 1959, enforcement of the controls was inadequate. The townships relied extensively upon part-time employees for administrative and technical services. As of 1957, the cities of Grand Rapids and East Grand Rapids had approximately seven full-time officials for each 1,000 population. Walker and Grand Rapids Townships had only 0.4 full-time employees for each 1,000 population, and Paris Township had 0.8, Wyoming Township 2.1, and Grandville 2.2.¹⁶³ Full-time and part-time employees in the four townships totaled 3.5 for each 1,000 population.¹⁶⁴ Hence, the townships were attempting to provide administrative and technical service with only half the labor force considered adequate in the cities of Grand Rapids and East Grand Rapids. In 1957 only Grand Rapids and Walker Township had full-time inspectors to enforce zoning, building, and subdivision regulations. While it is impossible to determine the exact extent to which enforcement of the land use controls was lacking in the

¹⁶³Grand Rapids Metropolitan Area Study. Planning, Zoning and Building Codes in the Grand Rapids Metropolitan Area.

¹⁶⁴Ibid.

Grand Rapids urban fringe under the urban service policy, it can be assumed on the basis of the number of township employees available that enforcement was inadequate.

Metropolitan Application of the Urban Service Policy

One weakness in the metropolitan application of the urban service policy was that it did not have equal significance in all four of the townships surrounding the City of Grand Rapids. The intended results of the application of the policy were most nearly achieved in Walker and Grand Rapids Townships which were entirely dependent upon the City of Grand Rapids for public water and sewer services. In these townships the lot size regulations were in effect and most development occurred within the urban service area where extensions could be made economically by the city. The lot size regulations were also in effect in Wyoming and Paris Townships, but the availability of independent public water systems made the urban service policy less significant there.

Another weakness of the application of the urban service policy was that it did not achieve its goal of making service extensions to the urban fringe economical for the central city. Full consideration was not given the financing of the expansion that would be needed in the water and sewage disposal plants as demand for services increased. No provision was made in the Declaration of Policy for sharing the costs of such expansion proportionally among the units using city services. The importance of the fact that the city residents would have to finance expansion for the benefit of outside users was evidently not recognized at the time of adoption of the policy. When this fact did become apparent after the policy was in effect, it caused considerable dissatisfaction with

the policy among the Grand Rapids City Commissioners and was one of the main reasons for its eventual elimination.

Perhaps the greatest weakness of the metropolitan application of the urban service policy resulted from the city's ability to suspend the extension of services, which made application of the policy sporadic. The provision of the Declaration of Policy which stipulated that services would be made available within the limits of the city's ability and consistent with its obligations to its residents, while a necessary safeguard from the point of view of the city residents, made the application of the urban service policy seem arbitrary to the township residents. The best interests of the city were put before the best interests of the townships. This was to be expected, since these interests were often in conflict. For example, it may have been in the best interests of a township to have services extended to a subdivision to prevent a health hazard and improve the township's tax base, but at the same time it may have been in the best interest of the city to deny the extension to avoid lowering the water pressure in part of the city or to avoid overloading a sewer trunk line. To successfully achieve the goal of promoting the health, safety, and general welfare of the citizens of the Grand Rapids metropolitan area, the interests of all participating units would have to be considered equally. This was not achieved under the urban service policy as applied in the Grand Rapids metropolitan area.

CHAPTER V
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

While the urban service policy did make certain positive achievements as a metropolitan planning device, it has been shown that it was not entirely successful in achieving its intended goals and the way in which it was applied was not as effective as it might have been. The adoption of the Declaration of Policy marked the first time all fringe-area governmental units agreed on a common means of solving some of their mutual problems. It allowed a degree of uniform metropolitan planning coordination and at the same time acknowledged the autonomy of existing governmental units. The subdivision regulations it set forth were not only the first such uniform regulations to be adopted by all four of the townships surrounding the City of Grand Rapids, but were also the strictest subdivision regulations in effect in the townships in 1951. However, the urban service policy did not assure adequate provision of water and sewer services to the Grand Rapids urban fringe, it did not eliminate small-lot development which could lead to a health hazard, and it did not make the provision of services economical for the central city.

