

STATE CAPITOL AREA PLAZA

A STUDY OF ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT PLANS

A STUDY OF ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT PLANS
FOR THE STATE CAPITOL AREA PLAZA AT TOPEKA

by

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PREFACE

During the summer of 1975, I had the opportunity to visit the State Capitol Area for three months. The distinct features of this area interested me very much. It was at this time that I received exposure to this particular project from the then State Highway Commission of Kansas. I found that this project offered an excellent opportunity to work with the diverse elements of planning and decided to work on it. I believe that this project has brought further exposure in my learning process of the field of planning.

The study was undertaken in two parts. The first part deals with a background study of the project and of the planning process. The second part deals with the development and evaluation of several alternative plans. Some general observations are given at the end.

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INTRODUCTION

Every site, natural or man-made, is to some degree unique; a web of things and activities. This web imposes limitations, and also contains new possibilities. All forms of planning analyses lead to the crystallization and synthesis of different elements and considerations into a proposed scheme or several alternate schemes. This coalescence of parts and shaping of an end resolution is planning, whether the product is a design for a physical facility or a master plan for a city.

Planning a site is the process of considering separately the diverse elements involved in a particular environment, inter-relating them one with another, determining which will be incorporated, and finally, integrating those into the most reasonable solution for an specified purpose. Site planning has been defined by Kevin Lynch as, "the art of arranging objects on the external physical environment in harmony with each other to support human activities."¹

Site planning, like any other branch of planning, seeks to achieve a solution to certain existing problem or resolution to new possibilities, either for a single site or for an entire community. A site plan can be considered as one that deals

with normally a particular contiguous area under the control of one agency, and with the use of the land and the physical facilities upon it.

This study deals with the planning of a site which may best be described as the administrative center of the state of Kansas. The site is the State Capitol Area at Topeka and the issue is to undertake a planning study for creating a unified and consolidated administrative complex with the possibility of a centralized 'plaza' or 'square', which would accommodate the needs and demands of physical requirements for providing public services, and in addition, would preserve and emphasize the prestigious impact of this landmark center.

The State Capitol Area at Topeka is one of the few sites which has survived and retained the characteristics of traditional administrative centers of American cities. Such characteristics are elaborated in section 1.5. Today, in the face of some of the common problems of growing cities, the Capitol Area has the unique task of promoting greater focus on the image of this center, in addition to providing for the physical facilities. The Capitol Area Plaza Authority (CAPA), the agency responsible

for administering the planning and development activities for the Capitol Area, have sought solutions along these lines. While attempts have been made in the past and several plans were adopted at various times, none of these could be implemented successfully. Various reasons could be advanced to explain this consequence, but important factors become apparent. First, all the previous plans emphasized the economic and engineering aspects of their solutions. They attempted more to accommodate physical needs, were more concerned with bringing solutions to the problems in existence rather than with lending some new insight into the real need. Secondly, most plans attempted to present one Master Plan, calling it 'the Master Plan' for the Capitol Area. This gave the decision-makers a choice that was really no choice: 1) to implement the plan as proposed, or 2) not to implement it. Obviously, the second happened to be the choice in all cases.

Thus, this study was undertaken, with the problems of the previous plans in mind, as an effort to find solutions which would be free of those problems.

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The existence of the present Capitol Area grounds dates to 1862, when the Topeka Town Association designated twenty acres of land in the center of Topeka for a Capitol Square. The first two buildings to be constructed on the site were the Capitol Building in 1866 and the Memorial Building in 1914.² Since then more buildings have been added to the site at various times to meet expanding needs for space. The first step of bringing all planning activities into the area was taken in 1955, when a state zoning area was created and the State Office Building Commission was assigned the responsibility of continuous reviewing of the site. In 1965, ground-work for a broad-based Master Plan for the Capitol Area was initiated. Black and Veatch Inc. performed the first planning studies.³

On June 8, 1966, a tornado struck the city of Topeka and did much damage to the area. At this stage, new efforts to create a State Capitol Area Plaza were taken. The Capitol Area Planning Commission, created in 1965, started to acquire the site, and in June, 1968, the commission initiated contracts with SUA Inc. of California. (The full name of this company was not available from any source). The original SUA study was completed

in 1968 and the final report contained specific recommendations and detailed statistical analyses of space needs for each division and section of all departments and agencies, projected for five year intervals up to the year 1995.⁴

In 1969, Kansas Architectural and Planning Associates was selected, first to develop conceptual plans of the project, which was completed in late 1969. At this stage, the official name of the commission was changed to Capitol Area Plaza Authority (CAPA). In 1971, Schaefer, Schirmer and Eflin Associates were assigned to update space and utility requirements and to prepare initial architectural plans for the main plaza.⁵ Recently, Oblinger Smith Associates of Kansas has been assigned to prepare new conceptual plans for the area. Preliminary plans were completed by this firm, but the future of the plans is unknown.

