The drive to wipe out slums through comprehensive planning began in the 1920s and made sense in the context of the work of the so-called Chicago school of sociology, some members of which proposed a theory of society and the city that rested on the idea that cultural groups derived their identity and behavioral characteristics from their history and experience in a particular place. These sociologists defined the city as a pluralistic organism with its own evolving way of life and portrayed its groups, parts, and systems as so interdependent that a change in one affected all the rest. The Chicago school also stressed the tendency of city growth to dissolve old forms of social organization but contended that this did not mean that the emergence of the modern city would eliminate a vital local life. According to the Chicago school, local unity and cohesion developed in areas dominated by first-, second-, and third-generation ethnic groups that forged and sustained formal institutions of local community in response to the outside threat of discrimination. This suggested that a similar sense of local community could develop in areas of the city in which city planning or natural processes of urban growth had separated residential from other land uses, segregated population elements by economic and ethnic
categories, and concentrated community organizing activities on homogeneous territorial units. Such an arrangement, the Chicago school argued, created "competent" communities, localities that stimulated residents to cooperate on such critical issues as assuring individuals a home, work, new experiences, leisure activities, status, and affection—the necessary prerequisites for the inculcation and development of civic patriotism.3

One member of the Chicago school, Louis Wirth, also thought that the contact and interaction of groups in the modern city tended toward cosmopolitanism, the creation of integrated societies comprised of a pluralistic blend of all the cultures that had and would participate in a given social system. Wirth conceived of this as stemming from the human capacity for empathy, that is, the ability to understand others' perspectives, motives, goals, and systems of thought even while disagreeing on particular questions. This suggested that contact and interaction among groups led to a process of interpenetration so that some groups came to share traits and outlooks while remaining cognizant of, proud of, and loyal to the heritage of their own group. (From this angle, of course, "natural" or trained cosmopolites seemed ideally suited as "experts" in discerning the public interest.)3

The Chicago school analysts of the city drew optimistic political implications from their view of the disorganizing, reorganizing, and integrating processes of urbanization. The city's disorganizing characteristics, if unchecked, might produce an anomic and alienated citizenry, perpetual social group conflict, and an undemocratic political system intolerant of subcultures offensive to the dominant group. But the city's reorganizing tendencies, if channeled by the use of segregative city planning and social welfare techniques, might fulfill the promise of the modern city for a new era of tolerance among subcultures, an era of urbanity, cosmopolitanism, and metropolitan civic patriotism.4

Yet the specter of disorganized and therefore incompetent local communities in the disorganizing and reorganizing dynamics of the modern city haunted this potentially optimistic view of modern American society. The threat lurked in every neighborhood but loomed largest in the slums, where losers in the competition of urban life found cheap habitations in places devoid of unity and cohesion. As Robert E. Park, the dean of the Chicago school, noted, all "the slum areas that invariably grow up
just on the edge of the business areas of great cities, areas of deteriorated houses, of poverty, vice, and crime, are areas of social junk" that tended to spread outward into adjacent old neighborhoods and contiguously from there toward newer places on the periphery of the city.\(^5\)

Views such as these about the perils and promises of urbanization made sense of and fueled Cincinnati's effort in the 1920s to simultaneously wipe out its slums and cosmopolitization its population, a campaign that opened a new era of reform that targeted every group and neighborhood in the city. Social workers, for example, moved beyond their exclusive concern for dependent and/or defective groups to the promotion of social welfare, by which they meant the welfare of all groups and neighborhoods in the metropolis and the facilitating of cosmopolitanism. For these purposes they created the Council of Social Agencies as an executive federation to supervise the activities of every helping organization in the metropolitan area, and they established the Community Chest to raise funds for distribution by the Council. Cosmopolitan social workers also created new social agencies to assure the separate but equal treatment and participation in Council deliberations of all groups, including those, like blacks, who in the past had failed to establish their own comprehensive social welfare program to care for them as a group. Cosmopolitan social workers also helped establish in 1926 the city's Recreation Commission, which promptly developed an ambitious policy of encouraging the cultural consciousness of groups and promoting intergroup relations through such programs as "The Bowl of Promise," a pageant that celebrated both the civic history of the city and the contributions of various groups to its emerging cosmopolitanism.\(^6\)

