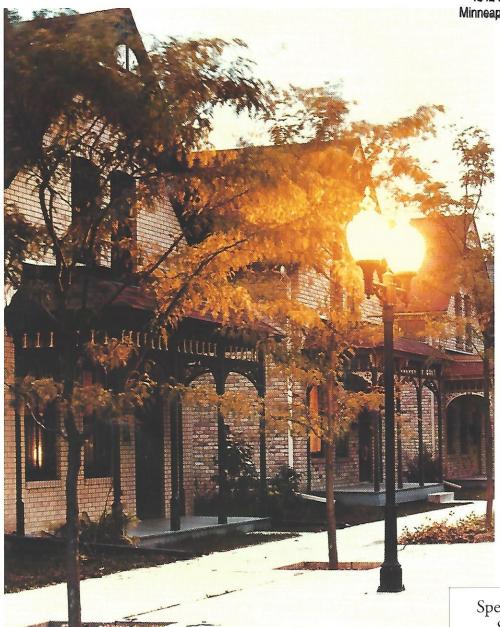


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HISTORY

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Special Issue! Seward Redevelopment



Ninth Ward Alderman Zollie Green and Mayor of Minneapolis Al Hofstede kicked off the Milwaukee Avenue Restoration Project in 1975.

Citizens Determining Neighborhood

The Redevelopment of Seward

by Iric Nathanson

hen urban renewal came to Minneapolis's Glenwood district in 1956, (see Winter 1998 issue) no one bothered to ask the people who lived there whether they wanted to be "renewed." The area's residents—mainly low-income renters—merely acquiesced to the Minneapolis Housing and Redevelopment Authority (MHRA) and its plan for the city's first federally funded urban renewal project.

After Glenwood, urban renewal moved on to new neighborhoods where the residents were not quite so passive.

In their 1989 book *Past Choices/Present Landscapes*, on urban renewal in the Twin Cities, Judith Martin and Antony Goddard noted that renewal moved steadily towards rehabilitation and away from clearance through the 1960s. "Plans could no longer simply be drafted, approved and implemented," they explained. "If much of the housing in the area was going to remain, renewal officials would have to deal with people in the houses, many of whom were owners . . . Planners had to start listening to what residents wanted and respond to those interests as well as their own." 1

"The story of neighborhood renewal in the Twin Cities, unlike the saga of slum clearance and downtown development, is largely a story of resident involvement," said Martin and Goddard.²

For about 15 years, to the mid-1970s, when the federal program was finally terminated, the MHRA brought urban renewal to the ring of aging neighborhoods surrounding the city's downtown core. On the east side in St. Anthony, on the north side in Near North, and on the south side in Cedar Riverside, citizen participation took on new importance as area residents began to play a more central role in determining their neighborhood's future.

In many ways, citizen participation reached a high point in the Seward neighborhood, where a small group of young activists, with organizing skills honed by the antiwar crusades of the Vietnam era, pushed their district's renewal plan in new directions. First as adversaries and then as partners with the MHRA, the Seward activists succeeded in laying the groundwork for one of the city's most successful and sustained redevelopment efforts.

The neighborhood setting

In the 1950s, Seward was mainly a blue-collar neighborhood, where many residential blocks were crowded with small workers' cottages built at the end of the 19th century. But unlike Glenwood, Seward had a strong base of home ownership and a solid middle-class leadership core on the neighborhood's eastern end, near the Mississippi River, where a significant number of faculty members from the University of Minnesota and Augsburg College made their homes.

Wedged between the Hiawatha industrial corridor on the west and the river on the east, with the 27th Street railway track along its southern edge, Seward had distinct boundaries that helped create a strong sense of neighborhood identity. On the district's north side, a new freeway linking the region's two downtowns would soon replace a strip of residential blocks north of Franklin Avenue. Interstate 94 would cause disruption and displacement, but it would also provide development opportunities.

While the neighborhood's eastern end was not developed until after the turn of the century, much of Seward had been built during the boom period of the post-Civil War era, when thousands of the European immigrants flocked to

'Neighborhood renewal in the Twin Cities

is largely

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Minneapolis to work in the city's mills and factories.

A major spur to growth came with the construction of the Milwaukee railroad line in 1870 along Hiawatha Avenue on Seward's western edge. In 1873, construction of the Minneapolis Harvester Works at Lake and Hiawatha provided nearby employment for the mainly Scandinavian immigrants who fueled a south Minneapolis building boom. Many of these new arrivals moved into the modest frame homes built on narrow lots in the crowded blocks between

25th and Minnehaha avenues. In the unsettled area east of 25th, known as the Fairground Addition, William S. King organized community fairs between 1877 and 1882. Today, Seward holds a biennial event known as the King Fair to commemorate these 19th-century summer celebrations.

Through the latter decades of the 19th century and into the early decades of the 20th, Seward continued its building boom. By 1920, most of Seward, except for its southeastern tip, was fully developed. On the neighborhood's northern

An aerial view of Seward in the 1930s. Seward School is in the foreground.



end, a commercial district on Franklin Avenue emerged to serve the daily needs of the neighborhood residents, while a network of streetcar lines gave residents access to the broader Twin Cities region.

By 1950, Seward was showing its age. That year, a survey by the City Planning Department indicated that 25 percent of the neighborhood's housing was considered substandard. The intrusion of industrial uses in the southern and western blocks was having a destabilizing effect, and much of the neighborhood was impacted by increased auto traffic that spilled through the area.

Despite these problems, Seward was not as bad off as certain other inner-city districts, at least not in the eyes of the city planners. A 1958 neighborhood renewal study by the MHRA ranked several neighborhoods ahead of Seward in priority for the redevelopment. The priority list included Cedar Riverside, just to the north of Seward, along with Stevens Square and Elliot Park.