Although all the plans, as above, were completed and some of them even adopted as the official plan, none of them were implemented successfully. While an elaborate evaluation of the above-mentioned plans was considered to be beyond the scope of this study, a brief review revealed that all the plans had certain individual merits, but few drawbacks were found in common

in all the plans. For example, these plans lacked flexibility, offered little choice for the decision-makers, such as, presenting different alternatives, were not comprehensive in nature etc. It could not be determined if none of the plans were implemented because of any of their drawbacks. The State Architect's Office, which performs the secretarial job for CAPA, would not give any more information in this regard than saying that they were political decisions.

The present location of the Capitol Area in relation to the City of Topeka is shown in Figure 1.1.1. The primary plaza is defined by the following streets:

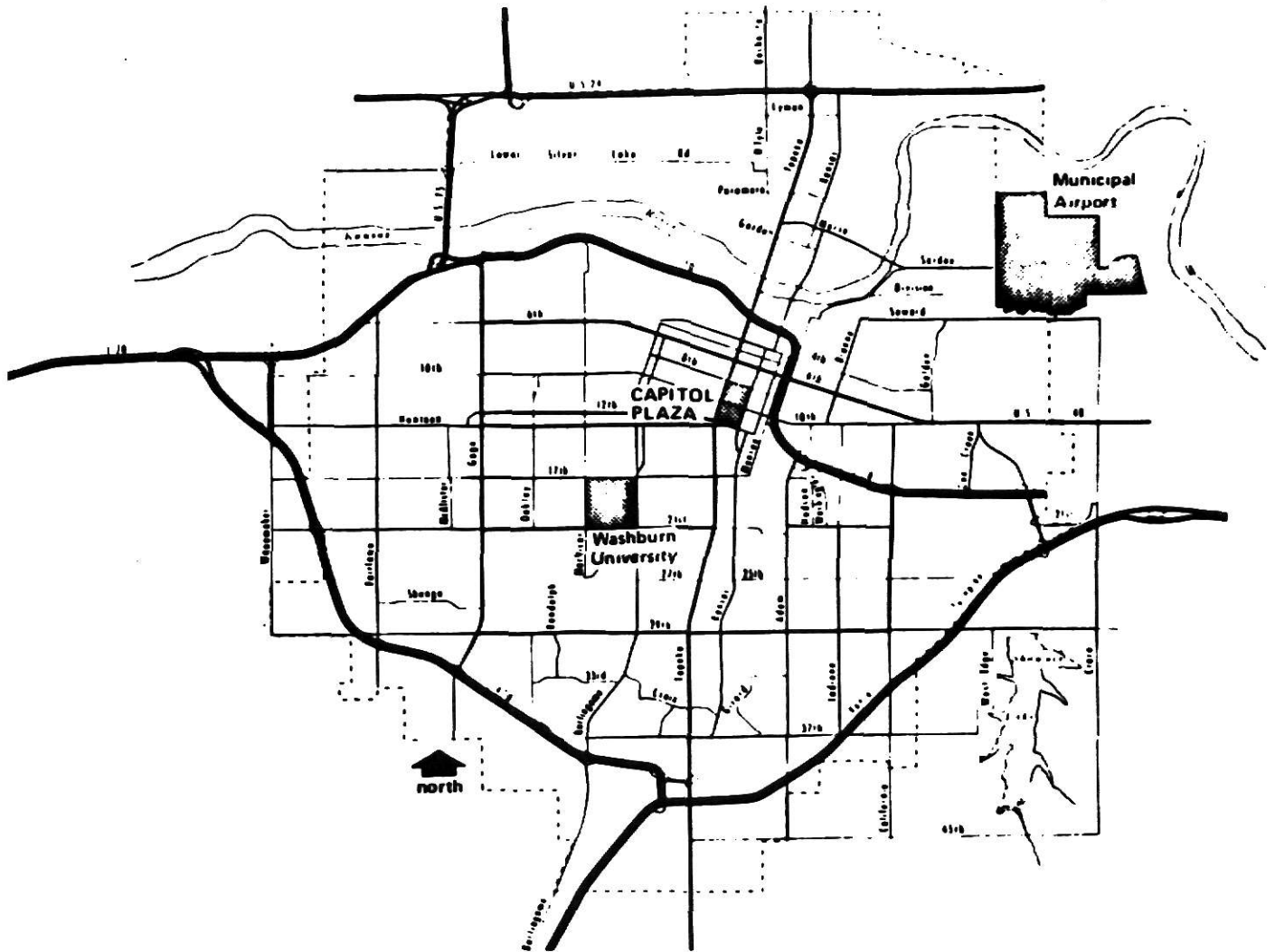
- Eight Street on the north,
- Jackson Street on the east,
- Topeka Avenue on the west, and
- Twelfth Street on the south.

