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The 1912 Carrère and Hastings Plan for the City of Hartford: The  
Capitol Area's First Experiment in Modern City Planning

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Summer 2003

## Introduction

“If Hartford does not eventually become America’s most beautiful city it will not be the fault of the city plan commission.”<sup>1</sup>

With this wry opening remark, a journalist for the *Hartford Courant* captured the hope, enthusiasm, and pessimism that accompanied the city’s first experience in modern city planning. It also reported the Commission on the City’s hiring of the famous New York architectural firm Carrère and Hastings to design a comprehensive plan for Hartford.

The experiment began in early 1907. In a *Hartford Times* essay Charles A. Goodwin, a Hartford civic activist, called for the creation of what would become the first municipal planning organization in the United States, the Commission on the City Plan. There he argued that a commission was needed: “to aid in building up Hartford in an orderly fashion, to sift the good from the bad, the necessary from the impractical and generally to make the city’s resources count to the uttermost.” With the support of Mayor William F. Henney, Goodwin obtained the City Council’s support for a charter revision, which was approved by the Connecticut State General Assembly in March 1907.<sup>2</sup>

The newly created Commission on the City Plan (CCP), comprised of citizens appointed by the Mayor of Hartford, shouldered responsibilities with optimism and pride. They hired the New York architectural firm of Carrère and Hastings to draw up a master plan for the city with the belief that they possessed liberal authority to carve out a new path for Hartford. They could not have chosen a more accomplished pair.

Early in his career, John Carrère worked for McKim, Mead & White of New York and later formed a partnership with his friend, Thomas Hastings, whom he had met in Paris. Carrère's firm worked in St. Augustine, Florida, and one important commission included Henry Flagler's elaborate Spanish Renaissance style Ponce de Leon Hotel in 1887. In the early part of the twentieth century Carrère designed the House and Senate office buildings in Washington, D.C., and worked on city plans in Cleveland, Baltimore, and Rapids, Michigan.<sup>3</sup> Carrère and Hastings' firm also drew plans for the New York City Public Library at 42<sup>nd</sup> Street and Fifth Avenue, the Manhattan Bridge, the Carnegie Institution in Washington D.C., Wolsley and Memorial Hall at Yale University, the interior of the Metropolitan Opera House, the Royal Bank of Canada, and the First Christian Science Church in New York. They also designed homes for homes for distinguished names such as Murray Guggenheim, William K. Vanderbilt, H.B. Townsend, and Henry Frick, now the museum on Fifth Avenue (which cost thirteen million dollars to construct in 1913). Obtaining such well-established talent gave Hartford residents reason to feel optimistic about their future.

But when Carrère and Hastings issued their plan in 1912, the city ignored it. *The Hartford Courant* and *Hartford Times* barely mentioned the publication, and the reports of the Commission on the City Plan addressed it briefly. The newspapers no longer suggested that Hartford might be beautiful one day.

Why did Hartford's first experiment in city planning fail to produce comprehensive changes? Why did the initial enthusiasm of Hartford city leaders

diminish? Is there a connection between early Hartford city planning and the subsequent twentieth-century decisions about its future?

The first Hartford city plan failed to produce significant changes because it was too comprehensive and utopian, too expensive, and would have required a level of government planning citizens were not prepared to accept. At the same time, enthusiasm for a comprehensive approach waned as city planners learned lessons about running a city, which at a national level resulted in a shift from the City Beautiful to City Functional. Finally, Hartford set an important precedent when it decided to ignore comprehensive planning, and the city's inaction marked the first time in the modern industrial era that city leaders turned away from the problems of Hartford.

The scope of the questions above may be explored in two separate contexts, local and national. First, a brief survey twentieth-century history Hartford reveals that the city has faced the problems of a complex, industrial society for many years. Conventional wisdom points to the construction of the interstate system and suburbanization as the time when the affluent "turned their backs" on Hartford. On the contrary, Hartford's failure to adopt a comprehensive plan in 1912 marked the city's first missed opportunity in modern times to deal with city issues. Second, the national context reveals the impulses of Hartford's first city planning experiment. Hartford and all major cities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century dealt with the challenges arising out of industrialization, immigration, and urbanization. A survey of the Progressive Era and some of the responses to these challenges provides a backdrop for

understanding the city planning impulse. In order to more fully comprehend the motivations behind the creation of the CCP and the Carrère and Hastings plan, it will be useful to explore the emerging city planning around the nation, an impulse deeply rooted in the Progressive reforms of the era.

After exploring the context surrounding Hartford's first attempt at modern city planning, a careful examination of Hartford newspaper articles and city planning documents will reveal specific reasons for the rise and fall of planning enthusiasm in Hartford. The evidence suggests excessive cost and impracticality caused Hartford's refusal to take a comprehensive approach to planning. Other changes between 1907 and 1912 contributed to the demise in enthusiasm. As scholars have noted, this era marked a change in city planning as the City Beautiful Movement characterized by aesthetic impulses was superseded by the City Functional Movement, which tended to conceive of cities as chaotic areas in need of order and harmony. As we will see, these changes were reflected in the shifting rhetoric of city planners.

Finally, applying the analysis of Robert Wiebe's *The Search for Order* to the Hartford experience will provide an interpretive framework. It will characterize the early city planning efforts of the CCP and Carrère and Hastings as reflective of patterns in American society in which a rising middle class of professionals embarked upon a quest for harmony and order.

