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OBSERVING AND INTERPRETING EAST WALNUT HILLS

by Allan B. Jacobs

PREFACE

It is possible to tell a lot about a city or neighborhood just by looking. Clues that are visible in the physical environment--everything from houses and stores to people to doorbells--can often be pieced together to tell the history and dynamics of an area: when it was built; for whom; the physical, social and economic changes that have taken place; who lives there now; what major issues and problems exist; whether the area is vulnerable to rapid change; and even something about how the area may change in the future. You may not be able to tell everything you would like to know about these questions, but you can tell a great deal.

Increasingly in recent years, quantitative data and qualitative surveys--census reports, traffic studies, opinion polls, and the like--are used to assess existing conditions, growth, and

change in the urban environment. Without challenging the importance or validity of those research techniques we believe it is equally important to cultivate our skills of observation. For in reality, people who live in urban environments, including policy makers, urban planners, designers, and other professionals, take clues from the physical environment every day, whether consciously or subconsciously. Often they act, appropriately or not, on the messages gained. The more consciously systematic the process the better. It is possible, we believe, to develop the process of reading the urban environment into a deliberate, analytical technique. That is the subject of this current inquiry.

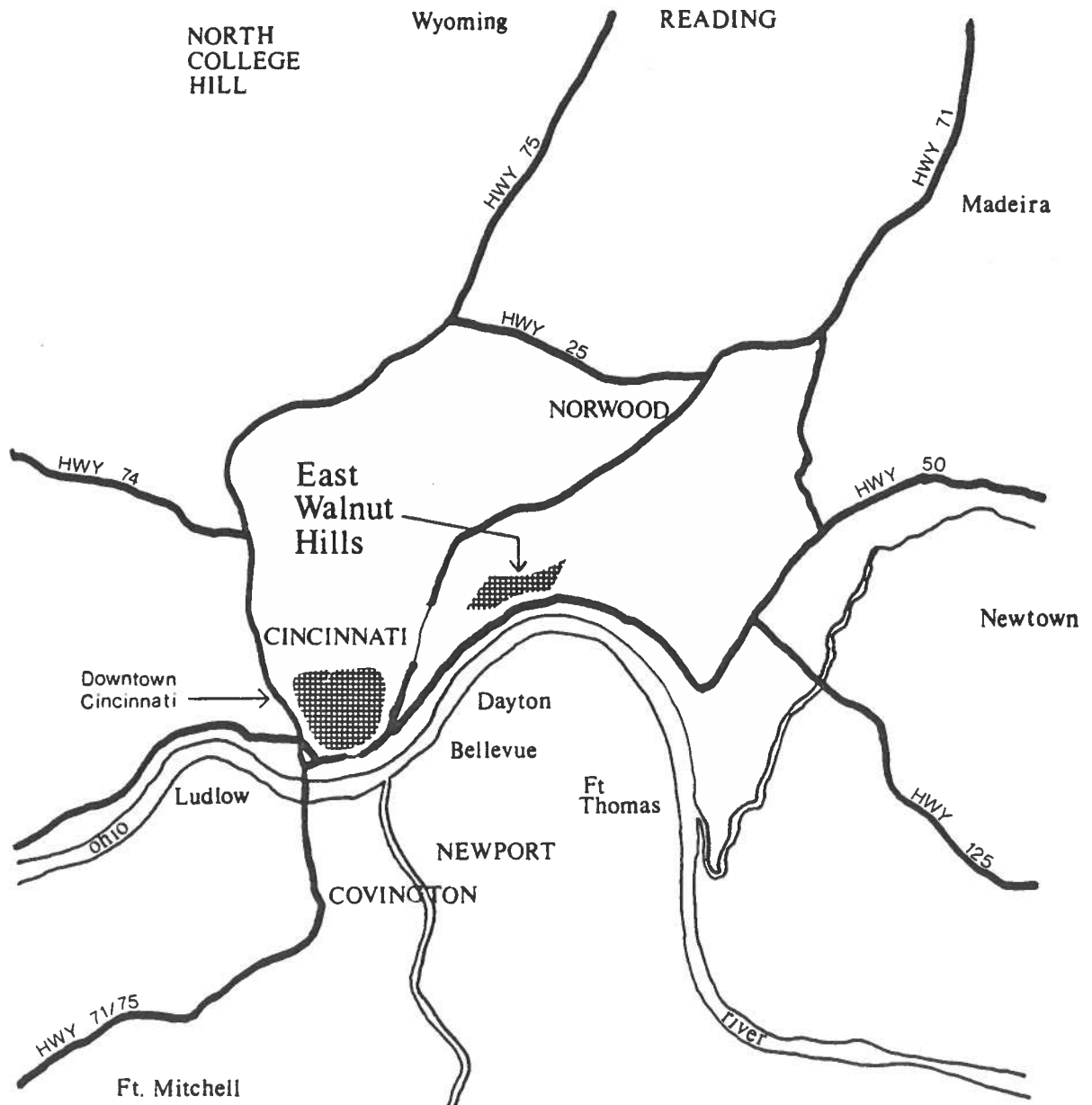
The purpose of this project is to develop and test a technique for observing and diagnosing change in the urban environment. As a first step, some case study "experiments" have been conducted, one of which is reported here. They involve a walking field trip by one to three observers in an urban area that is unfamiliar to them. A staff person in a local planning agency has been asked to choose an area that is urban, can be walked in two to three hours, is well known to people in the department or community, and for which data is available. The observers are given only a street

map on which the area they are to observe has been delineated. Two to three hours are spent in the area observing and interpreting what is seen. Short discussions with people on the street are permitted but these are not to be a major part of the inquiry. If someone says, "hello," or asks a stranger what they are doing, the field observer might well respond and a short exchange can take place; it is permissible to ask an occasional question of a passerby.