The twenty three block Capitol Area is defined by the following streets, as shown in Figure 1.1.2:

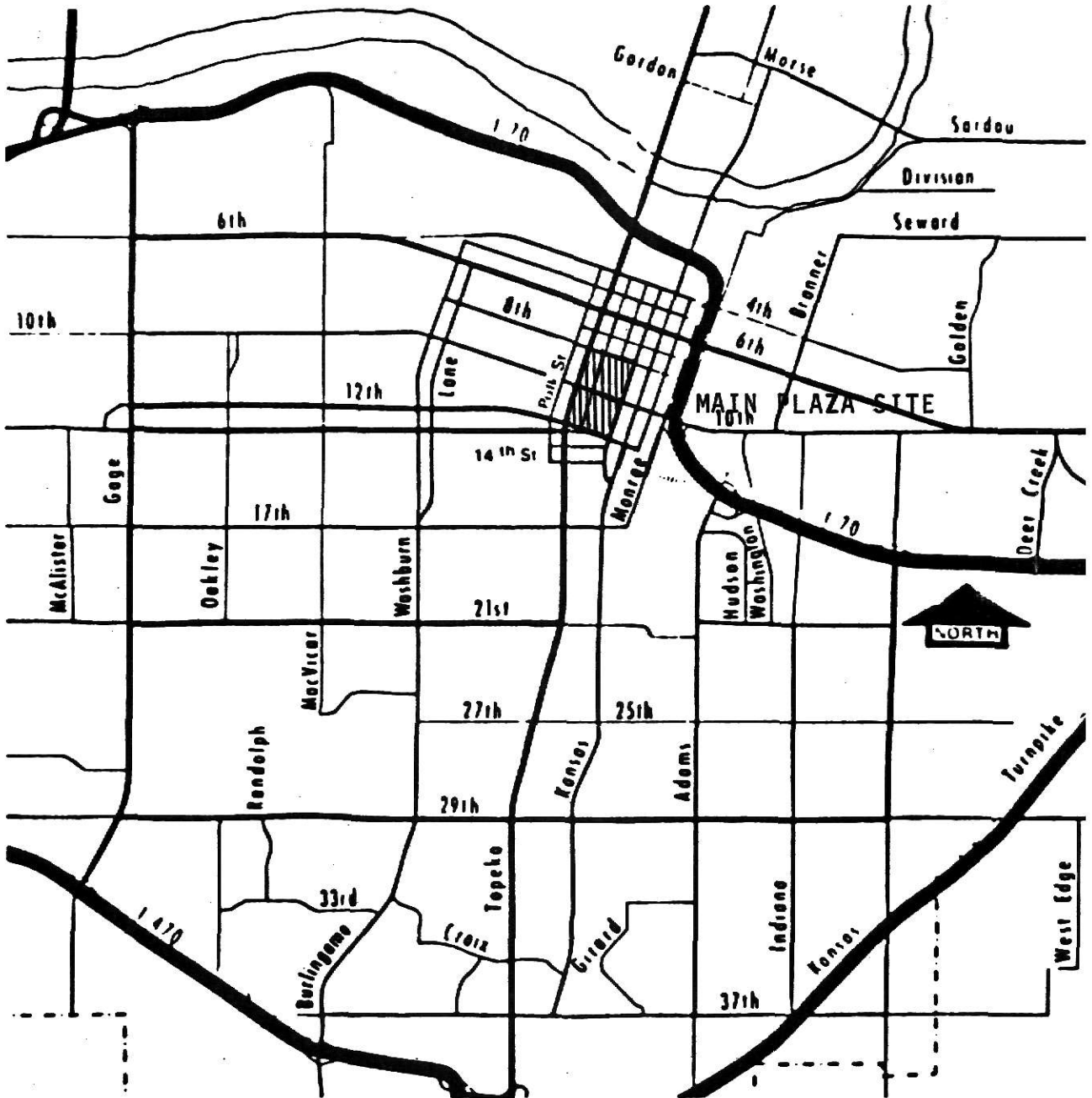
- Seventh Street on the north,
- Kansas Avenue on the east,
- Polk Street on the west, and
- Fourteenth Street on the south.