Seward may not have ranked at the top of the MHRA list, but the 1958 study found substantial blight in the older sections of the neighborhood, particularly in the blocks west of 25th Avenue, which were designated for reconstruction. According to the MHRA study, "A reconstruction area is a poor area . . . the need for repair and structural alteration is so extensive that there is no doubt whether it will be economically feasible to rehabilitate the area.³

East of 25th Avenue conditions were much improved, according to the 1958 study. The eastern half of Seward was designated for minor rehabilitation. "There may be a few scattered structures in the [area] which will have to be cleared, but on the whole, major repair will not be needed to bring the struc-

tures into acceptable conditions," the report stated.⁴

In 1959, the City Planning Commission augmented the data in the 1958 study with a new report, Comprehensive Planning for the Seward Neighborhood. The commission analyzed neighborhood housing trends and found the percentage of Seward housing units classified as "dilapidated or without private path" had increased from 20.5 to 25.6 percent between 1940 and 1950, an ominous trend for the neighborhood's 10,500 residents.⁵

The 1959 study analyzed the area's strengths and weaknesses. On the plus side, it noted the neighborhood's proximity to downtown Minneapolis, Augsburg College and the University of Minnesota, the amenities of the Mississippi River Parkway, good transit connections, and a stock of well-maintained housing in Seward's eastern end. On the minus side, it found blighted housing in western Seward, conflicts arising from a mixture of residential and nonresidential uses, a lack of playground facilities, and outmoded school plants.

The Seward plan concluded with a long-range development proposal that showed a new elementary school on 28th Avenue and 22nd Street, connected to a new park. A sharp line down 25th Avenue sliced the neighborhood's west side from its east side. West of 25th, Seward was to be cleared. East of 25th, it was to be preserved and rehabilitated. The landuse map on page 39 of the 1959 report was meant to provide the foundation for a comprehensive MHRA urban renewal plan, developed over the next five years.

The renewal process begins

The planning commission study provided the impetus for urban renewal in Seward and helped move the neighbor-

The planning commission study provided the impetus for urban renewal.



A dilapidated house at 2125 East 22nd Street before the start of the Seward West Urban Renewal Project

hood to the top of the city's redevelopment priority list. While blight may have been more severe in certain other neighborhoods, the timing was right for Seward. The first leg of Interstate 94 would be built through Seward starting in 1960, enabling the MHRA to link its redevelopment efforts to the highway department's construction timetable.

In addition, in Seward the MHRA could partner with other local agencies planning construction projects. The obsolete Seward School, built in 1887, had to be replaced. School officials were ex-

ploring a new partnership with the park board to build a joint school/park facility in the neighborhood. The school/ park project would provide another opportunity to jump-start the neighborhood revitalization process in Seward.

City officials also recognized the neighborhood's human potential. Seward had a core group of informed and well-educated residents who could help galvanize the neighborhood to support an MHRA redevelopment project. As the redevelopment process became more politicized in the late 1950s, Minneapolis's planning director, Larry Irvin, came to realize that strong, well-organized neighborhood associations could play a key role in helping the city further its redevelopment goals.

At that point, federal rules had not yet mandated meaningful citizen participation in urban renewal, but Irvin and his staff were alert to the informal political mandates in City Hall. "On the local level, we realized that we could not get local political approval for a project unless we had a neighborhood that was well organized," Irvin's longtime deputy Dick Heath explained.⁶

Irvin had started working quietly to promote neighborhood organizations in the mid-1950s, but he was called off by the Minneapolis City Council: "They told us to stop meddling," Heath said.⁷ But Irvin, a shrewd political strategist, came up with a new plan to work indirectly through the city's network of privately operated settlement houses, which had long-standing ties to many of the cities' inner-tier neighborhoods.

"It was a community of interest because the settlement directors supported our goals of neighborhood development. In some cases, this collaboration was successful, in other cases it was less so," Heath noted.⁸ In Seward, the alliance between the planning department and the nearby settlement house, Pillsbury Citizens Services, proved quite successful. Pillsbury's director, Camillio DeSantis, assigned a staff member, Dewey Boelter, to help organize the local neighborhood association, soon to be known as the Seward Neighborhood Group (SNG). Established in 1960, SNG played a key role in promoting a neighborhood redevelopment plan, emerging as one of Minneapolis's most effective resident-based community organizations.

Using the information collected in the 1958 citywide renewal study and the 1959 Seward planning report, the MHRA began working on a comprehensive urban renewal plan for the neighborhood. By the fall of 1962, the Seward renewal plan was ready to begin the complex, multilayered public approval process.

The \$15.5 million plan, with two-thirds of its cost covered by the federal government, called for clearance of about 35 percent of the neighborhood's 392 acres, with rehabilitation scheduled for the remaining 65 percent. A carrot of low-interest loans and grants for neighborhood residents linked to the stick of housing code enforcement was intended to improve housing conditions in those blocks slated for rehabilitation.

The local match required by federal guidelines would come in the form of a city-funded street-paving program and the acquisition of a new, two-block park site, but the renewal plan called for the displacement over seven years of 399 of the neighborhood's 2,306 families

In December 1962, the Minneapolis City Council held the first in a long series of contentious public hearings on the Seward renewal plan. By then, a citywide anti-urban renewal movement,

'We realized that

we could not

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URBAN RENEWAL PROMOTER SHOWS HIS CONTEMPT FOR PROPERTY OWNERS

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URBAN RENEWAL

A SOCIALIST SCHEME TO CONFISCATE PRIVATE PROPERTY

OBTAIN FROM. CHRISTIAN RESEARCH, INC. 2624 First Avenue, South Minneapolis, Minn. 55408

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An anti-urban renewal leaflet distributed at the Seward East hearing in 1962

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led by the portly Ed Straus, the executive secretary of the Minneapolis Retail Association, had whipped up fierce anti-renewal sentiments in the neighborhoods slated for the federally funded program.