At the end of the walk the observers are permitted up to an hour to mull over and summarize what has been seen and to think about what it might mean. A general analysis of the area—its history, changes that have taken place, who lives there now, current issues and trends, and possible future issues—is presented immediately after the walk and mulling over period to people who are supposedly knowledgeable about the area. Usually they are members of the local city planning department staff. Notes of the presentations are taken.

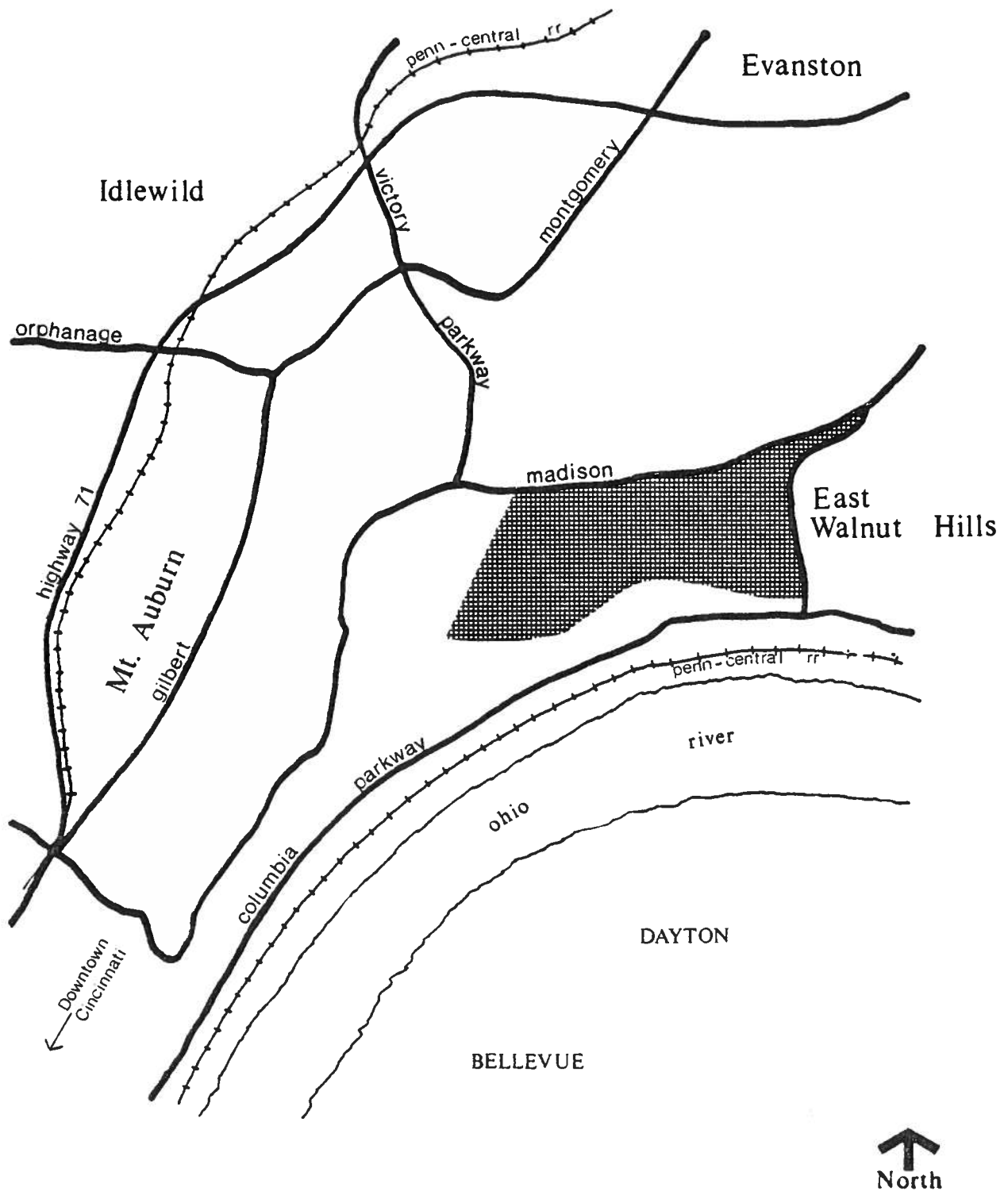
Comparing the conclusions to both the staff members' knowledge of the area and with other available data, the field observers can assess the extent to which they were correct in their

diagnosis. They can also determine which physical clues were most revealing and reliable, how clues were combined to help draw conclusions, the importance of personal knowledge, and some of the limitations and pitfalls of the method. The evaluation of the case studies becomes the basis for developing the observation process into a conscious analytical technique for analyzing change in cities.