FIGURE 1.1.1.

Twenty-three block State Capitol Area



Main Plaza Site of the State Capitol Area



The State Capitol of Kansas and its present grounds at Topeka have traditionally been a source of pride for the citizens of this state because of its sentimental value. The State Legislature, in recognition of this fact, have taken steps from time to time to provide and maintain a Capitol Area, which is adequate, efficient and a genuine center of prestige. The steps taken by the legislature in this respect have been discussed in the previous section.

The state government of Kansas is involved with serving a growing number of citizens and with providing ever increasing kinds of services. These factors and others have led to a consistent need for employment of more people, and this consistent increase in employees and services demands a highly specialized employment center. This involvement of activities in one center inevitably results in complex problems, both administrative and physical. Physical problems involve space, transportation, utilities, etc. Dispersal of service units over various sites, rather than concentrating them at one site, is also possible; but since the authority has desired to consolidate as many units as possible in one unified site,

a comparative study of advantages and disadvantages of the two possibilities was not considered relevant.

Today, the state government is moving ever closer to the development of a unified Capitol Area complex, dedicated to the needs and environments for the future. The Capitol Area Plaza Authority, which is assigned with the responsibility of undertaking this task, is currently in the process of achieving a Development Plan for the area, which would meet the following requirements:

- 1) Would consolidate the area as an administrative complex,
- 2) Would consider the possibility of a centralized 'plaza',
- 3) Would accommodate the needs and demands of physical facilities,
- 4) Would be comprehensive, long-range and flexible enough to meet the changing requirements of the future.

While all the previous plans were directed to meet the abovementioned requirements, a few problems with these attempts were observed. Two problems were important. First, several alternative plans were not presented to give the decision-makers enough choice, and second, the plans were not evaluated to

test their ability to meet the specified requirements or their side effects.

This study was initiated with an attempt to use the case of the Capitol Area Plaza for applying the planning and evaluating process, in the light of the problems of previous plans. Therefore, the purpose of this study may be stated as two-fold:

1. study the planning process for preparing alternative plans, and based on a selected process, prepare several conceptual plans for the site which would meet specified requirements,
2. study the methodology of evaluating alternative plans, and select one methodology to test the several plans for the site.

The final outcome would be to recommend one conceptual plan from the set of plans.

The scope of this study included the following stages:

- 1) Reviewing the literature for selection of process,
- 2) Establishing of a set of criteria with respect to goals,
- 3) Studying the functional and characteristic aspects of 'plaza',
- 4) Analyzing the existing and projected conditions,
- 5) Preparing alternative conceptual plans to meet requirements,
- 6) Testing alternative plans by applying selected methodology.

All goals and objectives stem from basic values that are important to people, and the goals rest heavily on inherent values. Associated with each goal is at least one strongly defined objective and a corresponding criterion. Professor John Dickey of Virginia State University defined a hierarchy of values and corresponding goals and objectives, followed by a set of criteria.⁶ According to Prof. Dickey:

Value is an element of a shared symbolic system, acquired through social learning, which serves as a guide for the selection from among perceived alternatives of orientation. Goal is an articulation of values, formulated in the light of identified issues and problems, toward the attainment of which policies and decisions are directed. Objective is a specific statement denoting a measurable end to be reached or achieved for a particular group of people, usually in a span of time. Criterion is an explicit attribute or characteristic used for the purpose of comparative evaluation."⁷

In order to establish the set of values-goals-objectives-criteria, various reports on legislative actions and current development trends, in addition to several past studies on the planning activities for the site were reviewed, after which the set, as follows, was considered appropriate to reflect the needs. An inter-relation of the components of the set

was established according to the description given by Prof. Dickey, an illustration of which is given in Figure 1.3.1. The value, goal, and objective components of the set are discussed in Appendix 1.3.1. The following is the description of the criterion component of the set. These criteria were used in the evaluation of the alternative plans in section 2.7.

1. Aesthetic:

- A. Improve on-site visual impact.
- B. Improve off-site visual impact (urban-scape view from road).
- C. Improve mass-void relation between buildings and spaces.

