CINCINNATI's municipal government adopted cultural individualism as the city's new social mission while planning a neighborhood conservation program to forestall the spread of slums and developing a scheme to revivify the central business district. Both of these projects involved attempts to promote neighborhood autonomy through the maximum feasible participation of citizens in making decisions about their turf. Both rested on a new view of inner-city neighborhoods as physical fabrics with social histories that might be drawn upon to create a residential ambiance desirable to people who might choose to live there in the course of defining and pursuing their cultures and life styles. And both contributed to the reidentification of Over-the-Rhine as a cityscape worth preserving and converting into a chic downtown neighborhood, the first step in a long struggle for control of the area as an autonomous entity with the right of determining for itself its identity and design.

Developing the vision of Over-the-Rhine as a chic neighborhood began with a conservation and rehabilitation project to stop the growth of the city's second African American ghetto and to prevent its deterioration into another inner-city neighborhood occupied solely by poor blacks. By the mid-1950s the displacement of black families from the
West End and the continued migration of blacks to the city had created a second ghetto that took shape around an old black enclave in east Walnut Hills, spread west into Avondale and Corryville, and threatened to engulf the nearby white and middle- to upper-class neighborhoods of Clifton and North Avondale. South Avondale and Corryville, moreover, contained several of the city’s most valuable assets, including the University of Cincinnati, five hospitals, a large and heavily wooded park (Burnet Woods), and the Cincinnati Zoo. The combination of these factors suggested the possibility of containing the second ghetto at the borders of North Avondale and Clifton while preventing the blighting of Avondale and Corryville by developing for them a neighborhood conservation and rehabilitation program.  

The professional planners in city hall approached the Avondale-Corryville project by consulting both the plan of 1948 and the Housing Act of 1954. The plan of 1948 laid out rehabilitation and conservation treatments like those written into the federal urban renewal legislation of 1954 and urged the provision of “guidance” to residents within project areas so that they would participate in the implementation (not the planning) of the program. According to the Housing Act of 1954, moreover, cities receiving urban renewal assistance had to demonstrate that the city would consult with other public agencies in developing urban renewal plans, and that the city had made some provision, unspecified in the act, for citizen participation in the project.  

Cincinnati’s application for federal support of the Avondale-Corryville project went well beyond the minimum federal requirements for citizen involvement. The first section responded to federal guidelines by establishing a citywide Citizens Conservation Council to advise the city administration on all such projects, and by pledging to consult at the local level with neighborhood associations and individual property owners. The second section vowed to involve citizens not only in implementing but also in planning the projects, a commitment that exceeded both the federal requirements and the guidelines set down in the plan of 1948.

Specifically, the Avondale-Corryville program called on the community relations staff of the Department of Urban Renewal to visit businesspeople, civic leaders, and residents in the target areas to stimulate interest in conservation and rehabilitation and to establish neighborhood councils and improvement associations to secure the voluntary
cooperation of property owners and renters in planning and plan implementation. The program also mandated the holding of public hearings in the target areas where businesspeople and residents could examine planning proposals and make suggestions for changes, both at the hearings and later in city hall before the Planning Commission. After these negotiations the plan would be revised and a new zoning plan prepared, and the whole would be presented once more to the Planning Commission and then to city council, which would hold public hearings and either approve the plan or send it back to the Department of Urban Renewal for further study.

City officials estimated that the use of this method in developing a plan for Avondale and Corryville would take twelve months, but the process took four years, about the length of time it took to finish the metropolitan plans of 1925 and 1948. The delay stemmed from several factors. The Department of Urban Renewal and the Planning Commission had to prod residents of the neighborhoods to establish block organizations and community councils as vehicles for their participation and to push the University of Cincinnati and several hospitals in the area to engage in long-range rather than piecemeal planning for the addition of new facilities. Also, neighborhood residents objected strenuously to the initial plan drawn up by the consultant on the project and insisted on several changes in the scheme.