### **The Local Context: Hartford**

Today's problems in Hartford differ dramatically from early nineteenth-century ills. But modern attitudes and approaches to dealing with Hartford issues can be traced to the Progressive era in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Conventional wisdom faults automobiles, the interstate system, and suburbanization for the demise of core cities, but despite the unquestionable changes they wrought, they represent a continuation of trends begun early in modern Connecticut history.

Hartford in 2003, almost 100 years after the *Courant* suggested it might have a chance at becoming America's most beautiful city, has suffered economically in its struggle to become a post-industrial city. The fifties, sixties, and seventies were difficult decades. Industry deserted Hartford while African-American and Latino immigrants flooded the city in search of economic opportunity. Segregated housing patterns and limited job opportunities spawned ghettos, and comfortable suburbanites fleeing the city began to associate poverty and economic depression with skin color, language, and place of residence. The urban crisis culminated in the late 1960s in a series of riots in Hartford that seemed to confirm the city's demise. Despite periodic attempts at urban renewal, Greater Hartford area residents have largely written off the downtown, preferring to remain in their towns to live, shop, dine, and attend church while blaming the city problems on its residents. Trends indicate that when they can afford a home in the suburbs, Hartford residents of all races tend to leave the city.

When did Greater Hartford residents begin to prefer suburban isolation?  
Are current practices recent phenomena or a continuation of a long history?

The suburbanization pattern in Hartford has its roots in the turn of the century. Wealthy upper and upper-middle class families, primarily white and native born, began to abandon their Hartford homes for the same reasons Americans have since World War II: chaos, dirt, noise, smells, congestion, crime, fear, and cultural differences. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Hartford had become a strange place for native born whites. Between 1890 and 1920, thousands of immigrants flooded the city from Eastern and Southern Europe. Italians increased from 350 to 7,101 between 1890 and 1920. Poles went from 19 to 4,880; Russians, mostly Jews, from 492 to 7,864; Lithuanians from 0 to 1,260. Meanwhile, the English, German, and Irish immigration (groups who had established themselves in Hartford) leveled off. The immigration resulted in an increasingly diverse city where natives encountered a place filled with newcomers speaking strange tongues and practicing different versions of Christianity and Judaism.<sup>4</sup>

Hartford and its surrounding communities also became more crowded. Between 1890 and 1920, the population increased from 42,551 to 138,036. In the same years the population of the nine suburbs of Hartford (West Hartford, East Hartford, Windsor, Wethersfield, Enfield, Avon, Simsbury, Bloomfield, and Newington) increased from 24,126 to 50,450.<sup>5</sup>

The figures suggest that the 30 years leading up to 1920 challenged Hartford with “modern” problems. Issues included: overcrowded cities, pollution

and dirt from industry, clashing cultural groups, poor housing conditions, and waste disposal. While reformers confronted and solved these problems, wealthier families began to see the early suburbs and quiet, out-of-the-way neighborhoods as places to escape while keeping business interests downtown. The expansion of the trolley lines into surrounding communities enabled quick and inexpensive travel as well.

The wealthy residents' gradual movement out of the city marked the emergence of patterns that continue today, and Hartford set two important historical precedents when it failed to deal with city issues comprehensively in its first attempt at modern urban planning. First, city planners and power brokers began to conceive of the city center as a place to be ordered, organized, maintained, and managed, which is reflected in the motivations for hiring Carrère and Hastings and in their plan for the city. The powers-that-be also chose to ignore the plan because it was too expensive and massive, establishing a tradition of city abandonment in favor of surrounding towns.

### **The National Context: Progressivism and City Planning**

A national wave of city planning enthusiasm caused the creation of the Hartford Commission on the City Plan in 1907. Infused with ideas about beauty, function, harmony, efficiency, and science, planners worked diligently to make better cities. The impulse, deeply rooted in the Progressive era, sought to "right urban wrongs" by instituting a broad array of reforms in United States cities. Social activists in New York, Chicago, San Francisco, and other metropolises engaged in work such as settlement houses, like Jane Addams' Hull House in

Chicago, a place in the slums where middle and upper-middle class women tried to “better” immigrants by encouraging temperance, cleanliness, and other middle class mores. The Progressive movement sought to cure nearly every perceived manifestation of immorality considered a result of urban living. Reformers attacked prostitution, poor and unsafe tenement housing, saloons and drinking, and child labor. The impulse emanated from committed and earnest intentions, but reformers rarely recognized how their imposed value system affected the masses and were criticized by leftist intellectuals such as Thorstein Veblen and Jack London.

Veblen claimed “the solicitude of settlements...is in part directed to enhance the industrial efficiency of the poor...but it is also no less consistently directed to incubation...of certain punctilios of upper-class propriety in manners and customs,” and London remarked that settlement workers, “beyond relieving an infinitesimal fraction of misery and collecting a certain amount of date..., they have achieved nothing.”<sup>6</sup> Activists improved thousands of lives by pushing through reforms resulting in safer and cleaner cities; however, the “top-down” agenda often incurred the resentment of the poor and working class.