Planning has been described as "a process of understanding human needs and of influencing and shaping future public policy to serve those needs most effectively."¹⁶⁵ A policy, then, is developed as a result of

¹⁶⁵Webster, p. 4.

and on the basis of a plan. This was not true of the Grand Rapids urban service policy. The urban service policy set forth the central city's criteria for extensions of city services and attempted to use the criteria to achieve certain planning goals of metropolitan scope -- adequate provision of services to the urban fringe, uniformity of subdivision regulations and hence orderly development in the urban fringe, and economy for the city in extending services. However, there was no underlying comprehensive plan of metropolitan scope as a basis for these goals. They were established by the Grand Rapids City Planning Commission on the basis of limited studies of the metropolitan area.¹⁶⁶

Although the urban service policy appeared to be a first step in the evolution of metropolitan planning cooperation, advantage was not taken of the spirit of cooperation which existed in 1951. The urban service policy acted as a panacea for the service provision and development problems of the urban fringe and more comprehensive metropolitan planning was not pursued until the Snow Report of 1959 focused attention on its shortcomings. The Municipal Planning Commission Act (Act 285, P.A. 1931) provides for the development of a master plan for the physical development of a municipality, including areas outside its boundaries which bear relation to the planning of the municipality.¹⁶⁷ Since the City of Grand Rapids considered the health, safety, and general welfare of the urban fringe essential to its own in 1951, it should have proceeded with the development of a comprehensive metropolitan master plan. With the master plan as a guide, such metropolitan planning devices as

¹⁶⁶ Supra, p. 21.

¹⁶⁷ Michigan Chapter, American Institute of Planners. Laws Relating to Planning: State of Michigan (Lansing, Mich.: American Institute of Planners, 1959), p. 9.

a metropolitan service district or completely coordinated and uniform township zoning and subdivision regulations developed by a metropolitan planning commission could have achieved as much if not more toward the solution of the problems of the urban fringe than the urban service policy. However, such devices take considerable time, effort and willingness to effectuate because of the number of points which must be agreed upon by all governmental units and the extent to which all units must cooperate. The urban service policy offered an expedient means of alleviating the problems at hand and presented no great difficulties in effectuation. Had it been developed and effectuated on the basis of a metropolitan master plan, many of its shortcomings which resulted from limited planning studies could have been avoided.

On the basis of a study of the urban service policy adopted for use in the Grand Rapids metropolitan area, the following recommendations can be made regarding the use of such a policy as a metropolitan planning device:

1. The specific provisions of any service policy must be dependent upon the problems and conditions characteristic of the area in which the policy is to be implemented.
2. Although an urban service policy should not be used as a substitute for more thorough and comprehensive metropolitan planning, it can be effective as a temporary or interim means of achieving certain goals or alleviating certain metropolitan problems.
3. To be most effective, an urban service policy should be developed on the basis of a metropolitan master plan.
4. An urban service policy should be accompanied by a financing plan adequate to provide for future expansion of existing water and sewer plant facilities.

An urban service policy as applied by Grand Rapids, Michigan, is not without merit as a metropolitan planning instrument. The political situation in the Grand Rapids metropolitan area, as in other metropolitan areas throughout the United States, was typified by fear of central city domination on the part of the fringe area units. The possibility of achieving metropolitan unity has always been and continues to be remote in the Grand Rapids metropolitan area. This was confirmed by the rejection of the proposed metropolitan district and county plans of providing services to the fringe and by the defeat of the proposed new city by all townships in the 1959 referendum. Moreover, the trend throughout the 1950's was toward further separation, rather than consolidation of the fringe area governmental units, as illustrated by the incorporation of Wyoming Township and a large portion of Walker Township into cities. In a democratic society, the public is the final arbiter in such decisions. If the public does not desire metropolitan cooperation, metropolitan cooperation will not be achieved, regardless of its desirability from a planning standpoint. Therefore, while the professional planner must continue to encourage comprehensive metropolitan planning through education of the public and should seek to implement it whenever possible, political realities often necessitate the utilization of less ideal methods of achieving planning goals. The urban service policy as applied in Grand Rapids, Michigan, affords a practical lesson in the application of such a method.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX I
DECLARATION OF POLICY