A key element of the completed plan was a kind of historical analysis new to professional planners, one that abandoned the old interpretation of metropolitan history as driven by social and economic forces that produced a cycle of neighborhood growth, maturity, decline, and decay. The new approach focused on neighborhoods rather than the metropolis and aimed to stimulate in residents a sense of neighborhood pride, loyalty, and patriotism rather than metropolitan pride, loyalty, and patriotism. The dynamic factor in the new history became the struggle of individuals in the past to make choices about their way of life and to arrange a physical and social environment suitable to that way of life, a process that gave each neighborhood its own physical fabric and social legacy. In this context the neighborhood's physical fabric seemed worthy of saving and its social legacy worthy of recording as inspiration for a new cadre of residents struggling to make choices about their way of life.
From this new understanding of neighborhood history the Avondale-Corryville plan handled the renewal area as not one but two entities requiring distinctive rehabilitation treatments. The new history of Corryville described it as a century-old residential place, one established as a suburb by people of “Germanic stock, neither wealthy nor poor,” who built on small lots solid and sturdy homes that “retain much of their original charm.” In the late nineteenth century, after annexation to the city of Cincinnati, Corryville prospered, maintained “its strong Germanic tradition,” and persisted as “a neighborhood of craftsmen and artisans, who were frugal and painstaking in their work.” When the twentieth century caught up with Corryville its residents lost a measure of control over their physical and social environment and their lives. Custom production gave way to industrialization, “the Germanic tradition faded,” original settlers moved out, some newcomers converted houses to apartments, more newcomers arrived, and the area became one of “heavy turnover in rental units.” Lending institutions became wary of making loans in the area, and the University of Cincinnati began its piecemeal and unpredictable expansion, making property owners reluctant to improve their buildings, “another factor in the downward trend creeping into the area.”

The plan’s history of Avondale also documented a change in population. But it noted that Avondale developed later than Corryville and as a suburb for “very wealthy businessmen” who built big, single-family homes and mansions on large lots. By the 1920s some owners converted homes to apartments as “successive waves of migration” brought various “components of the Jewish population” into the area and as entrepreneurs built large apartments along the major arteries leading into and through Avondale. Nonetheless, “a high level of livability” persisted as owners remodeled homes and apartments for families with children, and in the 1940s Avondale was still “one of the higher rental areas in the city.” Then came another shift in population and “negro families began moving in” as part of an “orderly expansion of an old negro settlement on the eastern edge of Avondale,” a reflection of “the economic well-being of the negro community.” By the late 1950s, said the plan, 75 percent of the dwellings in Avondale housed black families “that have moved into the area . . . by choice, not because they have no other place to go,”
and who “know that this is an area of above average housing” that can become for them “a good neighborhood in which to rear their families, ... an area of which they can be proud.”

Yet these residents, too, said the plan, found their choice of a way of life frustrated by factors beyond their control, for decline characterized the latest stage in the history of Avondale. Old property owners, the plan reported, recognized the eagerness of additional and less prosperous blacks to move to this promising neighborhood and therefore neglected to make improvements as they waited to sell their homes. The newcomers found it difficult to meet mortgage payments, or took out land contracts, in either case meeting the payments by renting rooms or by making illegal conversions. The overcrowding that resulted was “the first step toward a slum”; the lack of maintenance was the second. The plan described these problems as “potentially serious” though not “prevalent.”

The new neighborhood histories provided the basis for the principal objective of the Avondale-Corryville plan, the “restoration of value to a valuable area” through the preservation of the historic characteristics that distinguished the two areas from each other and from other neighborhoods. These features included the elegant scale of development in Avondale and the more modest charm of Corryville, and the importance of the presence of the university and the hospitals to the reputation of the two neighborhoods. The plan stressed especially the history of the neighborhoods as physical and social environments, the historic role of the neighborhoods in their local communities, and the historic role of these communities in the complex of communities that made up the city. Those roles and the values attached by people to a particular neighborhood deserved preservation because they sustained civic pride and translated into the potential economic value of residential property.