Progressive era urban activism catalyzed the modern city planning movement. Town and city plans were not new. Ancient Greece and Rome, Colonial America, and Europe all planned towns and rationally approached the use of space. Water was piped in and building restrictions enacted; without such initiatives towns could not encourage settlement or trade opportunities, and they risked catastrophes such as fires and population loss to epidemics. But the era

of industrialization and urban development spawned new economic and social ideologies emphasizing the free market and individualism. A belief in *laissez-faire* emerged. The market proved unable to regulate itself, and the state became increasingly involved in urban affairs.<sup>7</sup>

Germany served as an important source of inspiration for early American city planners. Though early British work handled matters like sanitation and housing, “the academic discipline and administrative practice of city planning as we know it today...was born in Germany during the decades before World War I.”<sup>8</sup> Germany served as a model because of its application of a strong local government to urban problems,<sup>9</sup> which early American planners desired but rarely achieved. The German influence left an impact on Carrère and Hastings. They assert in their plan for Hartford that Germany was “more scientific than other nations” because they developed zoning to protect houses from factories and commerce. In promoting their traffic design, Carrère and Hastings used plans of German cities and compared them to their Hartford plan to demonstrate properly designed roads and harmonious traffic flow.<sup>10</sup>

While the roots of modern urban planning may be traced to the response to industrialization and Germany, the United States developed its own particular traditions. The City Beautiful and City Functional Movements, the application of scientific management, the pursuit of profit, and the rise of a professional cadre of planners all color the era between 1900 and 1915. In these years, modern planning emerged in America and Carrère and Hastings established their reputations and created the plan for Hartford. While Hartford’s first modern

experience in urban planning reflect all of the characteristics mentioned above, the well-documented transition from the City Beautiful to City Functional that occurred in the last part of the first decade of the twentieth century explains the declining enthusiasm for city planning in Hartford between 1907 and 1912.

The City Beautiful Movement roughly spans from 1900 to 1910.<sup>11</sup> It originated in nineteenth century Europe and the boulevards and promenades of European capitals best exemplify its roots. In the twentieth century, commercial cities in central and western American adopted City Beautiful plans “to overcome collective inferiority complexes and boost business.”<sup>12</sup>

Daniel Burnham’s work best exemplified the City Beautiful ideal. The leading practitioner of the movement, Burnham thought cities could be made beautiful with the creation of parks, monuments, landscaped streets, and plazas. Burnham worked as head of construction at the Chicago World’s Fair of 1893 where he created an array of white neoclassical palaces. Later Burnham worked in Washington D.C., drafted a plan for San Francisco that was never implemented, and created a detailed and ambitious plan for Chicago in 1909. In the plan, Burnham proposed the redevelopment of an area covering a 60 mile radius with the city at its center. The plans included parks, with one spanning 20 miles of the Lake Michigan shoreline and a huge civic center. Above all, it promoted harmony and order. The goal was “order out of chaos” to stem rapid growth and “the influx of people of many nationalities without common traditions or habits.”<sup>13</sup> The City Beautiful Movement was an upper and middle class American attempt to reshape cities, and it involved “a cultural agenda, a middle-

class environmentalism, and aesthetics expressed as beauty, order, system, and harmony.”<sup>14</sup> John Carrère, in a 1907 address to the Hartford Municipal Art

Society, captured the spirit of the movement when he stated:

“That the problem of beautifying our cities is uppermost in the minds of our people throughout the United States at the present time, is most encouraging because the interest in this phase of municipal improvement is usually the forerunner and the first step in the direction of better public art, and by the inverse process of educating the general public, has always led to a very widespread appreciation of and interest in all kinds of art.”<sup>15</sup>

The enthusiasm for beauty and art remained influential until the Great Depression in the early 1930s, but city planners’ purpose began to shift in the latter part of the first decade of the twentieth century. Bureaucratic control and “the idea that experts and specialized agencies should determine social, political, and economic policies” replaced elite reformers’ aesthetic impulses. Critics began to minimize the relevance of City Beautiful ideas and characterized it as the “city impossible.” “Let us have the city useful, the city practical, the city livable, the city sensible, the city anything but beautiful.” Many thought the poor should receive money instead of investment in boulevards, statues, and elaborate public buildings.<sup>16</sup>

1909 was a seminal year in the history of city planning and in the transition to the City Practical. The first national conference on city planning occurred that year. Attendees sought to define a national purpose, make economic power socially responsible, and make political institutions more responsive to individuals. Social and economic ends, not aesthetic ideals, guided the planners. In 1909 the National Association of City Planning, the forerunner of modern city

planning organizations, was started. The same year Benjamin Marsh, Secretary of the Committee on Congestion of the Population, organized the famous Congestion Exhibition at the Armory in New York City. Marsh also wrote *An Introduction to City Planning: Democracy's Challenge to the American City*, which proposed the need for the individual to sacrifice for the good of cities.<sup>17</sup>

Traffic also figured into the transition from beauty to function. In 1910 Charles Mulford Robinson, an early proponent of the City Beautiful Movement, supported “defining CBD densities to control traffic volumes” which was one example that city planning had evolved into “the altering of spatial relationships to achieve efficiency and control.”<sup>18</sup> Traffic, as will later be revealed, became the primary concern of Carrère and Hastings and occupied a significant part of their Hartford City Plan.

The shift from City Beautiful to City Functional described above reflected in Hartford's first city planning experiment. In the following sections, *Hartford Courant* articles, city planning documents, and the Carrère and Hastings plan will be explored. They reveal a city caught between the City Beautiful and the City Functional trends. Initial enthusiasm drew inspiration from the aesthetic impulse as evidenced by Municipal Art Society president Charles Goodwin's role in the creation of the Commission on the City Plan and in early *Hartford Courant* articles. The new emphasis on practical considerations compelled Carrère and Hastings to incorporate elements of the City Functional Movement into their plan.