Straus and his allies, most of whom did not live in Seward, claimed that urban renewal was merely one step on the road towards government domination. Gerda Koch, a fervent anticommunist, maintained that renewal was the federal government's "back-door way of trying to take over everything. This is part of the plan to lead us to socialism," she declared at the December public hearing. Mrs. V. R. Tolen, another antirenewal stalwart, got a strong round of applause when she declared that "whenever we accept federal funds we are encouraging future enslavement." 10

Orlue Gisselquest, a resident of the area who supported the plan, countered that "change does hurt some and help some, but we are living in a changing situation and we must try to work together so that fewer of the people are hurt." Ninth Ward Alderman George Martens, whose ward covered much of the renewal area, strongly backed the project. "We have to do something about this area. This we know," he declared.¹¹

Seward East

MHRA officials included most of Seward in the overall renewal plan but proposed to implement the plan in stages, starting at the neighborhood's eastern end.

Seward East, as it came to be known, was bounded generally by 25th Street on the west, 32nd Street on the east, and the route for Interstate 94 on the north. On the south, the project area was bounded by 24th Street except for a two-block area south of Seward School,

where the project line jogged south to 25th Street so these two blocks could be cleared for a new park.

Despite the contentious December hearing, the Seward East renewal plan soon worked its way through the local review process and on to Washington, where it received preliminary federal approval from the Urban Renewal Administration. With a \$135,000 federal planning grant in hand, the MHRA began the detailed project design needed to implement the plan on a block-by-block basis.

The Seward East plan emphasized housing rehabilitation through the use of federal loans and grants for home improvements. Clearance was limited primarily to the sites needed for the new Seward school/park complex and a senior-citizen high-rise on Franklin and Riverside.

The school/park complex, completed in 1969, would emerge as a major focus of the Seward East plan. Neighborhood residents would get a new two-block park named for Charlie Mathews, a long-time Seward leader. The outmoded 1887 Seward School, with its cramped playground, would be replaced with a more functional but architecturally bland school building on 22nd Street, between 28th and 29th avenues.

A key feature of the school/park complex was the collaboration among the school board, the park board, and the recently reorganized Pillsbury Waite Neighborhood Services, the successor to the neighborhood social service agency that had staffed the Seward Neighborhood Group. Together they agreed that the Mathews Neighborhood Center, operated by the park board, would be built as a shared facility with the new Seward School. School children could use park board facilities during the school day,

'We are living
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to work
together.'

'Seven years
we've worked,
now we are irked,
Pass Seward.'

and the park board's recreation groups could use the school's gymnasium when classes were finished. Pillsbury would provide family counseling and other social services at the center.

MHRA officials spent much of 1963 putting the finishing touches on the implementation plan for the 26-square-block Seward East project. In 1964, city officials began a new set of public hearings for the project. In June, the ubiquitous Ed Straus was back at City Hall, this time protesting the Seward plan because of its provision for a small shopping center on Franklin Avenue. Straus claimed that "the government is becoming an ally of the large chain stores in the destruction of small businesses in our city." 12

Charles Horn, the HRA's blunt-spoken chairman, countered: "Whether we like it or not, we've got to recognize that eventually there aren't going to be any small merchants . . . they are going to be replaced by supermarkets. This is an economic fact of life." 13

Seward East hit a temporary roadblock in November 1964 when a Minneapolis City Council committee sent the plan back to the MHRA, complaining about the length of a new service road along Interstate 94 and the size of the proposed shopping center. Now, it was time for the plan's supporters to object. Singling out the plan's chief opponent, 10th Ward Alderman Frank Moulton, for their ire, Seward Neighborhood Group members and other plan supporters rallied at City Hall in November to protest the delay. They waved signs saying: "Moulton's elated, blighted Seward has waited" and "Seven years we've worked, now we are irked, Pass Seward."14

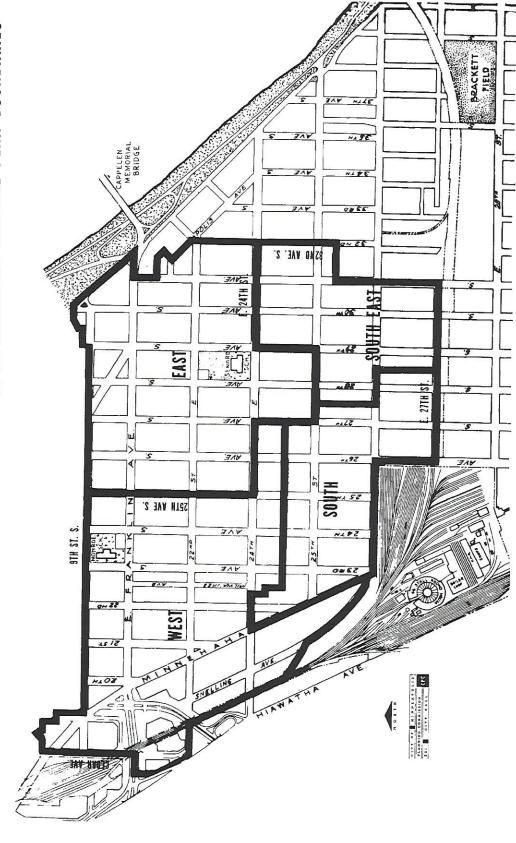
After making some changes to satisfy a small swing bloc on the council, the MHRA obtained council approval for the Seward East plan in mid-December. Only Frank Moulton voted against the plan, claiming that Seward was not sufficiently blighted to qualify for urban renewal.

With the controversy calmed, HRA moved ahead to implement the plan. By the early 1970s, Seward East was virtually complete. By then more than 170 substandard structures had been demolished and another 350 rehabilitated. The school/park complex had been completed, and a new 150-unit senior citizens' public housing project had gone up on Franklin Avenue.

In 1971, 640 units of housing for moderate-income families were developed in two massive towers that flanked the senior-citizen high-rise on Franklin. Built as privately operated subsidized housing under the federal Section 236 program, the Borson Towers was sold to a Seward-based community consortium twenty years later.

In 1973, HRA officials reported that Seward East had pumped \$13 million in construction activity into the neighborhood and generated a sixfold increase in property-tax revenues.