The Avondale-Corryville plan next laid out a program of private and public action for the various parties concerned with the future of each of the neighborhoods. Most important, it laid out a “mutual assistance program” to enlist and train citizens for participation in the formation and perpetuation of a physical and social environment compatible with their chosen identities and life styles. This program sought to eliminate top-down implementation by assuring “two-way communication” between
city hall and citizens. It required the staff of the Department of Urban Renewal to offer, on a house-to-house basis, advice on building improvement contracts, assistance in securing mortgages, and suggestions for architectural design, sometimes by arranging design clinics and exhibitions. It also assigned the department the task of aiding the Avondale Community Council and the Corryville Civic Association in the organization of residents on a block-by-block basis to ensure their representation and credibility in the ongoing implementation processes. In addition, the department proposed to work with the two neighborhood organizations in the “diagnosis of individual, group, and neighborhood social problems, and [their] referral to proper public or semi-public agencies for treatment.” Finally, the mutual assistance program called for the department to offer additional “informational and educational services” to “encourage and stimulate rehabilitation by citizen participation” and to ensure an adequate flow of mortgage money into the neighborhoods from lending institutions, both for remodeling and for new investment.12

The Avondale-Corryville urban renewal plan of 1960 marked a watershed in the treatment of Cincinnati’s neighborhoods. Experts in comprehensive metropolitan planning since the 1920s had believed that socially determined cultural group pluralism drove metropolitan growth in predictable and manageable patterns of change in commercial, industrial, and residential land use districts, patterns by which old districts gave way to new ones unless regulated by such planning devices as zoning or slum clearance and redevelopment. Both the master plan of 1925 and that of 1948, moreover, defined the public interest as the welfare of the whole and emphasized the promotion of intergroup tolerance, cooperation, and metropolitan loyalty by engineering trait-sharing.

The Avondale-Corryville plan abandoned all of these principles and practices. To these planners, individuals and neighborhoods, not socially determined cultural groups and the metropolis, seemed the fundamental elements of concern, and the future of neighborhoods rested in the heads and hands of each of their institutional and human occupants, not in the patterns of metropolitan growth diagnosed and prescribed for by expert metropolitan master planners. This new view of the city and approach to city planning called for a partnership among site occupants,
city hall, other governmental bodies, social agencies, lending institutions, and developers to secure the attachment of diverse individuals (human and institutional) to neighborhoods as a means of forestalling the flight to the suburbs and of assuring the viability of Cincinnati as a municipality.

The treatment of Avondale and Corryville as distinctive neighborhoods also indicated that the Planning Commission thought that Cincinnati ought to consist of a vast variety of neighborhoods to provide residents with a wide range of choices. This view led the director of city planning, Herbert Stevens, to establish in 1963 a neighborhood planning service for all the city's "older close-in residential areas," including Over-the-Rhine, which he now saw as a chic residential component of the central business district slated for rehabilitation and conservation, not slum clearance and redevelopment. This switch occurred in the process of developing a comprehensive central business plan that rested on a new definition of downtown as a distinctive neighborhood encompassing the entire basin and Mt. Adams, and one that required a participatory plan to ward off a new threat, the loss of its economic and entertainment functions to the suburbs.

The Planning Commission began to build the new vision of the slums as an integral part of the central business district in 1956 in a study prepared with the assistance of an advisory committee composed of individuals with an interest in downtown real estate and other downtown businesses. The study divided downtown into three parts, the "Core," the "Frame," and the "Fringe." The Fringe consisted of the central riverfront, the West End adjacent to the Frame, the land immediately east of the Frame, including Mt. Adams, and the land immediately to the north of the Frame (Over-the-Rhine). This was a first step in the reconception of downtown, one that marked a new era in the treatment of downtown and the slums. Never before had the Planning Commission included within downtown such a large and diverse part of the cityscape, defined it as a discrete unit requiring its own plan, and divided it into subareas for the purpose of determining appropriate land uses for them.

As the next step in the reconceptualization of the slums and downtown the planners issued a second study (also prepared with the participation of a group of advisers especially concerned with the central
Map of the central business district (the Core) and its surrounding areas. Reprinted from City Planning Commission, *The Cincinnati Central Business District Space Use Study: A Summary*, revised June 1957.
business district) that laid out a framework for determining land uses within all three parts of the central business district. This study proposed urban redevelopment (demolition and reconstruction) as an instrument for improving the Core, the traditional home for large office buildings, financial institutions, and department stores. It also contained suggestions for the Frame and Fringe satisfactory to contemporary proponents of the two-shift downtown, one as lively by night as by day. The boundaries of the Frame and the Fringe encompassed both the Music Hall–Washington Park and the Taft Museum–Lytle Park neighborhoods, thereby acknowledging the importance of high-culture institutions and parks in these subareas of the central business district. The study also recommended the designation of both Lytle Park and Garfield Park as sites for residential and club as well as office development. In addition, the study proposed an exposition/convention hall on the west edge of the Frame and a cluster of new office and commercial buildings between new construction residential redevelopment projects in Kenyon Barr (west edge of downtown) and the Core.