EAST WALNUT HILLS - CINCINNATI





EAST WALNUT HILLS - CINCINNATI

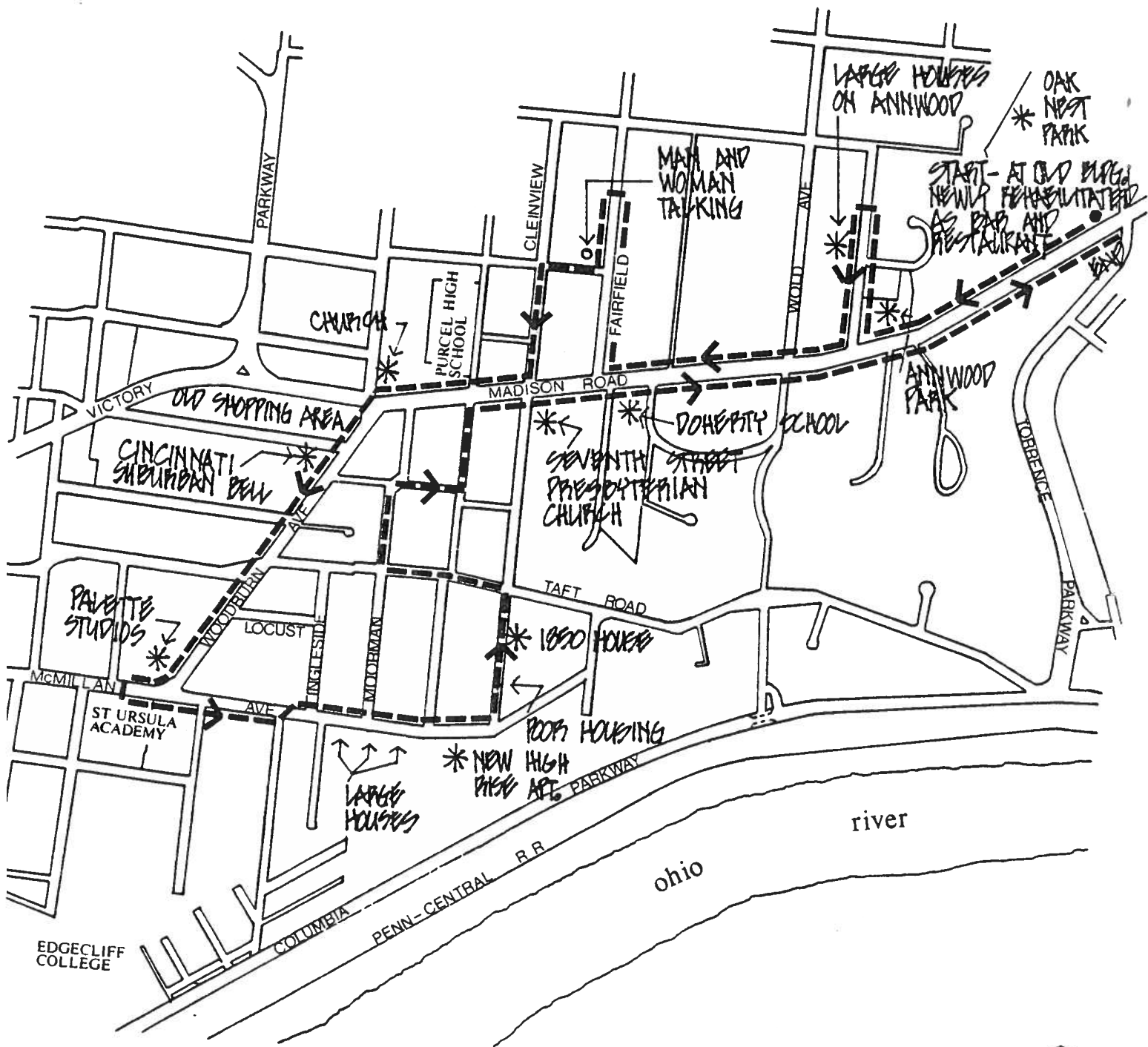
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OBSERVING AND INTERPRETING EAST WALNUT HILLS

It is a gray, warm, muggy morning, about 9:15, in Cincinnati. The location is Madison Road where it intersects with Torrence Parkway. We are about three miles northeast of downtown, having travelled by car along the Columbia Parkway which skirts the Ohio River. In getting here we haven't seen much of the city, travelling along the river, but we do recall views of some rather nice looking houses on the bluffs that overlooked downtown from the east. This is known as the East Walnut Hills area of the city.

The buildings are old for the most part, ranging in age from earlier than the turn of the century (they are simple brick loadbearing wall or wooden structures that remind us of buildings we've seen before, in the East) to the 1920s or 1930s (more horizontal, rough brick, like a lot of buildings that we saw in our childhood in Cleveland). They are low buildings, not over three floors. The only visible exception is a new, large (6-8 stories) brown brick apartment house or condominium.

At the corner there is an old building, recently recycled as a bar and restaurant. The sign is new and so are some window frames. Maybe



WALKING ROUTE IN EAST WALNUT HILLS CINCINNATI

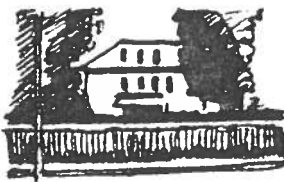
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SCALE



the brick was recently sandblasted. It looks like the kind of place that young executives would go for after work drinks or for lunch or dinner: stylish; lots of brick and old wood. Buildings face the street with no front set backs and few side yards. Stores and uses that catch the eye: Bible Deliverance Church, Second Unity Baptist Church, two antique stores, two small sports goods stores, a music store, an art gallery set apart toward the western end of the building strip. The stores aren't open yet. Building and public maintenance is good. The mix of churches that might be associated with blacks and the particular type stores suggest an area that has been oriented to Blacks and which may now be undergoing change to a white, professional, even upper income clientele. But it's a small area. It may not be a stylish area--yet.