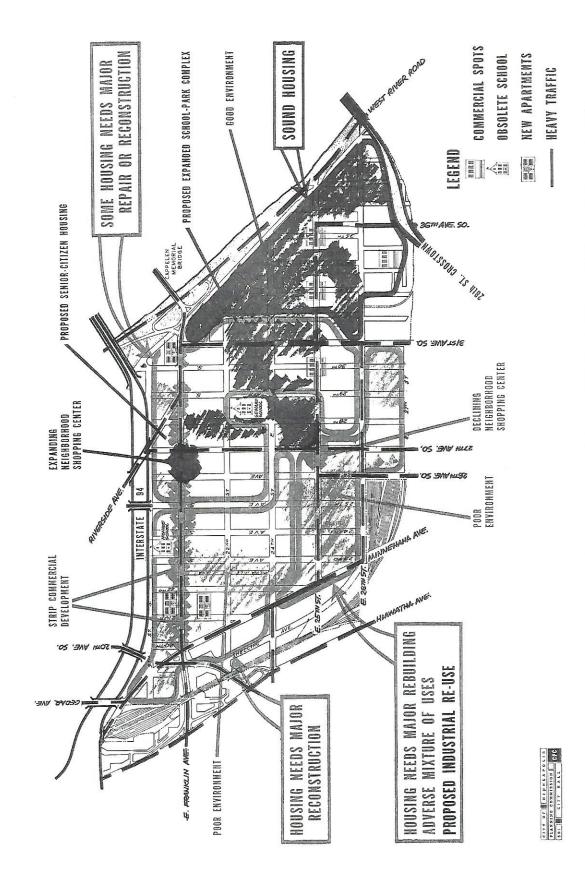
MHRA officials were less successful when they moved on to the next phase of the Seward plan, a ninesquare-block district south of 24th Street. In Seward Southeast, urban renewal opponents were better organized than they had been in Seward East. Unlike the earlier project, where the most vocal opposition had come from people like Ed Straus who lived outside the neighborhood, the Seward Southeast protestors came from within. Their leader was Pearl Harris, who lived at 3015 East 25th Street. Described as "tough and uncompromising," Harris continually locked horns with the leaders of the Seward Neighborhood



From Longfellow Community Analysis and Action Recommendations, published by the Minneapolis Planning Commission in 1965. The boundaries of Seward South were expanded later.

SEWARD NEIGHBORHOOD

PROBLEMS - ASSETS



From Longfellow Community Analysis and Action Recommendations, published by the Minneapolis Planning Commission in 1965

Group, who were all supporting the renewal plan.

"People here want to be left alone," Harris declared angrily in August 1972. "They don't want the government coming in and telling them what to do." Dick Westby, a leader of the pro-renewal forces, who lived around the corner from Harris on East 24th Street, countered that "There are houses here that are in desperate need of repair. We are cast as the bad guys who want to harm our neighborhood, when the opposite is true. We want to preserve." 16

Despite repeated efforts to push the plan, the Seward Neighborhood Group was unable to launch the Seward Southeast project, and the project was never funded. SNG did go on to work with HRA staff to bring the new citywide residential loan and grant programs to Seward Southeast to help neighborhood residents make needed home repairs. At least indirectly, SNG was able to promote its neighborhood renovation goals but without the backing of a federally funded urban renewal project.

In Seward's southwest quadrant, a largely industrial area, the MHRA was able to supplement federal urban renewal funds with a new local funding source tax increment financing. Much of the southern and western edge of the neighborhood was successfully redeveloped as an industrial district. The Flour City Ornamental Iron building on 27th Avenue was one of the few early buildings preserved in the Seward South district. In 1935, Flour City had been the site of bloody labor battle in which two passersby were shot and killed during a gun battle between the strikers and the company's security guards.

The Seward South district included the Minneapolis Moline site at Lake and Hiawatha, which was redeveloped as a retail center anchored by a Target store after the Moline plant closed in 1973. In 1978, the development district was expanded to include the 40-acre Soo Line rail yard along Hiawatha Avenue, just north of the Moline site. Through the 1990s, the Soo Line site has been redeveloped as the Seward Place Industrial Park.

Seward West

The final segment of the Seward plan targeted the neighborhood's oldest and most rundown section, a 39-block area west of 25th Avenue. The MHRA had assumed that Seward West would take shape as a traditional clearance project when the project received preliminary approval from the Minneapolis City Council in 1966. But the agency was not prepared for the forces that would be unleashed on it during the tumultuous years of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Seward West would soon be buffeted by the new cultural and political crosscurrents sweeping through the country during its conflict in Vietnam. On a local level, these crosscurrents helped generate a new mood of militancy in the urban renewal project areas.

After the 1966 council action on Seward West, citizen participation took on new significance for urban renewal in Minneapolis, starting in Near North, home to the city's largest concentration of African Americans.

The start of the Near North renewal project in 1968 coincided with a series of angry confrontations in the black community. The year before, Plymouth Avenue, in the heart of the renewal project area, had erupted in violence. The MHRA staff realized it could not conduct business as usual there.

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'How

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"The mayor and the entire city council would be on the north side almost every night," Dick Brustad, a former MHRA director recalls. "They had to deal with a new phenomenon of the black community being outraged, and we thought to ourselves, how are we going to plan and execute an urban renewal project in the middle of all of this?" ¹⁷

The MHRA's response was a new model of citizen participation that drew on the theories of community empowerment popularized by Chicago organizer Saul Allinsky. In Near North, the community took on a direct role in planning and executing the project through an elected citizens' board. The citizen-participation process had moved beyond the earlier model, in which the local homeowners' association was expected to rally support for a renewal plan drafted by the downtown bureaucrats.

The north-side board, which later reconstituted itself as the Northside Residents Redevelopment Council, soon took a seat at the table for making decisions about the neighborhood's future. But the board had more than a seat. It had independent financing, provided by the MHRA, which allowed the residents group to hire its own staff and its own attorney. The Northside model for a Project Area Committee (PAC), became the norm for later renewal projects.

By the time the Seward West renewal plan was completed in 1970, PACs had been mandated by the Department of Housing and Urban Development. HUD policymakers, like their counterparts at the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) had bought into the concept of community empowerment.