The cosmopolitan revolution reached well beyond the invention of social welfare. By the mid-1920s Cincinnati's cosmopolitan civic activists had also ousted the Republican machine and its hierarchically organized boss system and replaced it with a horizontally organized system of politics and government. The new city charter set up a city manager to coordinate on a separate but equal basis the activities of the various departments, boards, and commissions, including the new and powerful Cincinnati Planning Commission, and to arrange for the cooperation of civic organizations and other pressure groups with city government. In addition, the new charter established a merit system of civil service to eliminate group favoritism from the regulation of personnel matters and
created a nine-member council to make policy, a body that chose from among its members a "weak" mayor as presiding officer. The charter also prescribed the election of city council through an at-large nonpartisan ballot and a system of proportional representation (PR). At-large elections sought to encourage city council to focus on the welfare of the city as a whole, PR acknowledged the legitimacy of cultural group pluralism, and nonpartisanship made it easier for minority representatives to secure a place on the ballot.7

But comprehensive city planning ranked as the key element in the cosmopolitanizing campaign against slums, and its advocates based their programs on ideas similar to those of the Chicago school sociologists, including their views of competent communities and of the poorest slum dwellers as social junk so demoralized they could never become good citizens. In their view that justified slum clearance programs, and they persuaded city council to adopt two master plans, one in 1925 and another in 1948, each of which took different approaches to the slum clearing task. Each, however, stemmed from the same understanding of the city, one that justified comprehensive city planning as the centerpiece of the drive to promote trait-sharing among the city's cultural groups and to eliminate slums.

The campaign for the creation of a planning commission and the adoption of a comprehensive plan for Cincinnati began in 1915 under the tutelage of Alfred Bettman, a forty-eight-year-old lawyer and former city solicitor who in the 1920s became a nationally recognized expert in planning and zoning. Bettman assembled a United City Planning Committee composed of representatives of seventeen civic organizations, including the Council of Social Agencies, the Chamber of Commerce, the Federated (Neighborhood) Improvement Association, the City Club, the Woman's City Club, the Central Labor Council, the Better Housing League, and the Smoke Abatement League. Through this committee Bettman orchestrated a persistent and intense effort to persuade the public to support comprehensive planning under government auspices by trumpeting the social, economic, aesthetic, civic, and health benefits of such planning. By 1920 the coalition had persuaded the state legislature to authorize city planning and zoning by municipalities, and had amended Cincinnati's charter to provide city government with a planning commission.8

The Cincinnati Planning Commission in 1921 took its first step to-
ward the creation of an official comprehensive city plan by engaging, for a fee of $14,000, the Technical Advisory Corporation of New York (TAC) to conduct a survey of the city. Ladislas Segoe, a Hungarian immigrant and engineer who became by the 1930s one of the nation's premier planning consultants, prepared the survey under the supervision of George Ford and E. C. Goodrich, the founders of TAC.9

Cincinnati, Segoe reported, badly needed a comprehensive plan because one-third of the city's population lived in the basin (the old city), which contained just one-nineteenth of the city's area and broad stretches of depressed property values. The report pointed to crowded housing conditions in the basin and the absence of open space as breeders of disease and delinquency, especially in the Negro lower West End, where population densities ran as high as 1,500 persons per acre. It also observed that the city's comparatively small foreign-born contingent, mostly Germans, occupied the western and northern portions of the basin but under the pressure of business expansion had started migrating to a hilltop district between Eden Park and Avondale, a location far removed from jobs. The movement, the report said, had a "harmful effect on the surrounding [middle-class] residential districts."10

The survey suggested only tentative solutions to these problems, but it especially emphasized the virtues of zoning. This device, Segoe explained, created land use, height, setback, court, and occupancy restrictions in different parts of the city to "direct the growth of each function and each part of the city along logical lines."11 Zoning also could help alleviate several problems identified in the report. It could, for example, deflect the migrating foreign-born to homes within walking distance of their work and to districts more appropriate to their working-class and ethnic status. It could encourage the development of well-organized residential neighborhoods in outlying districts with community centers containing commercial, recreation, civic, and business facilities, amenities that would reduce the attractiveness of the basin as the "center of city life." And it could lower mortgage costs in outlying subdivisions by stabilizing land values and protecting property from harmful neighbors.