West on Madison there are very large, old, well-maintained houses and two old parks that are close to each other (Owl's Nest and Annwood). It does not appear that the houses have been subdivided (only one telephone line to each, not many visible cars). The curbs are old, of stone, maybe not granite. Houses off one of the streets, Annwood, are also very large and well maintained, single family. Though maintenance of buildings

and yards is quite good, it's not of the highest quality--manicured and clipped lawns and shrubs, paint every three-to-five years whether it needs it or not. Here some aging shows. Some paint is needed. On one side street, Gregory, there are newer one- and two-storey houses that bespeak higher income owners (big lots, large setbacks, good maintenance). These are houses of the 1950s and 1960s. Those larger, older houses might once have had live-in gardeners. Not now.

The sidewalk contractor has left his mark on Madison and the first side streets: "W.R. Budd & Bro., Est. 1892, Cinti, Ohio." That doesn't mean the sidewalk was laid in 1892, but the turn of the century would be a good bet.

A police presence is noted in a squad car. They observe a stranger, with camera, taking notes.

The Doherty School--Seven Hills Middle School, well set back from the street, but with a very elegant, well painted sign at the street, indicates a private school. Do students come from this area? Would a more exclusive school have a smaller sign, or no sign?

On another side street, Fairfield, the homes

are also large, but not nearly as large as on Madison. They are of roughly the same vintage, however; turn of the century and later. The new roofing material is not as good as the old. Maintenance is also good, not great, but good. Owners seem to do one thing at a time; there may be more than one thing that needs doing but priorities and sequences are set--maybe a roof this year, a porch to be fixed next, painting after that, a major landscape job sometime in the future but maintenance and minor improvements now--rather than to do everything at once. Original single-family homes remain that way. A bumper sticker says "NO NUKES." There are a lot of toys on one or two front porches. At the first corner a white man (mid 30's?) and woman (same age) talk and then walk out of sight. They appear to be neighbors, not a couple. They are animated and appear purposeful. Further up the street a middle-aged (young 50's) black man at his car talks to a white man (late 50's). Two black boys drive around on bicycles. Further along there is a two or three storey apartment house; maybe built in the 1920s; middle class. Some houses have new, white, helvetica numbers on them.

In this area there is a sense of striving, of trying to improve. There is a sense, more than

conclusive visual evidence, of a range of ages and of a racially integrated area. People probably know each other. We have seen some talking. They are active in trying to maintain this as an integrated (racially, economically, demographically) area. The chances are that this is the kind of area and these are the kind of people that would organize and maintain an active neighborhood association. It's not clear whether there is a public planning, rehabilitation, or code enforcement program here but one bets that these people are in contact with City Hall and that City Hall knows them.

At a corner the man and woman seen earlier are talking. They say "Hello" to a passerby and wonder what a person with a camera and a note pad is doing. They're fearful of someone who might be noting the locations of stained glass windows, for possible theft. Their neighborhood association of East Walnut Hills would be interested in the observations and conclusions of the stranger.

On Cleinview Street the houses and lots are smaller and more modestly constructed than on Fairfield. The street is not as well maintained, the houses are closer to the street, and looking through windows it is possible to see that there

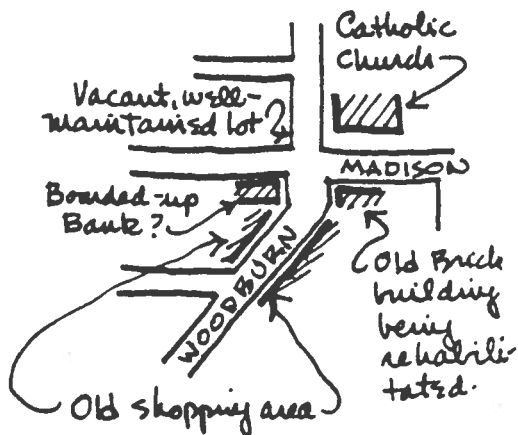


are more vacancies. There are more black people. Were these houses occupied originally by servants of wealthy people on Madison?

There has been a gradation from the starting point to Cleinview that has gone from large lots and houses to smaller and then smaller sizes.

Back on Madison, on the south side, there is a church. The stones are very clean, as if new. Something looks strange about that church. It may have to do with the roof.

Further along Madison there is a new (1979, says the plaque) fire house. At the corner of Madison and Woodburn there is a Catholic church, St. Francis de Sales, that's been around for a long time, an older, turn of the century, multi-story brick building (San Marco Building) that's being rehabilitated in a major way (insides gutted, new window frames, new interior partitions visible), a closed and boarded up one-story structure that has all the earmarks (marble facade, formal doorway, large spaced windows) of a bank, and a vacant, odd-shaped lot that has been graded, fenced, sodded and whose grass has been recently trimmed. These are stronger indications of a public program. Who would do such major rehabilitation work at that location on that old brick



building? Not "the market" on its own. Is this a housing project with some local-federal input? Why would that vacant lot be sodded so nicely and fenced? (It works its way between other buildings and so must have had a building on it until recently.) Why isn't that lot overgrown and unkempt? It looks like a concentrated effort to improve the area economically and to improve its image as well.

On Woodburn, walking from the southwest away from Madison, the buildings are built to the sidewalks and there are no side yards. They are all old; the Cruz Building has an 1895 date. The buildings and people on the street tell who the area serves: God's Holy Church, hair salons with black customers and stylists, black barbers, second hand stores, black teenagers. There's a semi-vacant sense to it all. This would be a hard area to deal with. There are likely economic and physical problems--low income, few jobs, not much for kids to do, physical deterioration, vacancies. Even if clearance were warranted that would mean displacement of residents. In the meantime there is likely no market to attract investment. If the public is actually involved here then it must be with a cautious, wait and see, look-for-opportunities-while-holding-on program. That

would make sense.