### **The Coming of the Carrère and Hastings Plan**

The Carrère and Hastings 1912 Hartford City Plan emerged from a complex set of impulses rooted in the Progressive era. It began with private, aesthetic initiatives associated with the City Beautiful Movement and gradually shifted to a public, municipal “search for order.” By the publication of the Carrère and Hastings, the functional mentality in city planning had taken root and it reached full expression in the 1920s.<sup>19</sup> The CCP struggled to maintain intentionality, regularity, and improvement between 1907 and 1912, the year Carrère and Hastings submitted their report to a disinterested audience. Public responsibilities replaced private enthusiasm for beauty. Eliminating sewage in the Park River, regulating the Huckster’s Market, and installing “houses of comfort” (bathrooms) in Hartford occupied the planners’ attention. The “search for order” in a complex urban landscape shaped the purpose and function of the CCP and the Carrère and Hastings plan.

The creation of the Commission on the City Plan by resolution of the Connecticut General Assembly in 1907 infused city leaders with the enthusiasm and confidence to comprehensively and systematically deal with Hartford’s problems. The inspiration for its creation came from Hartford’s Municipal Art Society, an organization whose declared its intention “to conserve and enhance in every practical way the beauty of the streets, buildings and public spaces of Hartford; to stimulate the interest in the scenic, artistic and architectural development of the city.”<sup>20</sup> In 1904 the society had its own Commission on the City Plan that studied civic issues, educated citizens on aesthetics, and made

suggestions to city government about reform. This served as the model for the municipal Commission on the City Plan, the first of its kind in the United States. Backed by Municipal Art Society members such as Charles Goodwin and Mayor William Heney, the new municipal (public) CCP members entered their positions with enthusiastically.

The CCP apparently, though inaccurately, believed it would have broad authority in determining the direction of the city of Hartford. In a report submitted to the City on October 20, 1908, the CCP said that a subcommittee comprised of Messrs. Goodwin, Preston, and Ford had recommended the hiring of experts, Carrère and Hastings, to assist them in creating a plan for the development of Hartford. In the report, the CCP stated in its first year of existence “the Commission has not attempted to branch out and take full advantage of the liberal authority conferred upon it by the charter amendment.”<sup>21</sup> The CCP determined that the charter amendment granted them wide latitude, or “liberal authority,” to reshape Hartford. In other sections of the report, they claimed they moved slowly and cautiously so they could gain the public’s confidence before pressing on. They also suggested basic needs such as a technical high school and the construction of a new union station. The men took their responsibilities seriously and believed the charter revision of 1907 gave them broad powers that, with the outside help of experts, could transform the city.<sup>22</sup>

*Hartford Courant* articles published in late 1908 and early 1909 boosted enthusiasm for the Progressive quest in the city. Entitled “Hartford to be Beautiful,” “Ideas for the City Beautiful,” and “The Hartford of the Future,

they tantalized *Courant* readers with the possibility of major changes in the city and appealed to the beautification impulse of the Municipal Art Society. Most significantly, the articles speak to the optimism and hype surrounding the hiring of Carrère and Hastings.

On October 21, 1908, "Hartford to be Beautiful" reported that the CCP hired Carrère and Hastings, optimistically asserting the possibility of a beautified city.<sup>23</sup> The City Beautiful Movement had swept the country and important projects had already occurred in cities across the nation. Sophisticated *Courant* readers would have considered Hartford in relation to other places across the country. Many readers would have heard Carrère's 1907 address to the Twentieth Century Club of Hartford in which he lamented the way in which modern cities separated the practical from the beautiful and work from pleasure.<sup>24</sup> National enthusiasm for the City Beautiful Movement combined with local interest in beautification efforts revealed a high level of hope possessed by the first Hartford city planners.

"Ideas for the City Beautiful" and "The Future of Hartford," published by the *Courant* in January and June of 1909, respectively, optimistically expressed several of the possibilities being considered by the CCP and Carrère and Hastings. "Ideas for the City Beautiful" reported a meeting of Hartford city fathers, architects, and real estate men at the mayor's office on January 3, 1909. At the meeting, Carrère argued that Hartford had three important needs: a suitable railroad entrance to the city, the establishment of a civic center according to a definite scheme, and street work that would open up main

avenues and control automobile traffic. The *Courant's* article lent credence to the efforts of the CCP and city leaders and reflected the city's enthusiasm for city improvement in early 1909.<sup>25</sup>

"The Hartford of the Future" contained a summary of the CCP's annual report to the city, and it included a long list of the "numerous unsolved municipal problems of Hartford."<sup>26</sup> Reflecting the immense job of the CCP and early planners all over the country, the Second Annual Report of the Commission on the City Plan identified 43 "matters for the advisory architects to consider."<sup>27</sup> Included in the list were: the locations for a new city hall and technical high school; street lighting; specific street improvement; arsenal and armory development; Bushnell Park extension to Main Street and to the Connecticut River; Park River control; trolley line construction; change in the railroad grade; Union Station relocation; Garden Street Reservoir removal; building height; playgrounds; fire codes; billboards; and zoning.<sup>28</sup>

The 43 points are significant in two ways. First, they specifically lay out the problems the city fathers believed they faced. Building sites, street lighting, a new armory, Bushnell Park extension, Park River control, trolley line construction, billboards, and zoning challenged Hartford in 1909. Knowing the specifics provides a rich understanding of the nature of the problems at the turn of the century Hartford. The detailed list, which was considered for months before being announced, also illuminates the challenges facing city leaders. With the issues such as an increase in population, the advent of the car, the success of the trolley, the need for public safety against fire and other dangers,

the nuisance of billboards, and the desire to plan for future development, planners had to find an orderly way to deal with the demands of running a city.