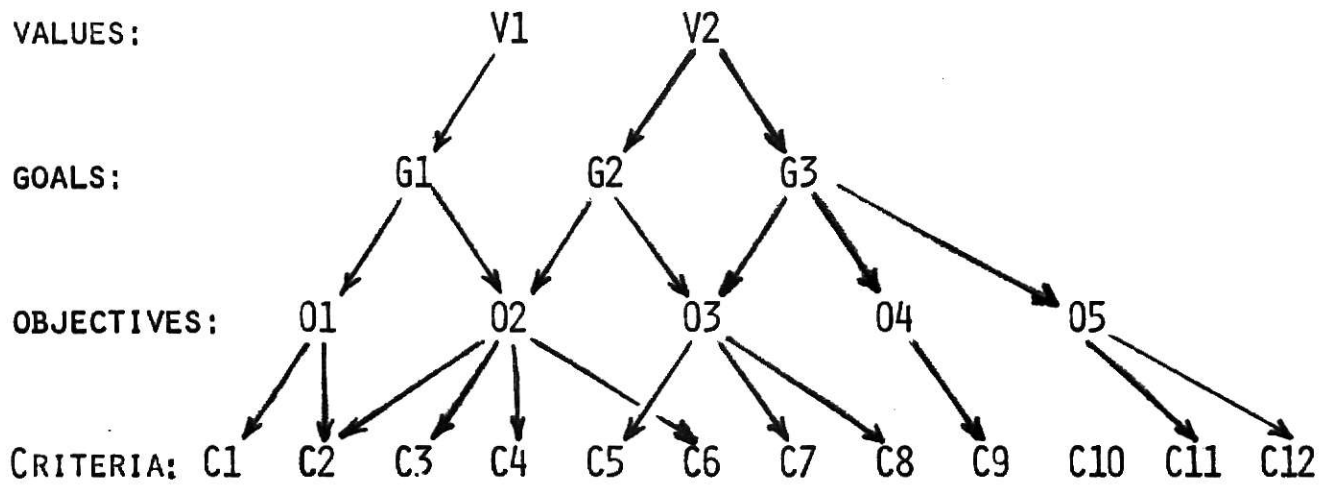
2. Building Condition:

- A. Preserve buildings of good structural condition and historical significance.
- B. Reduce dislocation of buildings to accommodate other facilities.

3. Environment:

- A. Reduce noise and air-pollution effects from surroundings.
- B. Reduce drainage problem of on-site water.
- C. Reduce vibration of surfaces by vehicle or equipment.

Inter-relation of Values-Goals-Objectives-Criteria



4. Economic:
 - A. Reduce disruption and displacement of economic activity in surrounding areas.
 - B. Keep construction and maintenance cost within minimum.
5. Land Use:
 - A. Improve land use to create a uniform, conforming and congenial area.
 - B. Reduce major change in land use within minimum.
6. Natural Features:
 - A. Reduce disruption of existing natural features.
 - B. Improve surroundings with addition of natural elements.
7. Parking and Transit:
 - A. Reduce parking problems, both on-site and off-site.
 - B. Improve transit service facilities to the site.
8. Pedestrian Circulation:
 - A. Improve pedestrian access to all units on site.
 - B. Improve pedestrian integration with parking and transit.
 - C. Create areas to accommodate pedestrian amenities characteristic of 'plaza'.
 - D. Reduce pedestrian-vehicular conflicts.

9. Traffic Circulation:

- A. Improve on-site vehicular movement.
- B. Reduce through-site traffic disruption.
- C. Reduce potential for traffic congestion at intersections.
- D. Improve access to and from the site.

10. Socio-cultural:

- A. Provide for socio-cultural activities on site.
- B. Reflect the physical character of the state.

11. Space Use:

- A. Improve utilization of existing space.
- B. Provide additional space to meet requirements.
- C. Provide flexibility of space use to meet changing needs.

12. Utility and Services:

- A. Improve utility facilities where upgrading is needed.
- B. Reduce utility disruption and relocation.

It has been mentioned, in section 1.2, that one important issue of this study is to look into the possibility of a centralized plaza with characteristic features typical of a 'plaza' or 'square' which would emphasize the impact of an administrative center. Therefore, it was considered necessary to study the functions and features of a 'plaza'. The following is a brief discussion of the study undertaken.