There are two apartment buildings built in the 1920s or early 1930s; brick, two to three storeys, one with a half timber-stucco style. They were built for middle-income families.

The Cincinnati Suburban Bell Building suggests that this area was once considered to be just that, suburban. It is only about three miles from downtown.

Aluminum siding has covered or replaced original surface materials on a group of homes on one side street. The people are mostly black. The houses, small and reasonably maintained--not the best, not the worst--suggest working class owners and renters.

The homes on the next street, Locust, are somewhat larger and in better maintenance.

There are large parking lots on either side of Woodburn at one point. Lots of cars. These are Blue Cross parking lots. From this vantage point it is possible to see that Blue Cross occupies what used to be the "Suburban Bell Building." Why is Blue Cross here? Part of a program to locate in poorer areas and to employ local people? If so, then a lot of locals still drive. It's

best to draw no conclusion on this as yet. One thing is for sure, though; the parking lots have fences and lockable gates and are very well lit with luminaires on tall poles. It seems reasonable to conclude that car-directed crime is or has been a problem here and that there is a perception that it originates with local residents.

The corner of Woodburn and East McMillan, though close to the Blue Cross complex, seems to be a different area. The Palette Studios and the furniture company are out of keeping with the area of only a moment ago. These uses are oriented to higher income people. White people are working inside. St. Ursula Academy is across the street. It is large and removed somewhat from the street. St. Ursula aside, there's a feeling of "hard white," here that is hard to define or pinpoint. Walking some areas, alone, one sometimes senses that he has entered a tense, no-man's land and it is very difficult to pinpoint why that feeling persists, but it is there. This is not a no-man's land but there is a feeling of transition here and of "resistance," whatever that means. Is there racial tension here?

Next to St. Ursula's is the Herman Schneider Foundation. Who was Herman Schneider? A Woman's

Club is or was also housed there. And the Engineering Society, in 1935. A building that never quite found a use?

Next is the New Thought Temple. Founded by liberal Jews or ex-Jews? The building looks more like a synagogue of the 1920s than like most churches. Is the word "Temple" an indicator? Is it an indicator of who might have lived in this general part of town? The indicators are too flimsy. A (black) maintenance man says hello.

There are some small office uses along this part of McMillan. They're not thriving. Automatic Data Processing has left the area. Why were they here in the first place? The building has lots of sections and seems to have been adapted or modified many times. It is for sale.

The Walnut Hills Christian Church, built in 1924, is a solid structure that bespeaks upper-middle class; stone, an effort to be "English" small town-garden suburb.

Ingleside, a side street off McMillan, has single-family, middle-class-sized homes. The residents appear to be black; probably they are owners.

Moving east, the south side of McMillan has very large homes that bespeak early wealth, not unlike houses on Madison. But here the largest houses are on one side, the south.

That's where the view is, to the river. The transition, between Madison and McMillan, was with middle class, owner-occupied housing nearest McMillan, and lower income and some rental housing closer to Madison and Woodburn. The residents closer to that intersection may always have been black, perhaps as servants in the wealthier homes. Even now, one senses that the area gets "whiter" as it gets close to McMillan.

There's a new multi-family, high rise condominium on the south side of McMillan. A large parking lot shows big cars and some older (if not elderly) people, mostly whites. This is market rate housing that probably replaced an older mansion, indicating some vulnerability here to change. There is some new, low infill housing further along on the south. Whereas the older housing was oriented to the street, the new housing, neither the high rise nor the low rise, is not. The high rise, removed from the street by the parking, is probably oriented to get a river view. The low rise, too, tries to establish its own, independent environment.

Housing on the north side of McMillan is not as large as on the south. Maintenance gets better moving east. Two telephone lines and more than one doorbell indicate conversions and perhaps roomers. The walks go directly from the houses to the street over good-sized front lawns.

Traffic on McMillan, while not heavy, is a bit fast. Cars seem to be heading through this area.

One gets a sense that the people who live on one side of the street are different than people on the other; higher incomes on the south. Do the people on the south side know and talk to each other regularly? On the north side? Is there regular communication across the street? Probably not. As opposed to the feeling on Madison, here it is less likely that a neighborhood association exists (or, if it does, that it is strong). Change is more likely here without discussion or community involvement, and might therefore occur more rapidly.



Cleinview, north of McMillan, has more modest, older housing. Some of it has not been well maintained at all. There is a vacant building and a "FOR SALE" sign. There is trash on the lawns. The yards are not well maintained. Why? The

topography? Then there is a wonderful old simple white stone house with an 1850 date. It is much older than the others. On the other side of the street, two old houses (but not 1850 vintage), have been rehabilitated recently. The work looks like it was done professionally, maybe both houses by one firm.



On William Howard Taft, a street that is coming up from the river, toward Woodburn, there is a group of very old houses, probably mid- or early 1800s. They are close together. At Taft and Moorman there is a newly rehabilitated brick house. Another good job. Is this a small sub-area that people have "found"? There's a white woman at Taft and Ingleside. Again, the sense is that the area south, toward McMillan is racially mixed and that it becomes more black moving north toward Madison and Woodburn.