Empowerment was a central tenant of HUD's new Great Society initiative,

the Model Cities program as implemented in Minneapolis in the Powderhorn community, west of Seward. HUD's project area requirement incorporated the form if not the substance of empowerment into urban renewal.

When the Seward West plan, with its block-by-block acquisition list, was unveiled in November 1970, the area already had a PAC, which generally supported the renewal plan. But a small group of residents, organized by VISTA volunteer Don Barton, had a different view. In December 1970, it formed the Ad Hoc Committee to Rebuild Seward West. The committee claimed that the current project committee did not fairly represent Seward West residents who would be displaced by the redevelopment plan.

In its January 1971 newsletter, the committee declared that it intended "to form a renewal plan which will save houses in repairable conditions and replace substandard housing with low- and moderate-income housing, consisting of owner-occupied, cooperative, and rental units." ¹⁸

A month earlier, the committee had submitted a petition to HUD in Washington, claiming that the Seward West plan violated federal guidelines. The Seward West activists, like their counterparts across Interstate 94 in Cedar Riverside, started to use federal rules and guidelines as weapons in their battles with the HRA.

"The plan is actually a people-removal project," the petition declared. "We feel the Seward West neighborhood has a well-balanced cross-section of people, both racially and economically. The destruction of good family housing will unbalance the neighborhood. We feel that a structurally sound house should be allowed to stand. Good homes should



A 1971 poster from the Ad Hoc Committee to Preserve Seward West

The activist group
in Seward West
wished to
redirect the plan,
not scuttle it
completely.

not be demolished just because of the fact that the lot is not large enough. This idea does not make sense when HRA will turn around and build high-density apartments."¹⁹

The Ad Hoc Committee represented a new approach to urban renewal in Seward. Where opponents in Seward East and Seward Southeast fought merely to block renewal plans, the activist group in Seward West wished to redirect the plan, not scuttle it completely.

One of the committee's lead petitioners was young grade-school teacher Tony Scallon. Scallon's rumpled appearance and excitable manner masked a quick mind and a keen sense of political strategy. He soon emerged as a leader of the Seward West struggle. The renewal battles launched Scallon's political career: first he was an appointed member of MHRA's board of commissioners; later he was elected to the Minneapolis City Council, where he came to chair the powerful Community Development Committee before his retirement in 1993.

In Seward West, Scallon teamed up with Bob Roscoe, a young architect living in the neighborhood. Roscoe helped bring the nascent historic preservation movement to Seward, and he later chaired the city's historic preservation commission.

In 1968, Roscoe had moved into the upper floor of a duplex on 23rd Avenue, later slated for urban renewal acquisition. "My landlady kept getting these notices from the MHRA saying that her property was going to be acquired, and she wasn't quite sure what they meant, so she would bring them up to show me," Roscoe recalls.²⁰

The young architect accompanied his landlady to the November 1970 renewal hearing, where he first encountered Tony

Scallon: "Tony had gotten up, given a speech against the plan, and told people that he would be circulating a petition after the meeting," Roscoe relates. "I saw him several months later at a planning meeting. I introduced myself as an architect and told him I thought I might be able to help the Ad Hoc Committee. Tony snapped: 'You're the enemy!' and turned and walked away from me."²¹

Roscoe was not put off by this rebuff, and he went on to become an active member of the ad hoc committee and one of Scallon's staunchest allies. "Tony had this uncanny sense of what the next move should be. He was always one step ahead of us," Roscoe recalls.²²

The young architect was part of a wave of new residents moving into Seward West and changing its character in the late 1960s. Until then, the area had been a largely working-class neighborhood, filled with extended families, usually of Scandinavian descent, with the cousins and aunts and uncles living down the block or around the corner from one another.

The new residents were part of the counterculture attracted to Seward by cheap rents and its close proximity to the university. "All the guys had long hair, the women wore granny glasses, everyone ate natural food, and there was a Volkswagen in every backyard," Roscoe recalls.²³ "The houses were close together, but the people were spaced out," one local humorist has noted.

Many of the newcomers had been involved in the antiwar movement and had honed their political skills during the 1968 election campaign, organizing precinct caucuses for Eugene McCarthy.

"The distrust of government authority spawned by the Vietnam war had an impact closer to home. If the govern-



Tony Scallon and Bob Roscoe, ca. 1974

ment could be wrong about the war, many of us thought, it could also be wrong about urban renewal," Roscoe observes.²⁴

The national mood of activism was mobilizing many of the nation's churches that were embracing community empowerment and other social causes. Early on, the Ad Hoc Committee enlisted the support of a statewide Lutheran social action committee that had endorsed the Scallon petition. A nearby church, Trinity Lutheran, soon played a key role in the Seward preservationist effort.

"The hippy counterculture had a strong antiestablishment flavor," Roscoe notes. "We had the view that the common people were getting screwed. The churches were saying that they had a mission to address people's needs. Scholars were starting to get interested in immigrant history, and we had a neighborhood of Scandinavian immigrants. In Seward West it all clicked into place." 25

The Seward activists, led by Scallon and Barton, put their organizing skills to good use when it came time for the areawide election for the Seward West project committee in 1971. Campaigning door to door in the renewal area, they succeeded in capturing 14 of the 16 seats on the committee and won control of the citizen participation process for the Seward West renewal project.

"That first year, we had an uneasy alliance on the committee," Roscoe recalls. "We had the far right represented surreptitiously by Minnesota T Party sympathizers. We had the far left with SDS [Students for a Democratic Society], and we had our middle group, the Eugene McCarthy liberals. We all used the same words when we talked about the need to preserve the neighborhood, but we gave different meanings to those words." ²⁶

Roscoe and the centrists realized that they could not move their agenda forward with such strong ideological differences, so they gradually eased the two extremes off the committee. "It wasn't hard to do," Roscoe notes. "The people on the far left were so caught up in their idealism that they weren't very effective.

