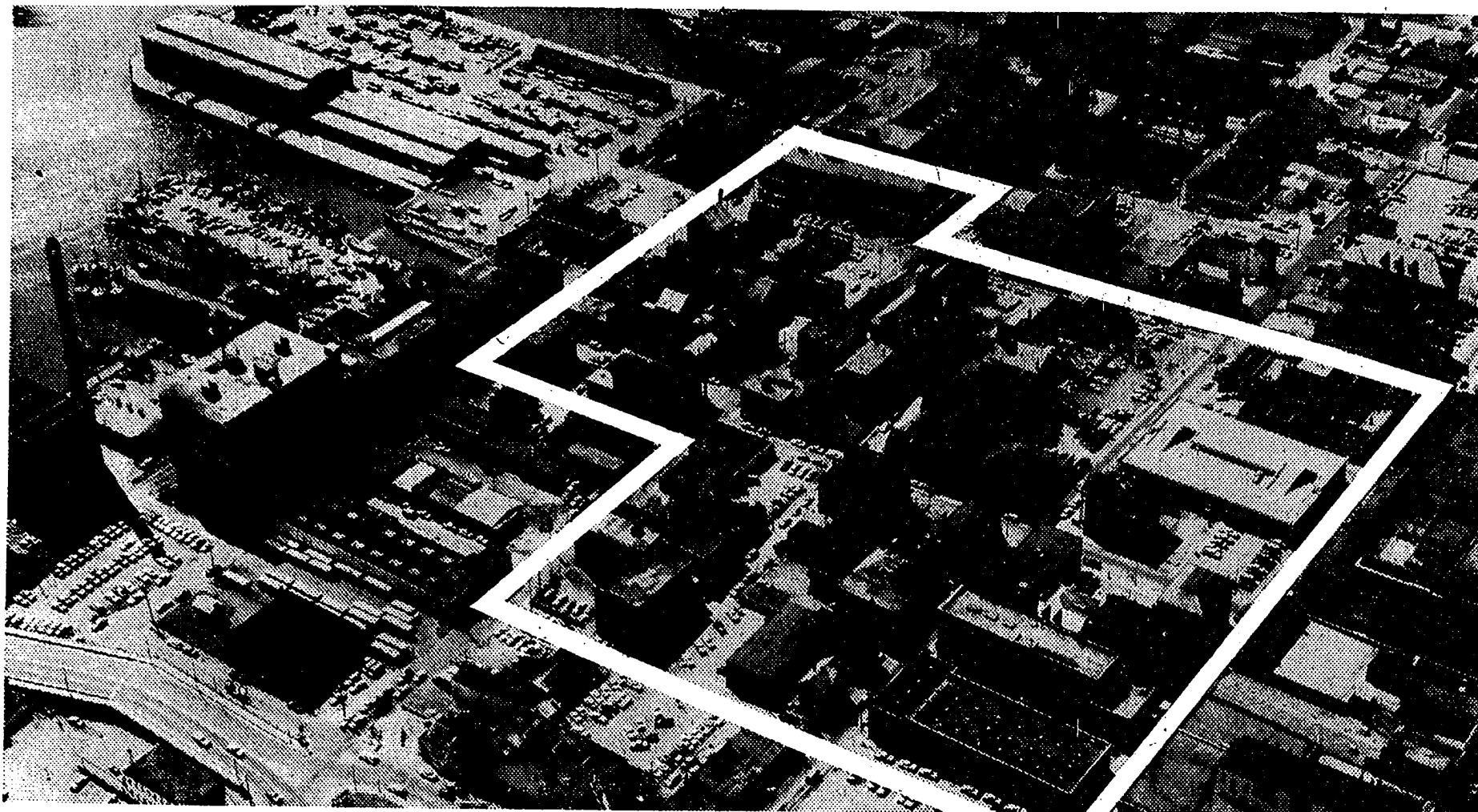


New Bedford Waterfront a Model Renewal Project



The area to be renewed in New Bedford, once the center of a thriving whaling industry, is outlined in white. Section of the city covers 190 acres.

U.S. Invests \$83,050 in a Trial Plan for Old Whaling City

By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE
Special to The New York Times

NEW BEDFORD, Mass., Nov. 19—The Federal Government has just sent up an \$83,050 trial balloon in its \$4.5-billion urban renewal program. The launching was done in this New England city of 100,000 that has three times lost its past through fire and industrial change and is now in search of its future.

The preliminary results of a small but critically important demonstration study for the renewal of the historic commercial areas of older cities were previewed here Thursday and yesterday in a two-day workshop attended by 100 hand-picked Federal, state and local officials and representatives of community groups.

The meetings were co-sponsored by the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the New Bedford Redevelopment Authority and the Waterfront Historic Area League of New Bedford.

The Government-backed study, the first of its kind, offers a complete redevelopment plan for the historic waterfront district of New Bedford. The proposal contains recommendations on zoning, financing and enabling legislation expected to have country-wide application to similar problem areas.