Returning to Madison, there's the Seventh Street Presbyterian Church again. What is it about that church? The stone is clean, as if newly laid or newly cleaned. The roof of the sanctuary has distinctly contemporary detailing; the sort of shopwork that is done today in joining metal with stone. But the tower: the tower is old. There is also a smaller tower on the other

side. Also old. The sanctuary, if as old as those towers, would be larger, wouldn't it? Aha! That's a new sanctuary. So what happened to the old sanctuary? Those things don't just fall down. Fire? Maybe it burned and was rebuilt. They couldn't afford to rebuild it to the original splendor, so it's smaller. It's very well done. Expensive. If there was a fire, was it started? Arson? If there was a fire and it was arson, was the torching racially connected? All of this is very speculative. A long shot. Interesting though, if all of these speculations are correct, that the church members chose to rebuild here rather than to leave the area.

Further along Madison, moving east now, back to the starting point, and looking back at the church, there are children leaving it, with parents. The children are white. They walk with their parents (some fathers) to cars parked on Madison and on side streets to the north. Still more young students and parents are leaving the Doherty School grounds. Upper class looking kids; expensive hair styles cut by a barber, well polished kids.

These schools and churches have been here a long time. The original people probably left,

slowly. The institutions remain and serve the same kinds of people that they did earlier. The institutions could have moved. Maybe the new market wasn't concentrated. Is there a commitment to the area? Maybe, maybe not. In any case, they still exist. If there is racial tension, it isn't so bad as to push these institutions out.

Walking back to the starting point one wonders if some of those very old single family homes on Madison haven't been converted to institutional uses, but with no visible announcement. Maybe there is an announcement--some cars perhaps--that isn't being carefully observed.

At the small commercial area where this trip began, the gallery is open and two men (white, stylishly dressed) are talking something in or out. There is the Blue Wisp Jazz Club. A leftover from days not too long ago when this was a predominantly black area?



Where do the people shop for food? Where did they shop in earlier days? At the two major intersections, here at Madison and Torrence, and further west at Madison and Woodburn? Presently there seems no place for either blacks or whites. Do the whites (the new ones moving in and the longer term residents) go by car to old shopping

centers where they used to shop? Is there an untapped market for new commercial development?

Thinking more about the very large, single family homes on Madison, why do they still exist as single family houses? The most wealthy no longer live here. Otherwise the grounds would show signs of being cared for by full time live-in help (immaculate, manicured lawns and bushes). The buildings, though they might not need it, would seem newly painted. That is not the case. In other cities homes like this, unless they are still where the most wealthy live, would have been converted to multi-unit rentals, converted to institutional uses, or razed in favor of new apartment units. Do they remain here because it is possible for the owners to hire on either a contract or an as needed basis the maintenance help required without too great a cost? In turn, does this imply that Cincinnati has had a fairly large supply of workers skilled in what is required to maintain properties like these and that wages for these people have been fairly low, at least low enough to permit owners who aren't the wealthiest people in town to live in and maintain such homes? If that has been the case, will that situation remain?

It is possible to conclude that this area is one of concentrated planning and action by the city, to stabilize it, to upgrade physical conditions, to provide services, to try to get new housing. Residents are actively involved, but in some areas more than in others. The improvements that come out of that program seem to be scattered for the most part, as if those in charge are feeling their ways, trying to get a handle on the area, and having some trouble. They may be using a hit-miss approach, looking for individual opportunities for improvements, hoping that such an approach will be enough.

Parts of the area were declining and that has stopped for the most part. But about half of it (west and southwest) is vulnerable to economic, social and physical decline because the least affluent people live here and they (and their area) are most vulnerable to economic cycles. The eastern area, on the other hand, seems to be in the process of what might be called modest "gentrification." Some of the large expensive homes on Madison will in time be vulnerable to pressures to convert or raze them. It is not clear that the present or replacement owners will be able to maintain them indefinitely. It's something to keep an eye on. A problem is (or will be) that

people in this kind of housing may not want to see or admit a problem (pressures to convert, institutionalize, or raze), and may therefore be uninterested in hearing possible solutions, except that of rigidly enforcing single-family zoning. So, if the problem does arise, it will be hard to discuss it and to develop alternative solutions until very late. A city planner will want to watch the area for signs of change and have possible solutions tucked away in a pocket.

History is a good place to end a field trip. Madison has a few characteristics of the English "High Street": development facing the road and every now and then a very urban concentration of shops and housing, usually at a major intersection. Was that the pattern here, along Madison? Were the intersection concentrations along Madison created by roads that came up from the Ohio River? Does the pattern continue beyond East Walnut Hills?

It is 11:15. A light rain is beginning to fall. The location is Madison Road where it intersects with Torrence Parkway.

Confirming (and Questioning) the Observations

Immediately following the field trip, observations and diagnosis described above, there was a meeting between the field investigator and three staff members of the Department of Economic Development of Cincinnati. They apparently know the area well. One used to live in it. One or more of them have been intimately involved in the area in professional capacities for a number of years. The description and interpretation above was presented to the three staff people in approximately the same order and depth as presented here. The written account is a bit more lengthy and has a few more details that were left out of the oral presentation. The staff members listened without interruption before responding with their own questions and confirmation or rejection of the diagnosis. Later, the staff reviewed the written description which was also given to the director of the Walnut Hills Redevelopment Foundation and to another city employee knowledgeable of the area and whose family members are long-standing residents of the neighborhood.

Generally, response to the diagnosis by staff and two other resident reviewers was simple: according to them it was correct on most counts.