The far right was a bunch of anarchists, and they didn't stay around long. Those of us in the middle thought the renewal plan was flawed but that there were parts of it we could live with. We were the pragmatists."²⁷

Rebuilding Milwaukee Avenue

With the internal political battles under control, the newly reorganized Project Area Committee turned its attention to the urban renewal plan. "The plan was basically a land-sale document," Roscoe explains. "It didn't provide for an end product. It didn't tell us what the neighborhood should look like. It didn't answer the big questions: How do you make a neighborhood work? What kind of housing should be there and for whom? We decided we needed to answer those questions for ourselves, so we started doing house-to-house surveys." 28

Roscoe and his group began its survey in the heart of the renewal project on Milwaukee Avenue, then a narrow two-block-long street, its modest frame homes were packed together on 35-foot lots.

Built during the boom decade of the 1880s, Milwaukee Avenue was an entry point for the low-skilled, mainly Scandinavian immigrants pouring into Minneapolis. "It was the stopping-off point for those who had not yet attained enough wealth to become assimilated into the larger affluent community," Seward activist Jerilee Richtman noted in her 1980 history of the avenue.²⁹

"Ninety years had taken their toll on Milwaukee Avenue when the City of Minneapolis designated it for total demolition in 1970," Richtman reported. "The street's visage had become decrepit. The brick veneer was cracked and loosened. The once-decorative porches had long since been removed or

enclosed and all the homes contained major code violations."30

Under the Seward West renewal plan, all 46 homes along the Avenue would be razed and the land reconfigured for an apartment development.

Despite the avenue's decrepit appearance, Roscoe discovered that many of the houses were sounder than they looked. He concluded that at least some of them merited preservation. The young architect urged the Project Area Committee to sponsor a study of the avenue to determine the feasibility for preservation, but he found that not everyone shared his point of view. "Some of the people in the PAC were very suspicious when I started talking about preservation. They kept asking me: 'Are you going to turn this into another Georgetown?' That was all we knew about preservation at the time. I knew that if I said 'yes,' we would never get the study."31

With the newly formed environmental movement gaining momentum on a national level, Roscoe argued that the preservation of Milwaukee Avenue was ecologically correct. The houses did not take up a lot of land. They were more compact and easier to heat than a typical suburban tract home, and they were near mass transit, so people would have less need for cars. Environmentalism would emerge as a major interest of Seward residents, some of whom would later build earth-sheltered and solar-heated homes in the neighborhood.

Roscoe found two allies on the MHRA staff—Bill Schatzlein and Bob Scroggins—to support the idea for the Milwaukee Avenue study. "I went to them and said, 'You are two of the most pragmatic people at HRA, and I am one of the pragmatic people on the PAC. I think we should work together.'"³²

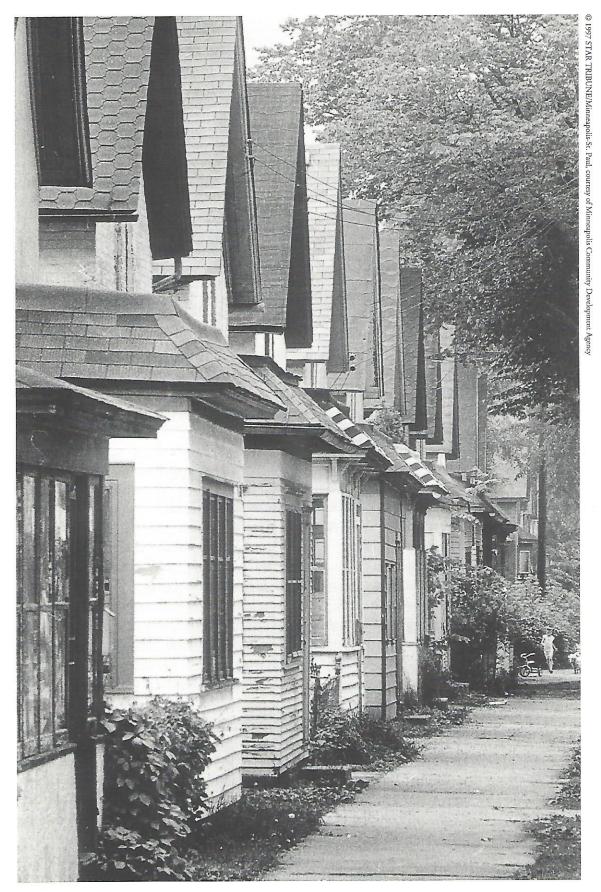
'Ninety years had taken

on

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Milwaukee Avenue in 1972, before the start of the restoration project

Reluctantly, the PAC and the MHRA agreed to the study.

In August 1972, the MHRA commissioners formally adopted a policy calling for a review of the demolition plans for 181 buildings in Seward West, about half the number originally scheduled for demolition. The newly formed Milwaukee Avenue Planning Team, which included Roscoe and Jerilee Richtman, hired an architectural consultant and started its house-by-house study.

While the planning team initiated its study, Richtman and others worked quietly to obtain historic designation for Milwaukee Avenue, so as to delay MHRA's plan to demolish homes in the area. In 1972, the PAC had attempted to get designation for a four-block district surrounding Milwaukee Avenue but was rebuffed by the city's historic preservation commission. Some PAC members speculated that the rejection was due, at least in part, to the fact that the preservation commission was staffed by members of the planning department who were tied into the MHRA's redevelopment agenda.33

But historical designation for Milwaukee Avenue moved forward on another front. Charles Nelson, a staff member at the Minnesota Historical Society, had recognized the avenue's potential, and he began building a case for the district's inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places.

Nelson's views were restated in more romantic terms, by Richtman, who wrote in 1980: "The narrow street with its small lookalike houses tucked closely together offers a visual lesson in economic and social history. It serves as a contrast to those artifacts of the aristocracy which have been the normal fare of historic preservation. Its vision does not entertain the romantic notions of the

'good old days.' The simplicity of the late-19th-century streetscape and its individual elements speaks eloquently of the lifestyle of the common men and women who lived without servants, buggies, and grand balls and without those amenities that are taken for granted today."³⁴

Nelson succeeded in persuading the historical society's directors to nominate Milwaukee Avenue for the National Register of Historic Places. Designation by the U.S. Department of the Interior came in May 1974, in response to the society's nomination.