The City of Grand Rapids and the Townships of Grand Rapids, Paris, Wyoming, and Walker of Kent County, Michigan, by their respective governing bodies, do each adopt the following resolution as a joint declaration of policy:

WHEREAS:

(1) The Townships adjoin the City and together with the City constitute one metropolitan community in which conditions which affect the public safety, health and general welfare of one part of the community in like manner affect the entire community;

(2) The population of the Townships is steadily increasing and as such Townships become more urban in character and are built up with residences the health and welfare of their inhabitants require that water service and sanitary methods of sewage disposal become available;

(3) The City owns and maintains a water works system and a sewage disposal plant and system for its own inhabitants and has furnished water and sewer facilities to certain areas in the Townships. Due to the growth of the population in the Townships, there is occurring and it is believed that there will continue to occur subdivision of vacant lands designed for residential purposes, and there is occurring and it is believed there will continue to occur a large amount of residential construction, all of which will result in increased demand for water and sewage disposal facilities;

(4) The ability of the City to furnish such facilities is limited and it is recognized by the governing bodies of the City and the Townships that it is essential to the public health and welfare of the inhabitants of the Townships and of the City that such subdivisions and residential construction shall not be permitted to so develop as to result in congestion and overcrowding or wasteful scattering of small lot residential development over an uneconomically large service area which can force undue expenditures of public funds for public improvements and services and thus make it impossible to have available to the future residents of such subdivisions adequate water and sewage disposal facilities.

(5) That, for these reasons, the City, in order to make it possible to serve the residential area within the Townships with water and sewage disposal facilities as the need therefor arises, must require that proper steps be taken to insure a residential development in said Townships which will not result in congestion and overcrowding or wasteful scattered distribution of residential population;

(6) The Townships have the authority to so legislate as to promote the public health, safety, morals and general welfare, to encourage the use of lands in accordance with their character and adaptability, to limit the improper use of land to avoid overcrowding of population, to provide adequate light and air, to facilitate adequate provision for sewage disposal, safe and adequate water supply, and to conserve the expenditure of funds for public improvements and services to conform with the most advantageous use of land resources and property.

Now therefore, be it RESOLVED:

I

That an Urban Service Area be drawn jointly by a committee composed

Now therefore, be it RESOLVED:

I

That an Urban Service Area be drawn jointly by a committee composed of Township and City officials and practicing subdivision engineers. This service area will be in scale with the needs of the metropolitan community based upon the amount of residential land needed to serve a reasonable metropolitan population growth for the next twenty to thirty years. This Service Area shall also include adjacent areas adaptable for industrial development.

II

That the following standards applicable to residential property in in Townships are agreed to be reasonable and necessary for the purpose hereinbefore mentioned:

(1) That in all future subdivisions in the Townships in which both public water service and public sewers and sewage disposal services are provided, the minimum lot requirements for each family shall be: A width of not less than 50 feet on the building or setback line and an area of not less than 6,000 sq. ft.;

(2) That in all future subdivisions in the Townships in which a public water supply is provided but public sewage disposal service is not provided, the minimum lot requirements for each family shall be: An average area of not less than 8,000 sq. ft. for all lots in the subdivision; a minimum lot area of 7,500 sq. ft. and a minimum width of 60 feet on the building or setback line;

(3) That in all future subdivisions in the Townships in which neither public sewer nor public water are to be provided, the minimum lot requirements for each family shall be: An average lot area of not less

than 12,000 sq. ft. for all lots in the subdivision; a minimum lot area of 10,000 sq. ft. and a minimum width of 70 feet on the building or setback line; that in such subdivisions the minimum lot area be 15,000 sq. ft. if the soil is primarily clay or is of such permeability that it will not permit ready drainage.*

(4) That all plats within the Service Area shall provide public water service or meet the conditions of sub-paragraph (3) hereof.