The experience of managing Hartford between 1907 and 1912 belied the optimism inherent in the City Beautiful Movement. Listing 43 problems suggests the need for expertise and for a scientific, comprehensive approach to planning. The emphasis on roads and traffic also indicates the functional problems that faced the city and suggest an important shift from aesthetic to practical concerns in city planning.

Another indication in the shift to the functional exists in a clippings file . It consists of local and national newspaper articles related to the field of city planning and the CCP collected it in scrapbook form between 1907 and 1940. One can infer that Hartford leaders were self-consciously caught up in the élan of the national city planning movement —why else would such clippings be saved?<sup>29</sup> The file contains numerous articles from newspapers all over the country that reported city planning efforts, national meetings of city planners, and general pieces extolling the role of planning in the future of cities. The existence of the collection suggests the CCP strongly identified itself with an avant garde of professionals capable of dealing with city problems with progressive methods and approaches.

The content of the articles are overwhelmingly positive and optimistic about the emerging efforts of local leaders to take control and improve cities. For example, three clippings from a Philadelphia newspaper discussed in great depth the emergence of city planning and the 1910 national conference held there.

The articles extoll the virtues of architects and planners while describing the variety of urban issues. The long list of problems included everything from sewers to water to traffic. Beauty, while mentioned, took a back seat to more practical concerns. The clippings reveal the emergence of a professional cadre of planners armed with scientific approaches and skilled expertise ready to tackle practical issues, not Municipal Art Society types committed to beautifying cities.<sup>30</sup>

### **The Carrère and Hastings Plan: A Quest for Order**

John Carrère and Thomas Hastings, two of the finest architects of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, produced their plan for Hartford after countless hours of work. An examination of the report reveals an overwhelming emphasis on the practicality, order, and harmony over the beauty. In Hartford, the variety of demands faced by city leaders caused the City Functional to emerge as the primary influence on the Carrère and Hastings report.

On the title page, Carrère and Hastings set forth their purpose: “the development and extension of the city of Hartford on comprehensive lines of order and harmony with recommendations.” In the foreword, city engineer Frederick Ford asserted several reasons for the creation of the report. “Self-complacency,” Ford said, would cause Hartford to lose its prestige among American cities. Forming a plan would keep the city “alert and abreast of the times.” The plan must also be “based on a thorough, exhaustive study of the city by a skilled, experienced, and disinterested outside expert.” Carrère and Hastings had a “national reputation” and were familiar with Hartford in their work on the State Arsenal and Armory Commission and later in advising on the

Technical High School and Municipal Building Commission. Ford asserted that the plan would serve as a model for all American cities. Beauty and health receive some attention in Ford's foreword, but primarily practical matters occupy his attention.<sup>31</sup>

In their opening section, Carrère and Hastings outlined their ideas about what constituted good city planning. They expounded upon the need for a common purpose of essential and non-essential planning in cities. They also saw themselves as part of a vanguard, a rising class of professionals utilizing “truly scientific principles based on actual requirements or statistics.” Carrère and Hastings pointed to the previous lack of coordination between forms of government and methods of taxation and asserted their ability to achieve a balance. The “theory of individual rights,” they maintained, had been misapplied and only scientific planning could step in and find a harmonious solution. To support their point, they discussed traffic. If each individual adhered to his or her own wishes when driving, then chaos would prevail. But by establishing a set of carefully considered rules, order could be established. Perhaps the following machine metaphor best captures the general approach of Carrère and Hastings:

“A city, in the light of modern civilization and modern science, must be considered as a great machine having a most intricate organism and a most complex function to perform, and it must be so well planned and put together and run that as an engine it shall produce the maximum of efficiency in every direction with the least expense and friction.”<sup>32</sup>

To illustrate their points, Carrère and Hastings made international comparisons with European cities. They argued that European planners faced less resistance and interference from individuals and were able plan more

efficiently. They claimed that democratic institutions slowed down proper city planning and therefore “educating public opinion” became significant. Perhaps John Carrère intended his 1907 speech to the Twentieth Century Club of Hartford to serve this purpose? The authors continuously drew comparisons to Europe, especially Paris and German cities, to illustrate proper planning.<sup>33</sup>

Carrère and Hastings’ had a few key ideas: a civic center, a new system of roads, and de facto zoning shaped by tax codes. The planners desired a civic center in the middle of Hartford. City hall, a post office, the courthouse, and other public buildings would occupy the community’s center of attention. The buildings would be majestic monuments to the city and civic life, and they would instill pride in the citizens of Hartford. Opening up the center of the city would be critical in this endeavor. To accomplish this they suggested widening Asylum, Church, and Pearl Streets to ease congestion and improve traffic flow. They also recommended a new Union Station, which would be achieved by condemning the two blocks bounded by Union Place and by Church, High, and Asylum Streets. Extending Bushnell Park to Main Street would connect the state and municipal centers, according to the plan. In the end, Carrère and Hastings envisioned a radically transformed city center that combined state and city civic centers with a dramatically transformed infrastructure designed to improve traffic flow.<sup>34</sup>