Administrative centers take many urban forms, but are most often found in what is called a 'Central Courthouse square', which is a square usually centered around a courthouse. In many places, however, squares are developed around a civic center, a public library, city hall or other administrative unit, a historical landmark, etc. The traditional center of many American cities, 'The Square' is described by Dr. Edward Price, Professor of Geography at the University of Oregon as, "a rectangular block surrounded by streets, with the central structure - often the grandest and most ornate building in the community - standing alone in the middle of the square, and the city's leading public and commercial structures enclosing the square symmetrically on all four sides."⁸

Planned squares and plazas appeared as early as fifth century in ancient Greece and are clearly recognized as such by their use, such as a city center plaza, a market square or shopping plaza, a traffic center, a parvis etc. The village green in a small town, the central square of a residential neighborhood, the monumental plaza of a metropolis - all serve the same purpose. Their physical and psychological functions do not depend on size or scale. They resulted directly from the form of the buildings and streets, and served the purpose of humanizing people by mutual contact. In other words, a plaza or a square may be stated as a public space of some sort, representing a gathering place for the people and providing them with a shelter against the tension of rushing through the web of streets.

Paul Zucker, architect and author, designated plaza or square as a three-dimensional expansion of 'space' and defined it as, "a structural organization as a frame for human activities and is based on very definite factors; on the relation between the forms of the surrounding buildings, on their uniformity or variety, on their absolute dimensions and their proportions in

comparison with width and length of the open area, on the angle of the entering streets, and finally, on the location of three-dimensional accents."⁹ According to Paul Zucker, the form of a plaza, like its function, may vary and is recognized by three space-confining elements: frame, floor and ceiling - the volumes of surrounding buildings being the frame, the patterns and levels of the surface being the floor and the heights of vertical structures giving the ceiling. The inter-relationship of these elements, combined with the functions offer the characteristics of a plaza.¹⁰

As a final word, it may be stated that the planning of a plaza involves the planning for pedestrians, the planning aspects of which are those that are inherent in or emanate most directly from the 'physical' man. Planning for pedestrians in urban centers had been badly neglected. Only recently, interest has turned toward this central formative element, because, no matter how people arrive at their place of work, they end up as pedestrians. Since the ultimate limit on the smooth functioning of an activity center is its provision for pedestrian circulation, it is important that high standards of amenities for the safety and convenience of pedestrians be maintained.

Briefly, the process of planning involves a system of inter-relating different elements constituting a particular area, which is derived by a schematic study and is incorporated in preliminary schemes depicting alternative solutions in space along with supporting analysis. From among the representations of these solutions, a preferred solution is selected which will permit working out a new and better scheme. After the adoption of a general solution, two categories of information are considered for final representation. One consists of the usual presentation drawings and relevant specifications which depict the three-dimensional and material characteristics of the proposed development. The other includes a variety of closely related information, analyses and decisions that are presented separately in many different forms such as graphs, charts, reports, tables, etc.

But before the stage of final presentation can be reached, the process of planning an environment is involved with a series of stages concerned with an inherently intricate system composed of many diverse parts. This study was approached with a review of the literature available on the planning and design process

currently in practice in order to achieve an ideal process. Although, for some time to come, it is expected that any fundamental advance is unlikely to evolve which will revolutionize the existing processes; in recent years significant improvements in various aspects of the process have come to practice in the individual or isolated planning efforts of several agencies and organizations. Therefore, this review has served to clarify the overall context of the mechanism. An elaborate discussion of this review is included in Appendix 1.5.1, while a brief summary of it is given in the following discussion.

While all the planning processes reviewed were rational, it was apparent that several of them were formulated to meet the needs of specific projects. However, there was a sense of agreement in the proper sequencing of activities in all the processes. One element present in many proposed processes was the preparation of several alternatives. This seemed to be a predominantly current trend. From this review, the process proposed by Lichfield, Kettle and Whitbred¹¹ was considered preferable for the purpose of this study, for reasons

such as its direct, comprehensive, less complex and general nature. The different stages of the process are given below, while an illustration of the linkages between the stages is included in Figure 1.5.1.

1. Preliminary Recognition and Definition of Problems
 - A. Surveillance and analysis of relevant problems.
 - B. Comparison of existing and projected conditions.
 - C. Assessment of problem significance.
2. Decision To Act and Definition Of The Planning Task
 - A. Decision to investigate the problems and alternative courses of action.
 - B. Definition of the purpose of planning task.
 - C. Formulation of goals for the plan.
 - D. Formulation of approach to the study and to the design and evaluation of alternative plans.
3. Data Collection, Analysis and Forecasting
 - A. Collection and analysis of data relevant to the problem.
 - B. Forecasting the scope for development.
 - C. Determination of evaluation data requirements.
4. Determination of Constraints for design.