III

To accomplish the purposes hereinbefore stated, the City establishes the policy that within the limits of its ability and consistent with its obligations to its residents, it will make available, public water and sewage disposal and sewers in the Service Area, (except where other public services of that character are available), but that it will be able to furnish such services only if the standards set forth in Paragraph II hereof are legally in effect and are complied with.

To facilitate the procedure necessary to carry into effect this declaration of policy, there shall be submitted to the City of Grand Rapids, a copy of each plat submitted to the Township for approval.

IV

That this resolution is not intended to constitute a franchise or other grant of authority by the Townships to operate and furnish water services and sewage disposal facilities in the Townships, nor to constitute the agreement by which the same shall be furnished, and the furnishing of such services and facilities shall be in accordance with existing contracts and franchises or contracts and franchises made and granted in the future.

*The minimum lot area requirement for subdivisions on problem soils was not included in the final version of the Declaration of Policy.

APPENDIX II
CONSOLIDATED REPORT OF TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMITTEE
AND TECHNICAL COMMITTEE TO THE URBAN SERVICE AND SUBDIVISION COMMITTEE
JULY 25, 1951

This is a consolidated report of the committee on "Township Planning," appointed by Chairman George S. Clarke of the Urban Service and Subdivision Committee, which held its first meeting at the Wyoming Township Office at 7:30 p.m., Tuesday, May 29th, 1951, and a Technical Committee, composed of Chairman Blandford and Messrs. Gritter, Todd, Williams, and Schnackenberg, which met on June 1st and 5th.

Purpose of the joint meeting of the committee and the township boards was:

- a. To analyze the proposed subdivision regulations as recommended by Scott N. Bagby, City Planning Consultant and the City Planning Commission, for adoption by the Metropolitan area townships as a requisite for the planning and extension of urban services to these districts by the City of Grand Rapids.
- b. To agree, if possible, on an alternate proposal for a suggested compromise should the several townships find all of the proposed city subdivision regulations impractical to adopt.

The following conclusions and recommendations were unanimously approved and adopted by the majority of the members of the township boards of the four Metropolitan area townships, Walker, Wyoming, Paris and Grand Rapids, and the chairman was instructed to summarize the proposals in a report to the Urban Service and Subdivision Committee:

1. In analyzing the city's proposed subdivision regulations the "Foreword" and "Procedure" outlined in Section 2, was interpreted to mean that all township plats must be approved by the City Planning Commission.

It was the general opinion that it would not be legal for one governmental unit to adopt an ordinance or regulations to be admin-

istered by a different governmental authority. Attorney Robert Verdier concurred in this opinion.

- 2..The townships then agreed that any subdivision regulations must be adopted and enforced by the townships with such regulations and standards as are acceptable by the City Planning Commission for the urban area.
3. The question of the most immediate and effective manner by which townships could adopt and administer subdivision regulations was then discussed with the following conclusions reached:
 - a. Amendments to the present township zoning ordinances to provide for subdivision regulations in the residential zoning classifications were agreed upon as the most effective legal method for townships to enforce subdivision regulations. Under this plan all subdivisions and plats must be submitted to the respective township boards for approval and must conform with the regulations provided in that township's zoning ordinance. This plan of subdivision regulation is not in force in Wyoming Township.
 - b.This means of subdivision control could be adopted within approximately 90 days by amendment to township zoning ordinances and would greatly expedite Metropolitan district subdivision agreement.
4. The matter of standards for different types of subdivisions was then discussed with the following conclusions reached:
 - a. The proposed standards for large lot or acreage subdivision as proposed by Scott Bagby were considered unacceptable by the townships as the land area requirements in those districts outside of possibly urban service areas were too great to permit profitable platting of the land and the natural result would be to stifle growth or expansion in these districts.
 - b. The minimum requirements which the townships feel would be both acceptable and practical were as follows:
 1. Any proposed subdivision in an area where both sewer and water are available shall have not more than 6 lots per acre; 90% or more of which shall be not less than 50 ft. wide on the build-

ing or setback line; and contain not less than 6,000 sq. ft. of area.