Mixture of Styles

The 190-acre historic New Bedford site that forms the basis of the pilot study is bounded by Union, Front, Rodman, Elm and Second Streets, and the waterfront. An important center of the Nineteenth Century American whaling industry, it has been recommended for a national landmark designation by the Department of the Interior.

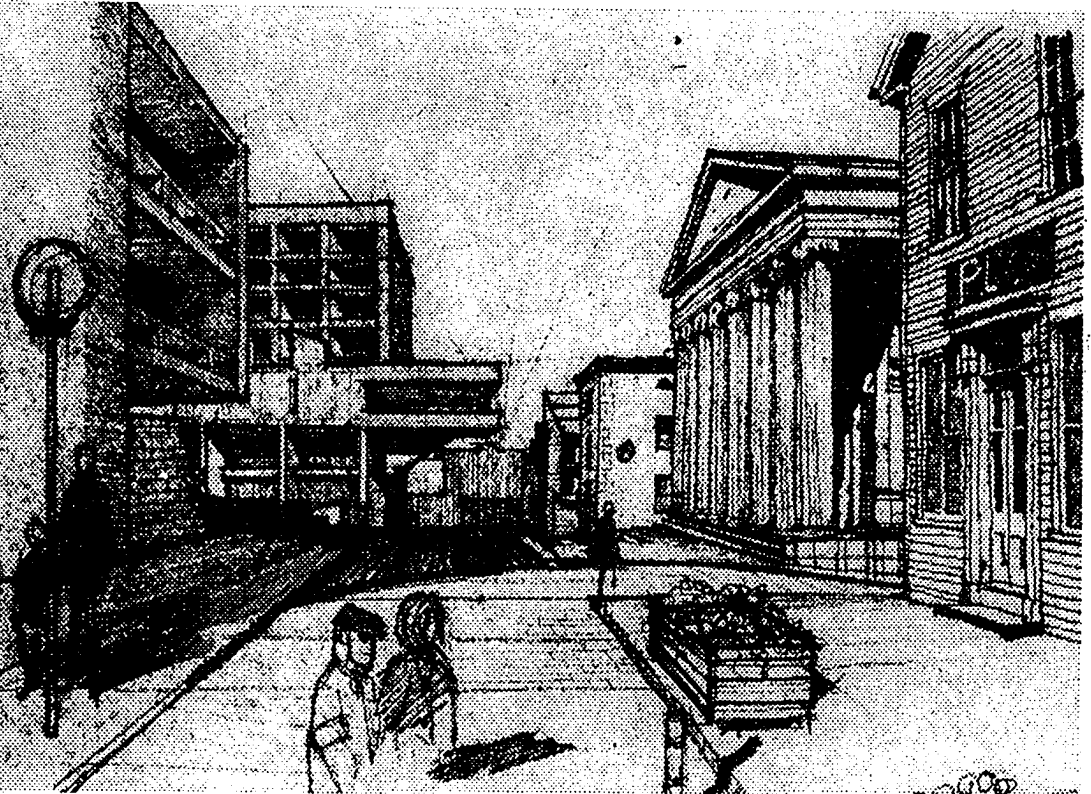
The study's proposals would turn a deteriorated nine-block neighborhood of once-handsome granite, brick and wooden buildings of the 1820's through the 1850's, still possessed of shabby Greek Revival charms, into a thriving mix of renovated structures and new business construction. The plan would tie in with the adjacent central business district, a city-wide circulation system, and massive urban renewal projects to the north and south.

"We are not in favor of Colonializing or Victorianizing the historic area," says Robert J. Kerr, chief planning consultant. "The good design that we are capable of producing today can blend with the good design of the past."

This kind of "restoration for



View north on Water Street. Buildings, right, including the pillared Double Bank Building, will be preserved. Much of the area was constructed from 1820's through the 1850's.



This rendering shows Water Street as it will appear after renewal. An office building and a hotel are planned for the area on the left. The buildings to be preserved are at the right.

New Bedford Model Renewal Project

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reuse," would bring service businesses, specialty shops, small offices, hotel and restaurant facilities into the historic district, which would also function as the city's tourist and cultural center.

It would be served by peripheral parking garages and be threaded by pedestrian ways, parks and gardens. The current cost estimate, if the plan is executed under Title I of the United States Housing Act of 1965, is \$3,176,000.

The New Bedford pilot study is directed toward the solution of one of the most common urban problems—the revitalization of the slipping commercial core of the older American community, which is almost always the city's historic heart.

Financial Procedures

Its proposals are considered significant because they deal not only with the architectural question of rehabilitating a historic commercial neighborhood, but also with all of the legal, financial and programming procedures needed to carry out a total "area" plan. The study is concerned with a kind of renewal that has been considered one of the most pressing needs and conspicuous failures of the Federal programs to date.

Until now, the chief tool for strengthening the economic base of these historic commercial districts has been the bulldozer. Critics have compared the results to small-scale bombing attacks on the American cities' character, history and culture, in which the economic and esthetic potential of an historic area is leveled with the old buildings and regional and traditional values are sacrificed to short-term, nondescript new commercial construction.