Roads proved critical to the plan and occupied most of the space in the report. Four parkways and a system of circular and radiating avenues were crucial to their vision. The parkways would end at the civic center and “the

country taper into the city (on the parkways) rather than reversing the process of the city tapering into the country” which would produce “confusion and ugliness.” The radiating and circular avenues were designed to improve traffic flow. The inner boulevard, or first belt line, would simplify crosstown communications for many quarters of the city. An outer beltway would join Colt, Goodwin, Elizabeth, and Keney parks. The authors claimed that “careful investigation shows just how great a preventative to juvenile delinquency and crime the playground is.” In this scenario, the beltway would even help prevent children from committing crimes!<sup>35</sup>

Carrère and Hastings also made recommendations about employing zoning and municipal taxes to affect development. Zoning was not used in the United States until the Twenties, but Carrère and Hastings’ suggestions reflect a rising sentiment among city dwellers for the “need” to separate functions. Industrial and commercial sites should be kept separate from residences. Many believed in the advantages of separating the upper class from the working class. Carrère and Hastings argued that most Americans would not vote for zoning because it infringed upon individual rights, so they suggested that Hartford use the locations of the railroad tracks to establish de facto zoning. By refusing to allow railroad to be built in certain areas, residential communities would emerge in areas without tracks.<sup>36</sup>

Instead of clamoring for new laws aimed at guiding development, Carrère and Hastings suggested the implementation of tax codes to create zones of development and to penalize activities city leaders deem detrimental to the city’s welfare.<sup>37</sup> For example, they discussed how skyscrapers and tall buildings were

taxed at the same rate as small buildings. They proposed assessing taxes based on the building's income bearing capacity rather than its cost value or a value assessment determined by square or cubic feet. Ignoring a building's revenue generating potential in favor of a tax based on occupied space encouraged tenements and overcrowding because the owner did not face an increase in taxes with a rise in revenue. Carrère and Hastings also argued that billboards, an often cited nuisance in the early twentieth century, blighted the community, and only the individual owner generated the benefits. "The real secret of the control of this nuisance is by taxation," the report stated. Carrère and Hastings asserted the need to promote public improvement by the remittance of taxes, which they believed should go to people who wished to improve the public welfare.<sup>38</sup>

The City Plan for Hartford sought to extend the authority of the city into other areas. The authors proposed the improvement of the Park River and the recapture of the Connecticut River area. They recommended trolley improvement to improve traffic flow. Street lighting, traffic regulations, and the regulation of tires on cars to reduce noise also attracted their attention. Preservation of historic buildings and construction of homes for workingmen were suggested as important parts of development. Public baths attracted their attention as well. These would be a "sanitary and moral benefit: for 'poorer classes' and should be nearest the most congested areas." The authors believed "personal cleanliness, when...made easy and attractive, will work for the entire uplift of the community." Comfort stations, drinking fountains, garbage cans, and uniform street names

also attracted Carrère and Hastings' attention. The Progressive impulse clearly emerged here in their attempt to deal with the problems of Hartford.<sup>39</sup>

In a strangely prophetic comment, Hartford's ideal direction was considered as the "development of small interrelated cities at suitable distances, and, by establishing such ideal conditions, would retard the abnormal growth of the more important cities..." Almost a hundred years later, the Greater Hartford area has become exactly this: a series of interrelated cities and towns.<sup>40</sup>

The preceding suggestions represent a monumental effort by the Committee on the City Plan and the architectural firm of Carrère and Hastings. It was typical of the Progressive Era effort and it possessed ideas prevalent at the time. A few stand out: using "scientific" approaches to solving social problems, the self-conscious professionalism of the men working on the plan, and, above all, an overriding sense that order and harmony must be achieved from the chaos of the city. Indeed, utopian visions of a City Beautiful were buried in piles of mundane yet essential city functions, establishing the search for order as the defining characteristic of city planning. In the end, the grand city plan for Hartford was too expensive but, more importantly, was not needed. Between 1907 and 1912 the Commission on the City Plan began its role as caretakers of city functions and established the quest for order as their primary concern.

The city ignored the Carrère and Hastings plan and the CCP barely recognized it. The *Hartford Courant* made reference to the plan's publication in an article reporting the tragic death of John Carrère in March of 1911 and in an October 1912 piece discussing the fifth annual report of the CCP. Neither the

*Courant* nor the *Hartford Times* paid significant attention to the work of the architects. The CCP never discussed the plan in its entirety in their meetings, maybe because City Engineer Frederick L. Ford resigned in 1911.<sup>41</sup> One possibility for the CCP ignoring the plan was that Ford had been the driving force behind the hiring of Carrère and Hastings and with his departure, the plan lost its biggest proponent. Ford's authorship of the plan's foreword and active participation in city planning meetings around the country suggest he might have been the impetus behind the report. Evidence for this is limited and there is no reason to believe that Ford possessed the clout to make a difference in the plan's future.

A more compelling explanation is that the city and its citizens considered the plan far too ambitious to implement. The CCP stated in its fifth annual report issued in March of 1911:

“However idealistic these plans seem, whatever difficulties may interfere with carrying them out in detail, however strongly they may be objected to, they yet illustrate the important principles of city planning and afford us a broader and clearer vision of what our city needs.”<sup>42</sup>

The defensiveness of this statement marked a significant departure from the enthusiasm and hype that surrounded the creation of the CCP and the hiring of Carrère and Hastings five years before. They clearly felt compelled to defend themselves to their critics even though the press only made passing reference to the plan. The quote's tone suggests a commission that had been responding to critiques attacking the unrealistic nature of the plan.