2. Where only sewer or water is available, subdivisions shall have not more than 5 lots per acre; 90% or more of which shall be not less than 60 ft. wide on the building or setback line; and contain not less than 7,500 sq. ft. of area.

3. Where neither sewer or water are available, the subdivision shall have not more than 4 lots per acre; 90% or more of which shall be not less than 70 ft. wide on the building or setback line and contain not less than 10,000 sq. ft. of area.

5. Road and street requirements were then discussed and since all township roads and streets are under the control and authority by state law of the Kent County Road Commission, it was generally agreed that all road and street standards should be as acceptable to the County Road Commission.

The above specific suggestions of the proposed method and standards of subdivision regulations and controls by the townships, working in cooperation with the City's subdivision regulation ordinance, is submitted as an alternate and immediate means of effecting cooperation in the adoption of subdivision control regulations by the several governmental units in the Metropolitan area.

Realizing that a long-range study of land use and zoning would be valuable to these townships in the Metropolitan area, it was unanimously agreed by Walker, Wyoming, Paris and Grand Rapids townships to adopt the proposed project of a comprehensive land-use study of the Metropolitan area, as outlined by Willis W. Atwell, Executive Secretary of the Metropolitan Grand Rapids Development Association and a Townships Planning Committee, composed of two members of each metropolitan area township, was formed to supervise each township's participation in the land-use study project.

Complete analysis of the principles and details of improvement standards has not been made by this committee. We believe that a study should be made of these standards at a later date.

Your committee trusts that this report of the joint meeting will pro-

vide the basis of a working agreement between the city of Grand Rapids and the Metropolitan area townships for the adoption of subdivision regulations agreeable to all units of government.

Respectfully submitted,

TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMITTEE

Kenneth F. Jones, Chairman

TOWNSHIP SUBDIVISION & TECHNICAL COMMITTEE

I. R. Elandford, Chairman

APPENDIX III
ANNEXATION STUDY COMMITTEE REPORT TO THE
GRAND RAPIDS CITY COMMISSION
JANUARY 9, 1959

Prepared by Commissioner Roman J. Snow, Chairman

The Annexation Study Committee was organized pursuant to City Commission Resolution No. 7441 on July 8, 1958.

The Committee has held numerous meetings and has reviewed the problems of sewer and water extensions, area fire protection and area fire agreements, area police protection, metropolitan planning facilities, area school problems and various suggestions and recommendations as to solutions to these many problems.

This Committee has found that in the four township areas immediately surrounding Grand Rapids, there are three cities and over forty school districts; approximately fifty units of government operating in the four-township area, with one unit of government having nearly 70% of the population, the only sewage treatment plant, an adequate water system, safety services based on national standards, recreational facilities and programs adequately staffed and serviced, well-grounded planning facilities, a complete educational program, an excellent museum, a top-rated library system and an adequate tax base from which to operate not only the absolutely necessary governmental services, but also all governmental services necessary to make a complete city. The Committee also found that the metropolitan areas depend to a large extent on these services of the City of Grand Rapids, but that these services are for the most part taken for granted and not fully appreciated, with the charges for these services being, in some cases, resented as an undue burden on the areas being serviced. It is the opinion of this Committee that the burden placed on the taxpayers of the city of Grand Rapids by virtue of the extension of these services is not fully and in some cases not at all understood.

It became apparent to this Committee, after much discussion, that not only the manner of extending services but also the very extensions themselves were critical points for decision, with the effect upon the future economy of the people of the City of Grand Rapids being a determining factor in arriving at any recommendations to the City Commission.

The Committee feels that in view of ever-increasing demands for services without contribution to the tax base of the City of Grand Rapids and without provision for future capital outlays that may be required as a result of these demands, it has no alternative but to make these recommendations. The City of Grand Rapids provides adequate municipal facilities which its citizens have paid for or are bonded for. Any use of these facilities by people in the metropolitan area tends to depreciate the investment made by the people of the city of Grand Rapids. The solution to a need for sharing the burden of services in the entire area is, in the opinion of the Committee, either annexation or formation of a metropolitan city.