The director of the Walnut Hills Redevelopment Foundation concluded that, " . . . it feels about 80% accurate." More specifically, combining both the immediate and later, more detailed response, the reviewers maintain the following:

- The observations about the changing (gentrifying) commercial area at Madison and Torrence are correct. The bar-restaurant is about one year old and was developed by a member of the City Council of Cincinnati. It does seek a young executive clientele.
- People do shop at a nearby shopping center, Hyde Park, one that is very complete and is a place that people have been shopping for years. A Walnut Hill business district is nearby as well. There is mixed opinion as to whether there is a market for a new, locally oriented center. One reviewer doesn't think so, another does and cites a 1975 study by Gladstone Associates to support his view.

- The large Madison houses are single family, but two of them have indeed been converted to institutional use.
- This was once a very wealthy area and some very wealthy people do live in the area, some perhaps on side streets not visited by the field observer. The people on Madison are militant in wanting to keep it single family. They're afraid of converting these buildings to apartments, a fear that comes at least in part from that sort of experience to the east (in Avondale?) which is associated with a downgrading of the area and with racial tensions. They don't want that to happen here.
- There is a sense of striving and there is a commitment to retaining a racially and economically integrated neighborhood in the area immediately north of Madison. There is local pride in a long history of this integrated character. Long an area of upper income whites and lower income blacks, according to one reviewer, more middle income whites are now moving in.

- There is an active East Walnut Hills Assembly (citizens' organization), more active, apparently, in the Madison area than in the McMillan area.
- The Seventh Presbyterian Church was fire bombed and there is considerable opinion to the effect that it was racially motivated. It happened during Cincinnati's racial disturbances in the late 1960s. However, one version has it that someone associated with the church rather than outsiders was responsible.
- The private schools are just that, apparently they are very expensive, and most students do come from outside the immediate area.
- There is a public program in the Walnut Hills area, one of rehabilitation and code enforcement. The Redevelopment Foundation is active in this area.
- The building being rehabilitated at Madison and Woodward is for subsidized housing for the elderly. The sodded, fenced and well-maintained lot at this intersection is not publicly owned

however. It was purchased by Hamilton Mutual Insurance Company located on the other side of the block (not seen by the investigator) and is being held and maintained by them for future use. This firm is active in the community and employs two advocate planners who work in and for the neighborhood.

- The perceptions about the Woodburn Avenue area are correct. The director of the Redevelopment Foundation sees it as a hard area to deal with. They are taking a wait-and-see attitude while working with existing owners to upgrade the area.
- The judgements about the role of the City's Department of Development in this area are largely correct, but the existence of an organization like the Redevelopment Foundation was not anticipated.
- The conclusions as to who lives where, racially and income-wise, are largely correct.

- The people on the south side of McMillan do not know each other for the most part and are not the same kind of people socially or economically as those on the north side. The staff person who confirmed this lived in the area until recently.

It is not surprising that two reviewers, one whose parents live in the area and the other the director of the Walnut Hills Redevelopment Foundation, responded in some detail to the observations and prognosis having to do with the large Madison Avenue homes. They observe that while some of these houses are still occupied by very wealthy people, others have moved away. They are now mostly owned by couples with combined incomes of from \$40,000 to \$200,000 who like big, old houses even if they can't maintain them perfectly. These reviewers report that there is a lot of self-maintenance (not by a reservoir of available labor for hire) and by the owners' children. They further contend, in response to the possibility of pressures to convert these homes, that residents would strenuously resist proposals that would permit that. Apparently there was such a

proposal in the late 1970s and there was such a response. All of this--a doubting of the likelihood of this kind of change and a prediction of failure if proposals to change come about--is consistent with both the field observations and the interpretation of what they could mean.

There is always the question of how well local experts know the history and dynamics of an area in question. Their confirmation of a diagnosis does not mean that the observations and conclusions are necessarily correct. Similarly, their rejection does not prove the diagnosis was at fault. In this particular instance it can be simply reported that local professionals who purport to know the area confirm the findings of the field investigator.

To find out more objectively the accuracy of the field observations and diagnosis, the Cincinnati staff was asked for available information about the East Walnut Hills area. It is noteworthy that the information provided is not terribly helpful, certainly not in any direct sense, in verifying or

discrediting the observations or diagnosis. Most of the data is taken either directly from the U.S. Census or from local counts of census-type information. That kind of data, though it certainly has uses, will not normally be helpful in suggesting or verifying the physical history of an area, levels of citizen activity, the nature of commercial areas, the levels of current investment, social tensions, the vulnerability of an area to changes, or other social, economic and physical activity on a small, less than census tract scale. Other information sources are required: descriptive histories, newspaper files, photographs, assessors' files, early subdivision plans, interviews with people of the area, recent sales activity, and the like. In this case there is none of that information. We depend on the census-type data and a list of projects that have been carried out in the area in recent years.

The field investigation was silent about what was happening to the resident population of East Walnut Hills, though it might have been expected to speak to this subject. That population is decreasing, from 5,416 to

4,106, a decrease of over 24% between 1970 and 1980. That is significantly more than the 14.8% decrease experienced by the city as a whole. Vacancies were observed and mentioned, but only in passing, in three places by the field investigator. It might be expected that such a drastic reduction in population would have had more visible and therefore more notable impact than was reported. On the other hand, the total number of housing units has stayed fairly constant since 1970, as has the number of households. The vacancy rate has changed only moderately, from 8.73% in 1972 to 10.8% in 1980. The number of persons per household has declined somewhat, and this is a less visible characteristic than is other physical change. Between 1970 and 1980 the black population remained fairly constant (32-33%) as a percentage of total population, though it dropped by 22% in total numbers. The field investigation, while it observes where blacks and whites live, does not speak at length to changes in racial composition of residents. It does note that areas may have been largely black for a long time (Madison and Woodward, the Cleinview area) and that

one commercial area appears to be changing from a black-serving to a more affluent white-serving area.

