



Homes In Place Of An Expressway

By CHRISTOPHER JENNEWAIN

WHILE state and city officials are still committed to completing Interstate 40 through Overton Park, some Memphis planners and architects have begun thinking about other uses for the highway's right-of-way.

Suggestions include a "city within a city" project modeled after similar developments in northern cities, a meandering extension of Overton Park and a new residential community.

The unused right-of-way stretches 3.7 miles from Claybrook eastward to Bon Air and averages a block in width. Excluding the portion within Overton Park, there are about 74 acres for development, about two-thirds of it east of the park. Both the east and west segments are among the largest parcels of vacant land in the mid-city area.

SECRETARY OF Transportation Brock Adams' rejection of the plaza design for the highway's park stretch has reduced the chances of completing the link. Adams did not rule out a tunnel, but state officials have virtually dismissed that alternative as too expensive. And there has been some discussion among state officials about trying to ignore the federal government —

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and its 90 per cent financing — and going ahead with the highway.

CHARLIE HILL, deputy director of the city's community development division, said a self-contained city of housing, parks and stores could be built on the right-of-way west of the park. High-rise buildings could be constructed over streets to save space.

He said community development could purchase the land from the state with loans secured by the division's federal grants, then sell it to a private developer. Community development's involvement would insure control over design.

"I'm just speculating. But I think it could work. You're talking about a 10- to 15-year project. But it can happen."

A similar project underway in Philadelphia, Pa., is Franklintown, a 50-acre development of high-rise housing, shops and hotels adjacent to the city's downtown.

John McShane, executive vice president of Franklintown Corporation, said the

\$500 million project is expected to house 12,000 people and offer 3 million square feet of office space when completed in the late 1980's.

"It's basically a total community. We expect to have people living, working in the area."

A 300-UNIT apartment is already occupied and a high-rise apartment for elderly persons was recently "topped out." McShane said he expects construction to begin before the end of the year on an 800-room convention hotel.

Franklintown is privately financed. Philadelphia's only assistance was to condemn and sell to Franklintown 15 per cent of the land needed for the development.

Engineers at Ellers, Fanning, Oakley, Chester and Rike, Inc., the firm designing a garbage-burning plant for Memphis Light, Gas & Water Division, said the plant could heat and cool a development of high-rise buildings in the right-of-way.

"If they were high-rise type buildings with central systems I would definitely think they would be compatible," said Harvey C. Marcom Jr.

Engineer Carl Avers said less than 10 per cent of the plant's output would be

needed to heat and cool new housing for 7,500 people.

The proposed plant would burn garbage to produce steam, hot water and chilled water to heat and cool buildings downtown and in the Medical Center.

Architect James Williamson has suggested that the right-of-way be developed as a meandering park lined with homes, public buildings and stores. He described his idea as "the park growing sprouts in two directions."

He said it would be an "active, vibrant space" in contrast to the primarily recreational character of Overton Park.

Architect Carl Awsumb said townhouses and apartments could be built along bicycle trails and rights-of-way for minibuses and other mass transit. Alternately the land could be divided into its original lots and sold.

"It could be put back just the way it was and it would be fine. It could be more than that," he said.

John Dudas, executive director of the Center City Commission, said a high-rise development would spoil the surrounding neighborhood. If anything other than a highway is to be built in the right-of-way, he said, it should be single-family homes.