This Committee believes that the potential growth and economic development of this area is dependent on the provision of these services by a metropolitan city. This conclusion is not unique in that it is not contrary to policies of other cities throughout the State known for their growth and individual development.

The Committee urges the City of Grand Rapids to welcome overtures by any individuals or groups seeking to arrive at a solution to the entire community problem.

The Committee emphasizes that this Report specifically excludes any request by industry either in, or seeking to locate in, the metropolitan area and the Committee recommends that every effort be made by the City of Grand Rapids to encourage industry and educational institutions to locate anywhere in the metropolitan area.

As a result of a review of all these problems, the following recommendations are made:

1. EXTENSIONS OF SEWER AND WATER SERVICE

No further commitments of sewer and water service should be granted at this time.

In reviewing the extensions of water and sewer service the Committee finds that there has been no general plan for the extension of this service, other than that proposed plats comply with the so-called Urban Service Policy. Many of the extensions of sewer and water service were granted for vacant land and have not resolved the existing sanitary sewer and water problems in the metropolitan area. It is our opinion that arbitrary approval of extensions with no plan of the total area to be served could very well dissipate the available capacities of our present sewer and water systems and render us incapable of serving any areas desiring to be annexed, in addition to weakening our potential of serving the needs of the citizens of the city of Grand Rapids.

Our recommendation takes into consideration the capacity of our present Sewage Disposal Plant, our Water Filtration Plant, our Sewer and Water Distribution System, and our present source of water supply from Lake Michigan.

It is our further recommendation that a survey be made of the additional requirements necessary for complete and adequate sewer and water services in incoming areas in the event large-scale annexation should develop; and that the City Commission go on record as promising full and complete development of these systems for the benefit of any incoming areas.

2. SCHOOLS

The people of the city of Grand Rapids in 1951 voted an additional 2-mill levy for twenty years in order to promote a school-building program. A review of the building program indicated that since that time five units have been added in addition to replacement of a number of existing facilities, with all of the total number being populated by more than 1200 students from areas outside the city of Grand Rapids.

We recommend that the City Commission request the Board of Education to give consideration to the termination of acceptance of students from areas outside the School District of the city of Grand Rapids, inasmuch as the present practice provides for a utilization of the tax base of the City represented in capital outlay, by non-residents without the responsibility for providing the capital investment required for school facilities; that the citizens of the city of Grand Rapids are in effect supporting school districts other than the one in which they live.

3. FIRE PROTECTION AGREEMENT

Contracts with adjoining townships and cities should be carefully reviewed to determine whether the City of Grand Rapids is assuming any undue liabilities, based upon the exposure of the City's manpower in these emergency situations. From the very nature of these agreements, calls from surrounding areas are not made to the City until fires have, in many cases, surpassed the normal danger involved in combatting them. Fires can best be handled on the basis of immediate attention and the delay by adjoining areas in requesting these services results in a hazard which we can ill-afford.

4. POLICE SERVICES

Police services, such as training, radio communication, etc., should be placed on a realistic cost basis for the purpose of achieving uniformity and a proper base for the rendition of services.

Much of the service in the way of police-training, communications, etc., is not taken for granted by area police departments; the tax dollars of the citizens of the city of Grand Rapids reflected in the training of our Police Department should be in some measure returned from others receiving the benefit of that training.

5. PLANNING

The City of Grand Rapids should be cooperating with other units of government in order to insure proper area planning; reasonable charges should be made, however, for planning services rendered to those units of government outside the city of Grand Rapids. Although uniformity in area planning is extremely desirable, these planning activities should be rendered with the understanding that the decisions made in these units are the decisions of their elected officials and Planning Commissions and not by the City of Grand Rapids or its planning staff.

In conclusion, let us repeat what a newspaper columnist recently said: "Some sensible planning for the whole region is imperative. Otherwise, the city will become a place occupied only by the very rich and the very poor; and the suburbs will become middle-class slums, with all the urban prob-

lems they sought to escape - plus fantastic taxes. Unless the inner city and the suburb can find a way to work and live cooperatively only the termites will inherit the earth."

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