No direct financial aid for preservation has been available from Federal programs until this year's Demonstration Cities and Metropolitan Development Act, which will make it possible for local agencies to acquire historic structures and restore and resell them for the first time. The definition of historic structures is still unresolved.

Rehabilitation, which is presently receiving heavy emphasis from renewal administrators, has been limited largely to residential users and has proved almost worthless in commercial districts. Commercial revitalization of older, downtown cores remains an unsolved critical priority.

The \$83,050 New Bedford study has been based on a \$63,050 Section 314 grant given to the local Redevelopment Authority in September, 1965, by the Urban Renewal Administration of the Housing and Home Finance Agency. Both agencies now function within the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

The New Bedford City Planning Department added \$11,000 in services, and a private, non-profit group, the Waterfront Historic Area League, known as WHALE, contributed \$3,000 in services and an \$8,000 grant from the Old Dominion Foundation, a Mellon philanthropy. It has also bought and handsomely restored three typical frame houses in the historic district.

The work has been carried out by the Urban Design Group of the Corinthian Conservation Company, Inc., of Newport, R. I., as the prime consultant on planning and design; the New Bedford City Planning Department; and Peter J. Laudati, a real estate and market expert who acted as economic adviser.

Reviewed by Jury

A jury consisting of Jacob L. Crane, planner, Frederick Gutheim, urban affairs consultant, and Stephen W. Jacobs, associate professor of the Cornell College of Architecture, reviewed the project during its concentrated one-year development period.

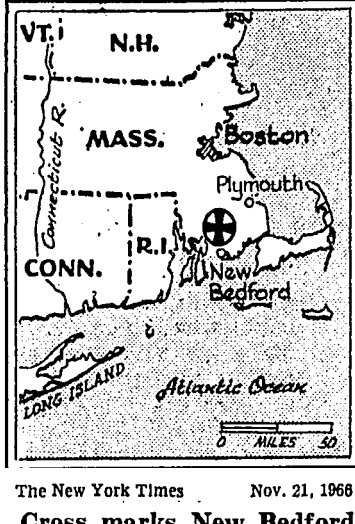
New Bedford has offered the demonstration study a typical concentration of the older American cities' troubles.

Its decaying downtown and historic past not only coincide in textbook fashion, but suffer as well from all of the commonly associated ills of loss of business, unrented space, a slipping tax base, the need for new commercial activity and construction, and the strangling traffic problems that the automobile has brought to towns never built to accommodate it. The business district is about to lose its chief department store and one of its largest commercial tenants.

The city has also endured a traumatic series of disasters, from the burning of the Eighteenth Century town by the British to the loss of the Whaling industry, followed by the loss of the textile industry in the Nineteenth Century, and the loss of urban character through Twentieth Century blight. Neglect of older sections has created areas expensive to the city to service and inadequate for the needs of modern business, and they are a burden to property owners.

To complete the list of predictable problems, an expressway in the planning stage will cut across the waterfront. It could have gone straight through the historic district, eliminating it completely, or loomed behind it to displace a residential neighborhood.

With an "if you can't lick it, join it" attitude, the planners are working to minimize its disruptive impact with a buffer zone of water in a lagoon and



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Cross marks New Bedford

stream to be brought into the area from the waterfront. An underpass below the expressway will lead to the wharves that accommodate New Bedford's active fishing fleet.

Study in Three Phases

The pilot study is being carried out in three phases. The first has dealt with collection of data on the characteristics of the site, land use, circulation, utilities, services, streets, parking and evaluation of buildings.

The second phase has consisted of design studies. The third phase of the project will be completion of a report that will be printed for national distribution by the Department of Housing and Urban Development in June.

The plan sets new standards and criteria for historic renewal. Unlike Williamsburg, and many preservation projects that have copied it, New Bedford will undertake no artificial reconstruction of the past, and will make no copies of buildings that no longer exist.

Old structures will be restored for reuse, and new construction, for contemporary uses, will be of contemporary

design. There will be no modern commercial equivocations in what critics call the "A. and P. Georgian" style. The new buildings will be allied to the historic buildings by a relative scale and a sympathetic vocabulary of materials.

The underlying philosophy of the plan is that preservation should not embalm the past or create archeological imitations, but should treat the city as a living "continuum," in which all periods and styles add up to the richest and most productive urban experience and design.

Both the approach and techniques of the New Bedford study are expected to be influential in other communities. At present this is a city in search not only of economic prosperity but also of an urban identity.

Among the study's generally applicable recommendations for expediting historic commercial district planning are these special zoning, legislative and economic proposals:

A "business historic" classification to be added to the present zoning laws to allow mixed retail, residential and office uses.

Historic district zoning to be based on standards set by the existing, older building heights, floor area ratios and percentage of ground coverage. New construction in the area would follow these standards.

A proposal for flexible easements for amenities and services to replace rigid "yard zoning" that requires every building to have specified front and side yard setbacks. At present, the only conforming building in the New Bedford Historic District is a gas station.

A system of establishing the economic practicality of restoration by calculating the ratio of profit or loss on total costs versus fair value after rehabilitation, based on expert real estate appraisals.