The overwhelming majority of housing units (93.5%) were judged to be in standard condition in 1974. The field investigation, it will be recalled, spoke of only one small area where poor building condition was noticeable.

Most of the other census information is inconclusive: proportionately fewer professionals; an increase in managers, proprietors and supervisors, fewer clerical and sales persons as heads of households; a general decline, since 1972, of persons on welfare, stable owner-occupancy statistics. It neither confirms nor refutes the field diagnosis. A possible confirmation of the observation that there is a limited market for new housing in this area is the data that shows very few new construction permits in the past seven years. All in all, a look at that information does not give a sense of the dynamics that may be going on, or an indication of what might happen in East Walnut Hills.

A list of projects supplied by the city staff is also sparse for this area. it does note the proposed renovation of an old fire house at Madison and Hackberry, for photography and design studios and a conference area. The fire house was not observed by the field investigator. The list also confirms the low-rise, expensive new condominiums that were observed on McMillan as well as the rehabilitation of existing apartments at Madison and Woodward for elderly housing by the Housing Authority.

In summary, involved professionals who might be expected to be knowledgeable about the history and present dynamics of the East Walnut Hills area confirm the field observations and diagnosis. Immediately available data neither confirms nor refutes the diagnosis.

A BRIEF COMMENTARY AND CONCLUSION

Assuming, as we do and as this case study supports, that it is possible to tell a great deal about an area's origins, evolution, and present dynamics by careful

observations, then any number of questions arise, not the least of which have to do with the clues, individually and collectively, and with possible uses and limitations of diagnosis through observation. We will not attempt to deal with these questions here. Rather, we will be satisfied to note the most obvious clues, to make some observations about the methods, and to raise some of those questions. A more complete review and analysis must await more case studies that will certainly present similar and different clues and any number of additional questions as to the process of field observations, its uses and pitfalls.

The most useful physical indicators seem to have been the buildings (size, age, condition), the quality of maintenance of buildings, yards and public streets, the uses and types of uses of buildings (the Bible Deliverance Church is different than the Seventh Street Presbyterian Church), people (races, ages, dress) and short discussions with them, indications of territoriality and safety issues (fences, lighting), and a great number of small details that we will call artifacts (toys, house number styles, dates

on buildings and in public places, telephone lines, bells, names and signs).

Equally important to individual clues were groups of clues (such as church signs, building sizes and condition, vacancies, the people) that together suggest who lives in an area (including their economic status) and how the area may be changing. It will be worthwhile to question what combinations are most useful in what situations. Change was also indicated by the amount and nature of new construction (in this case very little) and of work on existing buildings, especially in relation to older buildings as yet untouched. The juxtaposition of something "new," even if it is new house numbers, in an existing environment invites comparisons and questioning, of why and of possible significance.

The question of "what is normal" arises over and over again. If a house or yard is well-maintained, then what is normal maintenance? Is well-maintained normal? A large house implies a small or medium-sized house. "Normal," for any number of clues, may be different for different observers, and needs

definition.

Going further with the question of norms, if normal is understood and the observer sees something that is normal, then what? The difference between what is actually seen and what is expected or might be expected requires a constant questioning on the part of the observer. Indeed, a constant questioning of the observed environment may be the most important part of the process of diagnosis: what is being seen, how does what is being seen relate to other clues, what might they indicate. Just as important are questions that have to do with relating what is being observed to knowledge that the observer brings to the situation; from other times, other places, and from some knowledge of urban history.

Presumably it would be important that observations and conclusions by different people be similar. If one observer saw what was reported here, would another observer setting out in the same task arrive at similar conclusions? We don't really know but could test that likelihood.

Another question that deserves consideration, assuming that this approach to urban analysis is useful, is what might it offer that others may not? Again, we will not try to answer that question here but it is worth observing that besides the value of becoming personally familiar with an area and being able to relate data or recorded history to a real place, we have seen that available "factual," statistical information is not current or does not deal with the dynamics of change that were observed in East Walnut Hills. Nonetheless, it will be worth exploring other sources of information that can provide an understanding of the history and dynamics of an area that observation alone does not. Short written histories, for example, might be more accurate and as easily assimilated.

A series of questions can be generated that deal with the relationship of a small area such as East Walnut Hills to the larger city and even to the metropolitan area. Assuming that the diagnosis of a neighborhood or district is reasonably correct, does it imply anything for the city as a whole? This case includes some minor speculations on that

count, having to do with available labor, and by implication, to wages. This would seem to be an area where considerable caution would be in order. Looking at it another way, what might be concluded about an area simply from knowing its location within the larger Cincinnati metropolitan area, within the city, and in relation to the downtown area?

Ultimately there are questions to be answered about the uses of observations as a tool to help plan or design an area. Does the knowledge gained simply raise questions, questions that are the basis for more detailed, specific research that can supply harder, more factual answers than can be gained by observation alone. That might be justification enough. We suspect that observation can help pinpoint issues, to foresee them, and even to start looking for ways to deal with them. In this case a potential issue of the future of the large homes on Madison was identified and possible solutions began to be formulated. The issue may not be an issue. Verification would be needed. But it would be hard to identify that possible issue, early, without first seeing the area. Possible solutions, too, came from observing

the specific area in question. So we think there are uses of this kind of observation and interpretation. Clearly, though, it will be necessary to spell them out in greater detail, having in mind the many contexts within which urban planners and designers work.