Indeed, Segoe contended, comprehensive zoning as an integral part of a plan would eventually solve the problem of Cincinnati's uneven and illogical distribution of population and property values. A plan combined with a zoning code would reserve the basin for business and industry in the future and disperse its residential population to the hilltops,
into better organized communities segregated by ethnicity, race, and class. These large movements would not happen suddenly, Segoe acknowledged, but in the meantime a good plan would provide more open space and playgrounds for basin residents. And as basin housing wore out, collapsed, burned, or gave way to the invasion of commercial or industrial facilities, its occupants would be dispersed to outlying neighborhoods and suburbs equipped with community institutions appropriate for healthy urban life.12

Three years later, TAC’s preliminary solutions to Cincinnati’s problems became law in the form of the master plan of 1925, a document that focused on creating and improving the functionally differentiated units of the metropolis and on shoring up real estate values as a means to protect the city’s tax revenues and ensure a healthy rate of population and economic growth. Beyond the basin, the plan would foster in existing residential sections the development of competent neighborhood communities, each with a business and commercial recreation center and an adjacent civic center surrounded by residences. The plan identified several such nascent communities of wage-earners close to the basin, and others inhabited by more prosperous persons living nearby in detached houses on larger lots. The plan also declared it “obvious” on historical grounds that the nearby older neighborhoods “will gradually give place to more intensive development and the best type of housing will move farther out.”13

This picture of the growth of the city indicated that the bulk of poor newcomers—most of them rural and southern in origin, the plan predicted—would occupy temporary quarters in the basin.14 As a consequence, the plan did not provide an enduring role for the basin as a portal of entry for newcomers or as a major residential district of any sort, even though the area contained 80 percent of the city’s tenements. Indeed, the plan reserved all of the basin for commercial, industrial, and civic uses, each in its own segregated zoning district. And the plan noted with satisfaction that natural forces, “the spread of business and industry,” were decreasing the basin’s population of 120,000 at the rate of 2 percent per year, a calculation suggesting that the basin’s new zoning maps would merely accelerate the inevitable.15

The plan of 1925 also made other recommendations to hasten the transformation of the basin, several of which involved changes in or near
Over-the-Rhine. In so doing it consolidated and reformulated into a single bold design four previous plans—one of them as old as 1907— for civic facilities on or near the southern edge of Over-the-Rhine. The plan suggested the construction by 1950 of a cluster of new developments in the elbow of Central Parkway between City Hall on the south and Music Hall, which sat across the street from Washington Park. The park itself occupied the equivalent of four city blocks and contained a bandstand, benches, curvilinear paths, and statues. In addition, the plan urged the location around Washington Park of new cultural facilities, such as a natural history museum, a historical museum, and a technical museum, and the extension of Central Parkway straight west to a proposed union railroad passenger terminal in Mill Creek Valley at the west end of Lincoln Park. The erection of a colonnaded memorial tower between the proposed post office and Board of Education building at the beginning of the westward extension of Central Parkway also was suggested. The plan proposed to extend the civic center to the other end of Central Parkway, where the Ohio Mechanic's Institute (with its acoustically marvelous Emery Auditorium) and the county courthouse stood. Near the courthouse, at the confluence of Eggleston Avenue and Reading Road, the plan called for an underground rapid transit terminal covered by a transfer plaza containing planted terraces from which passengers could make connections to trolley and bus lines.