Historic designation provided an enormous boost for the preservationist cause in Seward. Now that Milwaukee Avenue was on the National Register, no homes could be demolished or significantly altered without a public hearing.

The planning team continued its work, compiling market data and construction-cost estimates. The team's final recommendations provided the midcourse correction for the urban renewal plan that the PAC wanted. Eleven houses on Milwaukee Avenue were eventually demolished and replaced with newly built historic replicas, but the rest were preserved and rehabilitated. The narrow Milwaukee Avenue was closed and converted to a pedestrian walkway. The team also proposed establishing a zoning plan known as a Planned Residential Development for the four-block Milwaukee Avenue development district so as to provide common ownership of the pedestrian walkway and permit variances from the city's minimum lot-size requirements.

The PAC faced major challenges in its work to implement the plan, but Roscoe and the other Seward preservationists were starting to work with the MHRA staff more as allies than as ad-

'The narrow street

offers a
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and social
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The City and the residents are working together to rebuild Seward West



Mayor's tour of Historic Milwaukee Av July 3, 1975

For complete information call 332~5537

The Seward West Project Area Committee

2421 East Franklin Av. Minneapolis, Mn. 55406

versaries. The new partnership was fostered in part by a change in the MHRA's local leadership. Bob Scroggins had become the head of the authority's southarea office, replacing the earlier project director, who had taken a harder line on the need for clearance in Seward.

"In the beginning, we felt the houses on Milwaukee Avenue weren't worth saving," Scroggins recalls. "They were too small. Many of them didn't have basements. They were in poor shape. We felt we could put a lot of money into these units, and they would still be marginal housing. We just didn't think it made economic sense to preserve the avenue." 35

Scroggins recognized that the PAC had an ally at the local HUD office-Charlie Warner, the federal bureaucrat who had to sign off on the MHRA's urban renewal plan. "We knew that Charlie was not going to give us a favorable review unless we reached some kind of accommodation with the PAC. Finally, out of our own frustration, because we felt stalemated and we wanted to move the project forward, we gave in on Milwaukee Avenue. Once we agreed to rehab the avenue, everything else fell into place. We still had our disagreements with the PAC, but they were honest disagreements, not hysterical ones."36

Publicity for the Seward West Project Area Committee included a July 3, 1975, photo of officials and residents including Mayor Al Hofstede (right, in suit), Tony Scallon (dark shorts), and Ninth Ward Alderman Zollie Green (light shorts) PAC leaders

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By the end of 1974, agreements between the MHRA and the PAC called for the rehabilitation of Milwaukee Avenue and the surrounding blocks, but Roscoe, Scallon, and their new allies at the MHRA knew that it would not be an easy task. Many of the houses needed total reconstruction. Some had to be raised off their foundations so new basements could be built beneath. The brick veneer walls had to be removed and replaced, in some cases with new bricks. On the inside, the interior walls had to be gutted, new mechanical systems installed, and windows and doors replaced.

Now that the preservation battle had been won at the policy level, the PAC leaders realized they would need new organizational structures to implement the redirected renewal plan. They sought outside help to put the renovation of Seward West on a more businesslike footing. With the help of the Greater Minneapolis Metropolitan Housing Corporation (GMMHC), a new citywide nonprofit with strong business backing, the Milwaukee Avenue Community Corporation was organized to oversee the planning and implementation of the redevelopment plan for the four-block development district.

Redesign

Even before the creation of the Milwaukee Avenue Corporation, PAC members had started working with a small nonprofit housing organization that had evolved from a Trinity Lutheran Church committee. Trinity Lutheran itself had been displaced by the construction of Interstate 94 in the early 1960s.

"Back then, the Trinity congregation was very involved in social justice issues," recalls David Raymond, one the Trinity members who joined the preservationist cause in Seward West. "We really believed that Scandinavian socialism could work here."³⁷

When Trinity was bought out by the highway department, the congregation decided not to build a new church, at least not right away. The church had a healthy treasury and was seeking ways to carry out its social mission close to home, in Cedar Riverside and Seward, where many of its members lived.

A core group of members came up with a plan to create a housing development corporation to help alleviate Minneapolis's low-income housing shortage. The congregation allocated \$5,000 to the new effort and spun off a new organization, Neighborhood Research and Development (NRD) to purchase rundown homes, rehab them, and sell them to low-income families.

When Dave Raymond, then an aide in the university's housing office, joined Trinity in 1971, he become an active member of NRD. At about the same time, several Trinity members had learned about the renewal struggle in Seward West. "They told us 'those people in Seward are pretty scruffy and a little crazy, but they are doing some interesting things. Go and meet them, but be wary," Raymond relates.³⁸

Raymond was part of the group that started meeting with the PAC in 1972. "The PAC told us that the neighborhood was in pretty good shape even if it looked run down. They said they wanted to build on the strengths of the neighborhood, and we thought that was a good idea. They wanted to form a housing corporation, but they didn't have much credibility. After meeting with them for a couple of months, we decided to join them. We basically gave away our money and our corporation to them." 39



rect the renewal plan, Redesign was getting ready to take on its first rehab project. The newly reorganized development corporation wanted to buy a group of six houses from the HRA and rehabilitate them for resale to people who had been displaced by the renewal

project, but the local HUD office did not support the rehab plan, at least not initially.

While the PAC was working to redi-

"The lawyer for the PAC was a man named Steve Swanson," Raymond recalls. "Later Steve calmed down and became a district judge. But back then, he had a very ferocious appearance, with a huge head of unruly hair and a wild beard. Steve came with us to the meeting where we wanted to get HUD's

A Seward West Redesign rehab project underway at 2301 23rd Avenue South, 1975

"I guess it was our Norwegian background coming into play," Raymond explains. "There is this Norwegian dictum against boasting. You are not supposed to flaunt yourself. You go out in the world and do good work, but you are not supposed to talk about it. That's why we let Trinity take a back seat and let the people from the PAC take control."