Its overwhelming scope would have cost an enormous amount of money. Carrère and Hastings stated that it should be implemented over the course of 50

years, which would ostensibly ease the financial burden over the years. The CCP also found themselves defending the money they spent hiring the architects. In the fifth annual report the CCP stated:

“that plans for the development of large tracts of land in the northern and southern sections of the city have been prepared along the lines suggested by this report, and these results are worth more to Hartford than the expense of procuring the report.”<sup>43</sup>

The CCP, again on the defensive, felt compelled to justify the three thousand dollars spent to hire Carrère and Hastings in 1907.

The silence of the *Hartford Courant* and the *Hartford Times* and the defensiveness of the CCP in its fifth annual report indicate the city’s unwillingness to take the plan seriously. Things declined for the CCP. Their budget was cut to five hundred dollars in 1913 and to three hundred dollars in 1914.<sup>44</sup> The group that could “make Hartford beautiful,” it turns out, could not to much at all.

The search for explanations for the ultimate “failure” of the Carrère and Hastings, in many ways, frames an overly simplistic question. It is clear that the plan was too expensive, too impractical, and too radical. How does one begin to make sense of the early (and rather futile) attempts at city planning in Hartford?

The early city planning effort can be understood in two senses. Hartford found itself caught between the City Beautiful and the City Practical trends in city planning. The overwhelming urban demands faced by the CCP and encountered by Carrère and Hastings forced them to abandon aesthetics for practicality. A new value system and mentality is also embedded in this first “modern” attempt

to systematically make sense of space. The CCP and Carrère and Hastings faced dilemmas unique to their time.

Robert Wiebe explored the Progressive era in *The Search for Order, 1877-1920*. He argued that the years between the end of the Civil War and the end of World War I, the years of industrialization in the US, saw fundamental changes in American values. In response to the challenges posed by the rise of industry, immigration, and rural to urban migration, a new middle class of urban, professional men and women emerged. They valued “continuity and regularity, functionality and rationality, administration and management.” The new values would be instituted through reform—hence the Progressive impulse for change through government intervention.<sup>45</sup>

The early Hartford city planning experience fits well into Wiebe’s thesis. The creation of the Commission on the City Plan was an act of the Connecticut General Assembly and it intended to deal with the issues facing urban Hartford. The values Wiebe identifies were reflected in the work of the CCP and in the Carrère and Hastings plan. For example, by identifying 43 problems facing the city of Hartford, the CCP sought to manage the numerous difficulties in a comprehensive way. Hiring experts to fix the problems of Hartford reflected the rise of the specialist who could use scientific approaches to fix problems. The clippings file kept by the CCP indicate a self-conscious group dedicated to rationally approaching problems. The Carrère and Hastings report can be characterized as an attempt to impose order and harmony on space made chaotic by the sweeping social changes of the late nineteenth and early twentieth

century. By emphasizing things like traffic flow and taxation, they sought to establish order, predictability, and control over urban space. Finally, the “search for order” ultimately undermined the City Beautiful movement as aesthetic concerns became crowded out by the pressing demands of the city.

### **Conclusion**

Modern city and regional planning emerged in the Progressive Era, a time when the United States faced unforeseen challenges brought by immigration, industrialization, and urbanization. Driven at first by beautification efforts and later by practical considerations, professional planning emerged in the early part of the twentieth century as a bureaucratic and managerial pursuit rooted in the desire to achieve order and harmony in cities. Hartford’s first experiment in city planning reflected these developments. But the city also set an important precedent when it refused to act in a coordinated way to deal with a host of problems. Native Yankees began moving to surrounding towns and suburbs while Italian, Polish, Russian, and Lithuanian immigrants filled Hartford. The pattern of ignoring city planning initiatives with a simultaneous exodus of wealth from Hartford continues today.

Almost a century after Hartford’s first attempt at comprehensive planning, similar issues remain. In a recent Sunday edition of the *Hartford Courant*, Bruce Katz and Mark Muro, analysts at the Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy at the Brookings Institute, argued Connecticut should adapt “Smart Growth” policies to curb suburban sprawl, which would save money on expensive infrastructure expansion. With a state budget squeezed because of dwindling tax receipts,

smart growth would save money, reduce sprawl, and conserve green space.<sup>46</sup> A week later the *Courant* printed a piece by Richard J. Porth and Mary Ellen Kowalewski, members of the Capitol Region Council of Governments, a 29-town regional agency. Their piece promoted their organization's publication: "Achieving a Balance: A Plan of Conservation and Development for the Capitol Region," which they claimed "is intended to guide decisions on physical development with an eye toward both the physical and social impact of these decisions." In their regional approach they implicitly sought the sacrifice of town autonomy in the Capitol area, a difficult task in a region with a long tradition of "home rule."<sup>47</sup>

Like the Commission on the City Plan and Carrère and Hastings in the early part of the twentieth century, urban and regional planners still search for ways to direct society's use of space. The underlying challenge today the same as the one faced in early Hartford: how can a community, in a world with limited resources of land, labor, and capital, collectively decide the future of its shared space? This raises a fundamental question about individual property rights (the building block for our economic and political system) and community efforts to decide how to use space. How Hartford and cities around the United States will strike a balance between the rights of property owners and the regional environmental and economic needs will be one of the fundamental concerns of the twenty first century.