This list of projects did not exhaust the plan's schemes for the basin, which with its civic center and other embellishments would serve as "a visible focus, an expression of civic pride, a tangible medium for the awakening of civic consciousness." In pushing for this goal the plan promoted cosmopolitanism, sometimes by reproducing pictures of old civic designs in European and American cities as worthy of emulation. But it also claimed for Cincinnati "all the picturesqueness of Boston, New Orleans, Quebec [and] the hill towns of Italy," a characteristic derived not only from the Queen City's hills and vistas but also from its eighty-eight public parks and the charming streetscapes of its "innumerable corners," some of them in the "picturesque" slums "that delight the artist." The plan proposed several ways of enhancing the city's "real and vivid personality," including the designation of twenty-three historic sites, most of them in the basin but none above Central Parkway, and recommended their identification "by tablets, monuments, or small parks, or by the
The projected twenty-five- to fifty-year plan for the basin and civic center, 1925. Reprinted from City Planning Commission, *The Official City Plan of Cincinnati, Ohio*, 1925.
erection of dignified public or semi-public buildings appropriately named or marked." The plan also urged the preservation of the city's abundant "natural and inherited charm" by the establishment of an "art jury" to approve "the location, character and design of all public structures, and . . . to influence the design of semi-public and private structures."  

Zoning and other features of the plan of 1925 ultimately would create a new basin. In the meantime the plan recommended other alterations and policies to make Over-the-Rhine and the rest of the basin palatable for those residents who could not or would not soon move. These included the opening of courtyards in large, poorly ventilated, and dimly lighted tenements, the creation of new neighborhood parks and playfields and additional playgrounds next to schools, and the merger and elimination of several school districts and buildings. The plan noted, too, that stall rentals in the city's five public markets, all of them in the basin, produced little revenue for municipal coffers but remained useful because they helped "to lower somewhat the cost of living for poorer residents." Nonetheless, the plan recommended the closing of two of the markets because their clientele "is moving away with the incursion of business." The other three, including Findlay Market, the only one in Over-the-Rhine, could remain without serious damage to traffic or the extension of business, though the plan concluded that "their usefulness does not warrant any large expenditures for enlargement or even renewal."  

The plan also recommended the melioration of the housing problem with special reference to the basin, where conditions had become so acute that social agencies found it "impossible . . . to provide anything like a satisfactory solution to the family problems which they are attempting to adjust." The problem stood out most starkly in the lower West End, where "the majority of the colored people" lived with six to twelve people per room crowded into the oldest and most unsanitary dwellings. Here, as in other black enclaves outside the basin, rents had more than doubled and families spent at least one-quarter of their average annual income for rent. But the plan emphasized that the housing shortage also bore heavily on the white low-wage earners of the basin. Since these two groups could not afford newly constructed accommodations, they would have to be provided for by the decentralized-
tion of the population into the competent communities the plan sought to create in older districts beyond the basin.\textsuperscript{22}

Such decentralization "should be encouraged by every means," the plan insisted, including transit, viaduct, boulevard, and cross-town thoroughfare projects designed to open the western hills for more intensive settlement and to fill the gaps between the bands of settlement along existing traffic corridors that stretched out of the basin to the north and east like the fingers of a hand. The planners, moreover, thought that decentralization could be hastened without involuntary displacement, because questionnaires and the history of city growth indicated that low-wage earners wanted better dwellings in better (and therefore farther out) neighborhoods. The plan predicted that silk-stocking neighborhoods such as Clifton, Hyde Park, and Avondale would eventually fall to a lower status, replaced as the city's choicest and most exclusive residential sites by four even more remote areas, including three outside Cincinnati, where "the best type of housing should be encouraged."\textsuperscript{23}

In its decentralization scheme, then, the plan of 1925 pictured a metropolis with residents constantly in motion through several classes of homogeneous and stable competent communities. It depicted this mobility as the solution to the housing problem: low-wage earners forced to live in unzoned neighborhoods that lacked community centers, often close to or in the midst of the "social junk" of the slums and therefore exposed to influences likely to render them incompetent citizens. Population decentralization would solve the housing problem, the plan said, for "as fast as the families in better circumstances move out of the older tenements and houses, they will become available for housing the lower wage earners."\textsuperscript{24}

This policy also held out the hope that the basin might continue, albeit temporarily, to serve as a staging ground for mobility, but it provided no place or remedy for those slum dwellers described by Robert Park as "social junk," and the comprehensive plan remained silent on the question of what to do with or for them.