In November 1972, Neighborhood Research and Development was reconstituted as the Seward West Redesign. Trinity had two members on the board, and the PAC had eight members. One seat was reserved for GMMHC, which was also involved in the Milwaukee Avenue restoration. Another seat was reserved for the housing arm of the Catholic archdiocese.



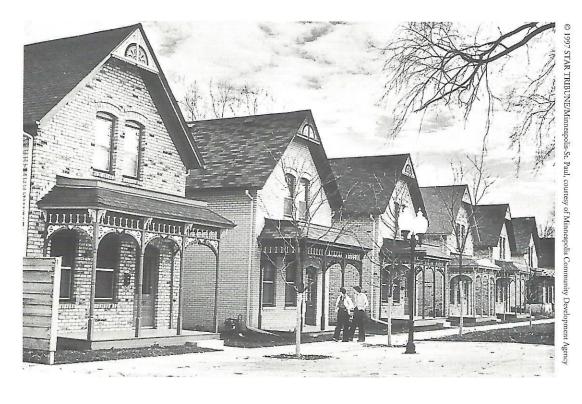
Milwaukee Avenue restoration in progress in the mid-1970s: (top) 2125; (middle) 2108 and 2106; and (bottom) 2007, 2015, and 2017 Milwaukee Avenue in the mid-1970s











(Left) Milwaukee Avenue after the restoration, ca. 1980; (above) Milwaukee Avenue as it looked in March 1991

sign-off on the rehab project. He brought his briefcase with him, which had his initials "S.D.S." on the front. He swept into the room, slammed the briefcase on the table and sat down and scowled. I am sure those people at HUD thought he had a bomb in the briefcase. They were very intimidated," Raymond relates. ⁴¹ But the HUD officials eventually agreed to the sale, and Redesign was in business.

On June 20, 1974, the HRA commissioners voted to sell the six houses to Redesign. The next day, the Seward

Today,

Seward ranks

as one of

the Twin Cities'

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stories.

group announced that it would totally rebuild the six vacant properties and resell them to low- and moderate-income families for under \$20,000.

"HRA basically gave the houses away to us, and GHMMC provided the construction financing, so Redesign didn't have to spend much of its own money to make the project work," Raymond explains. 42

Redesign, which later dropped the "West" from its name, would go on to rehab 24 additional single-family homes in and near the renewal area. It would also build and manage a series of low-income and market-rate housing projects, including a 12-unit townhouse complex at the south end of Milwaukee Avenue.

Later, Redesign reconstituted itself as a community development corporation (CDC), which ended Trinity's formal membership on the board. As a CDC, Redesign would help engineer community ownership of the 640-unit Borson Towers project on Franklin Avenue so as to retain the project's subsidized rents.

By the early 1980s, the PAC had accomplished its objectives and started winding down as an organization. The Seward West plan had been redirected away from clearance and towards renovation. Milwaukee Avenue had been rebuilt as an architectural showplace, boosting an economic rejuvenation of Seward West that has continued through the 1990s.

During the tumultuous era of the early 1970s, Seward, in its small piece of south Minneapolis, was able to harness the energies of the broad social movements that were sweeping through the country. The antiestablishment counterculture linked up with the church-based social justice movement, with the environmentalists and the his-

toric preservationists rounding out the circle. "The stars were aligned," David Raymond says. "It was serendipitous." 43

In the final analysis, luck and timing played an important role in the success of the Seward West renewal project. "We came along when the funding stream from Washington was at its high point," Bob Roscoe notes. "If we had come along even one year later, that stream would have been cut off, and we could never have accomplished what we set out do."

Seward in the 1990s

The neighborhood rejuvenation effort launched by the Seward renewal projects has been largely sustained during the past 25 years. Today, Seward ranks as one of the Twin Cities' leading urban success stories. Unlike many other inner-city neighborhoods, Seward has been able to maintain racial, ethnic, and economic diversity while retaining its middle-class base. The neighborhood continues to have more than 800 units of low-income housing, concentrated mainly in the two large high-rise buildings on Franklin Avenue, now known as Seward Towers.

Recent statistics on property values in Minneapolis document the neighborhood's economic vitality. Between 1991 and 1994, Seward was the only Minneapolis neighborhood with a significant amount of low-income housing to show a substantial rise in single-family home prices. Seward's increase of 20 percent ranked with neighborhoods along the chain of lakes, such as Linden Hills, East Harriet, and Cedar-Isles-Dean.

Many local residents credit their community organizations—the Seward Neighborhood Group (SNG) and Seward Redesign—with preserving and enhancing the revitalization efforts ini-



tiated with the urban renewal projects of the 1960s and '70s. SNG has taken on a new role overseeing the implementation of the city's 20-year Neighborhood Revitalization Program (NRP) in Seward. Redesign has shifted its focus from housing to economic development, working to redevelop the industrial district in Seward West and the commercial strip along Franklin Avenue.

Several neighborhood residents including people like Dick Westby and Don Barton, who helped lead the early renewal organizing efforts, continue to be involved in neighborhood improvement activities. Westby says the renewal projects unleashed a substantial amount

of energy in Seward. "We had to contend with a lot of disruption. "Some people moved out, but others moved in. Many of the new people put in a lot of sweat equity into their homes. All that energy has made a big difference," he explains. 45

Unlike some other inner-city neighborhoods, which have been preoccupied with ideological crusades and factional disputes, Seward has benefited from strong, sustained, and pragmatic leadership. "We have had our fights," Westby notes. "But we know how to reach consensus. Continuity has been very important here; it has let us build on past successes."

The dairy store at 2215 Franklin in the 1960s, one of a small group of East Franklin commercial buildings that were preserved during Seward's urban renewal era "Many neighborhoods lack focus, but we have that focus," Westby adds. "The neighborhood has natural boundaries. We all know where Seward begins and ends. And we are not too big. We are really more like a small town in the middle of the city." "The neighborhood has everything going for it; Augsburg and the university are right near by. Both downtowns are just a short drive away," he says. "You can walk along the river and enjoy the green space. Why would anyone want to leave?"⁴⁷

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