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<sup>1</sup> "Hartford to Be Beautiful," *Hartford Courant*, 21 October, 1908.

<sup>2</sup> James Baldwin, *Domesticating the Streets: The Reform of Public Space in Hartford, 1850-1930*, (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1999), 240.

- <sup>3</sup> From biographical introduction to: John Carrère, "City Planning From an Artistic Standpoint," *Urban Planning, 1794-1918: Bibliography of Source Material in the Anthology* accessed at <http://www.library.cornell.edu/Reps/DOCS/carrere.htm>
- <sup>4</sup> From class handout, "Foreign-Born in the Population of Hartford," from The Mitchell House, Inc. and "Population of Hartford and Suburbs," from Connecticut State Register and Manual.
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>6</sup> Jon Teaford, *The Twentieth Century American City*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, Second Edition, 1993), 30-36.
- <sup>7</sup> Anthony Sutcliffe, ed. *The Rise of Modern Urban Planning*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980), 1-3.
- <sup>8</sup> Brian Ladd, *Urban Planning and Civic Order in Germany*, (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1990), 1.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>10</sup> Carrère and Hastings, *A Plan for the City of Hartford: Preliminary Report* (Hartford: Case, Lockwood, and Brainerd for the Commission of the City Plan, 1912), 13.
- <sup>11</sup> William H. Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 1.
- <sup>12</sup> Peter Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow: An Intellectual History of Urban Planning and Design in the Twentieth Century*, (Oxford, England: Blackwell Publishers, 1988; 1996), 175.
- <sup>13</sup> Teaford, 41-42.
- <sup>14</sup> Wilson, 1.
- <sup>15</sup> John Carrère, "City Planning From an Artistic Standpoint," *Urban Planning, 1794-1918: Bibliography of Source Material in the Anthology* accessed at <http://www.library.cornell.edu/Reps/DOCS/carrere.htm>
- <sup>16</sup> "Planning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century in Washington State: A Reconsideration of the Scope and Status of the Comprehensive Plan," paper presented by the American Planning Association-Washington Chapter Senior Action Committee (SAC) at APA WA Chapter Conference. October 2-4, 2000. Accessed at: [http://www.washington-apa.org/htmlPages/SAC.htm#\\_Toc509735858](http://www.washington-apa.org/htmlPages/SAC.htm#_Toc509735858)
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>19</sup> This argument is set forth in Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967).
- <sup>20</sup> Quoted in Peter Baldwin, *Domesticating the Streets*, 234.
- <sup>21</sup> October 20, 1908. "Reports of the Commission on the City Plan, 1908-1947." Bound volume held at the City Planning Office, Hartford, CT.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>23</sup> "Hartford to be Beautiful."
- <sup>24</sup> James Baldwin, *Domesticating the Streets*, 230. Refers to speech cited by Baldwin as: John M. Carrère, "City Improvement from the Artistic Standpoint," in *Publications of the Municipal Art Society of Hartford, Connecticut*, no. 7, *City Improvement from the Artistic Standpoint, an address by John M. Carrère*, New York (Hartford: Municipal Art Society, 1908), 7.
- <sup>25</sup> "Ideas for the City Beautiful," *Hartford Courant*, 4 January, 1909.
- <sup>26</sup> "The Hartford of the Future," *Hartford Courant*, 17 July, 1909.
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>29</sup> Clippings file marked "1907-1945." Bound volume held at the City Planning Office, Hartford, CT.
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>31</sup> Carrère and Hastings, *A Plan for the City of Hartford: Preliminary Report*, 1.
- <sup>32</sup> Ibid, 5-9.
- <sup>33</sup> Ibid, 9; John Carrère, "City Planning From an Artistic Standpoint."
- <sup>34</sup> Carrère and Hastings, *A Plan for the City of Hartford: Preliminary Report*, 10, 27-34.
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid, 10-12, 55-57, 59.
- <sup>36</sup> Ibid, 13.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 13-14.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 18-23; 74-75; 87.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 61-63; 68-74, 76; 79-80; 83.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 88-89.

<sup>41</sup> Gordon Bell, "Planning in Hartford, 1907-1942. A Study of Planning Activities in Hartford, Connecticut From the Creation of the First Official Planning Agency in the United States in 1907, to 1942." Created for Walter H. Blucher, Planning Consultant, Detroit, Michigan, 1942.

<sup>42</sup> Quoted in Gordon Bell, "Planning in Hartford, 1907-1942," 16, Peter Baldwin, *Domesticating the Streets*, 248, and "Report of City Plan Commission," 15 October 1912, *Hartford Courant*.

<sup>43</sup> Quoted in Gordon Bell, "Planning in Hartford, 1907-1942," 16.

<sup>44</sup> Gordon Bell, "Planning in Hartford, 1907-1942," 17.

<sup>45</sup> Robert Wiebe, "The Search for Order, 1877-1920," vii-viii.

<sup>46</sup> Mark Muro and Bruce Katz, "The Smart Money is on Smart Growth," *Hartford Courant*, 8 June 2003, C4.

<sup>47</sup> Mary Ellen Kowalewski and Richard J. Porth, "Achieving Balance in the Hartford Region," *Hartford Courant*, 15 June 2003, C5.

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