After 1929 the persistence of the low-cost housing shortage and its aggravation by the Great Depression changed the minds of the Planning Commission members and other supporters of comprehensive planning about the elimination of residences from the entire basin. In the early 1930s the Planning Commission staff began work on a proposal for slum clearance and the creation of newly constructed competent communities
in the West End and Over-the-Rhine (which they called the north basin). City officials in 1932 and 1933 supported several efforts by limited dividend corporations to secure loans from the federal Reconstruction Finance Corporation for slum clearance and competent community housing development projects, all of which failed for lack of adequate local financing. Prospects for such projects brightened in 1933, however, when the New Deal's Public Works Administration authorized its housing division to make loans and grants covering 30 percent of project costs to states, municipalities, or other public bodies engaged in low-cost or slum housing redevelopment. That same year Cincinnati planning advocates and housing reformers helped persuade the state legislature to establish the Cincinnati Metropolitan Housing Authority (CMHA) for a territory covering both Cincinnati and three outlying townships. The CMHA hoped to accommodate those displaced from slums in low-density projects in the basin and on vacant land sites in outlying areas, including the suburbs.

But the CMHA wanted to start with slum clearance in the basin, and the Planning Commission unveiled in 1933 an ambitious basin redevelopment plan prepared by the Commission's secretary, Myron Downs. This plan treated the north and west basin problems as identical and proposed to correct them by razing 145 blocks of slums and replacing them with sixteen superblocks in two community development housing projects. One of the projects straddled Lincoln Park Drive (now Ezzard Charles Drive) between the newly constructed Union Terminal and Music Hall on the west side of the northern axis of Central Parkway. The other lay parallel to the West End project on the east side of Central Parkway and included Washington Park in Over-the-Rhine and additional land up to Findlay Street. The selection of these sites ignored the worst slums of the lower West End, whose residents the planners regarded as socially and civically irredeemable. But surveys of the target areas by the Planning Commission and other agencies persuaded the planners that high levels of sickness, crime, juvenile delinquency, and unemployment qualified the two target areas for slum clearance and redevelopment, even though some residents objected to the designation of their neighborhoods as slums.

In defense of the scheme the planners contended that the North and West Central Basin District Plan would relieve congestion, provide more
light and air, and give residents the experience of competent community living. The plan called for neighborhood schools scattered throughout the area, and each superblock offered abundant space within rectangular residential developments for recreation facilities, churches, businesses, and meeting places. Each possessed distinct boundaries formed by thoroughfares to enhance the sense of a self-contained community.

The plan for the north and west central basin never came to fruition, but the CMHA did complete two smaller public community housing projects, Laurel Homes for whites and Lincoln Court for blacks, both located one block west of Music Hall on either side of Lincoln Park Drive, the approach to Union Terminal. By subjecting prospective tenants to credit, employment, and crime-record checks, CMHA weeded out those it deemed hopelessly corrupted by slum living, and by setting income maximums for tenants it designated the projects as way stations, temporary but competent communities that prepared their residents to acquire
the resources, community spirit, and cosmopolitanism necessary for successful urban life in other communities farther out. To assure this outcome, Laurel Homes contained not only 1,309 housing units in low-rise apartment buildings in a park-like setting, but also a shopping center, playgrounds, and a supervised community building where tenants could meet, establish social organizations, hold dances, read the project's newspaper, and develop community and civic spirit. Lincoln Court, a project for black defense workers completed in the early 1940s, operated on the same principles, separate but equal.

The creation of Laurel Homes and Lincoln Court under the New Deal public housing program left Over-the-Rhine untouched, as did other major New Deal housing initiatives—the provision through the Home Owners Loan Corporation and the Federal Housing Administration of guaranteed mortgages for housing improvements and new residential construction. Indeed, these measures benefited outlying city and suburban districts at the expense of the basin because the federal agencies endorsed the homogeneous community ideal, which regarded areas of mixed land uses and/or mixed peoples as slums or proto-slums and therefore at high risk for housing investments. The policies also helped preserve Over-the-Rhine into the 1950s as a predominantly white enclave, for they encouraged the confining of blacks to black areas or mixed areas near black enclaves, a practice endorsed by the Cincinnati Board of Realtors, which supported the homogeneous neighborhood policy by refusing to assist the movement of blacks into white neighborhoods as a matter of high ethical principal.

During World War II, however, a sense of crisis led to the writing of a new metropolitan master plan that revived the issue of redeveloping Over-the-Rhine. In 1940, the Urban Land Institute, an agency of the National Board of Realtors, commissioned Walter S. Schmidt, a leading Cincinnati Realtor, to undertake an analysis of the city's problems and what might be done about them. Called Proposals for Downtown Cincinnati, the study in fact sought to rejuvenate the entire metropolitan area. It identified two new problems, the difference in the rate of population growth between Cincinnati and its suburbs, which seemed to threaten the status of Cincinnati as the core of the metropolis, and the slowing of activity in the central business district, which had suffered a 20 percent drop in retail business since 1920.
The study did not call for the rebuilding of the central business district. Instead, it made a host of recommendations, including several to address the principal causes of the stagnation of the central business district, which it identified as the obsolescent housing around the district and the desire of residents of older sections for new homes in outlying neighborhoods. As correctives the study proposed the development of a new metropolitan master plan that would include proposals for the rehabilitation of the old stock of housing around the central business district and improved transportation facilities to make downtown more accessible to people from city and suburban neighborhoods.27

That same year the Real Property Survey of Cincinnati and urbanized Hamilton County, a study carried out by the Cincinnati Planning Commission and the Hamilton County Regional Planning Commission (established in 1929), intensified the sense that the city faced grim problems. The survey reported some familiar news—66,100 substandard or overcrowded living units in the basin, for example—but also endorsed Schmidt's conclusion that Cincinnati was growing much less rapidly than its suburbs. The real property survey, however, eschewed the rehabilitation of old neighborhoods in favor of the clearance and "physical redevelopment of . . . blighted neighborhoods" as the proper check for the "outward flow," the perpetuation of which would create a fiscal crisis for Cincinnati.28

In this context of conflicting strategies for dealing with the suburban exodus and the basin's obsolescence, Alfred Bettman, the chair of the Planning Commission, pushed for a revision of the plan of 1925.29 Instead of reviving the United City Planning Committee, he put together a support group consisting of the chief executive officers of the area's biggest businesses. It organized in December 1943 as the Cincinnati Citizens Development Committee (CDC) to back not only comprehensive planning but also "every movement of a broad nature for the improvement of business and living conditions in the Cincinnati area." In that capacity it lobbied city council and the state legislature on planning issues, put out a newsletter urging public support for planning and public works projects, and raised $100,000 to underwrite a successful bond issue campaign to raise $41 million for capital expenditures by the city and county and Cincinnati public schools.30

City council also responded favorably to the pleas of the CDC and
others for a new master plan. In February 1944 it appropriated $100,000 to the Planning Commission to create a Division of City and Metropolitan Planning and to hire a separate staff headed by experts in regional planning. After a careful nationwide search, the city hired Sherwood L. Reeder, a former director of the regional federal Public Housing Authority in Detroit, as director of the division. As consultants, Reeder selected Ladislas Segoe, who had served in the 1930s as research director for the Urbanism Committee of the New Deal's National Resources Planning Board, and Tracy Augur, a planner for the Tennessee Valley Authority, another New Deal venture.31

They faced a daunting task. After two decades of comprehensive metropolitan planning the slum problem remained unsolved. Planners in the 1920s had sought to resolve it by encouraging the use of zoning to eliminate all housing in the basin, and by the 1940s two alternative proposals had appeared: slum clearance and redevelopment for competent community living in public housing, or housing rehabilitation. Questions remained about the last option, including the issue of which neighborhoods would be rehabilitated, but it did not necessarily run counter to the competent community ideal. That ideal had focused on the rehabilitation of salvageable slum dwellers by creating for them a new and cosmopolitanizing social and physical environment to foster metropolitan civic patriotism, a project conceivable in a physical environment created in the past but rehabilitated physically and socially to serve the present and the future.