This study for the first time advocated a promiscuous mixing of land uses downtown but said little about the character of Over-the-Rhine as a Fringe residential neighborhood. Yet Over-the-Rhine received special consideration before the adoption of the central business district plan that linked it not only to neighborhood conservation but also to the use of historic preservation as a particular conservation technique. This occurred in the context of a fight over the proposed demolition of several nineteenth-century residential structures and clubs in the Taft Museum–Lytle Park neighborhood to make way for an expressway tunnel. The clubs and their residential allies protested vigorously the proposed demolitions in arguments stressing the historical significance of the buildings and contending that both the historic character of the neighborhood and its contribution to housing in the central business district should be preserved.

This outburst of enthusiasm for historic preservation prompted city council to ask the Planning Commission to prepare a citywide inventory of historic sites that might require more gentle treatment in the future. This document appeared in 1960 and identified just eleven historic areas in all of Cincinnati and Hamilton County, including Upper Broadway in Over-the-Rhine. But the catalogue of individual buildings and sites of
historic significance in Over-the-Rhine contained twenty-two citations, more than any other neighborhood in the city. The Over-the-Rhine list, moreover, underscored the growing interest in mixed land uses, for it included Findlay Market, St. John's Roman Catholic Church, Grammer's restaurant, Wielert's beer garden, Turner Hall, Cosmopolitan Hall, Music Hall, the College of Music, the Hamilton County Memorial Building, St. John's Unitarian Church, Washington Park, Heuck's Opera House, the People's Theater, St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church, the Ohio Mechanic's Institute, and St. Paul's Roman Catholic Church.  

The new passion for historic preservation and the density of historic sites in Over-the-Rhine helped persuade city planners to handle the area with care as they completed the plan for the downtown renaissance. The Planning Commission and city council adopted in 1963 a new zoning code and maps that reserved space for residential housing in the Fringe, including Over-the-Rhine, and a year later city council approved a design plan for the renewal of the Core that laid out a preservationist philosophy on which rested the entire scheme for downtown, including its Fringe.

From antiquity into the nineteenth century, claimed the design plan, downtowns had been extraordinarily diverse places, a characteristic that suggested three major attributes of a vital modern central business district. It should offer goods and services in such variety, quality, and quantity that no one would be “excluded from the opportunity to participate in the life of downtown.” It should be accessible and compact, and should intermingle land uses to provide the “excitement” generated by the concentration of diversity. And it should be pedestrian in scale and aesthetically pleasing, not only as an attraction to Cincinnatians but also as “an intimate place for the traveler moving on foot, as in ancient days,” through the heart of the city in “surroundings of special beauty.”

The report insisted that this historically based and sensitive approach to the downtown renaissance would serve well the key goal of the plan, the making of Cincinnati into “the management center of the Ohio Valley,” a proposal in which the Fringe figured prominently. To achieve this goal required the capturing of corporate headquarters and high-technology industries, not only by providing tangible advantages such as superior transportation facilities, but also by fostering intangible attrac-
tions such as a two-shift central business district, a strategy requiring an “intermingling of uses including housing.” For this purpose the plan stressed the importance of residential development not only in Garfield Park and Lytle Park but also in a broad band extending from Mt. Adams on the east through the Lytle Park area to proposed high-rise apartments on the central riverfront.\(^a\) For Over-the-Rhine, the plan suggested the preservation of its mix of land uses in a program that placed “particular emphasis on conservation and rehabilitation, minimizing clearance except where required by . . . structural conditions” or by opportunities for new uses “compatible with Downtown’s functions,” such as a branch of a university to serve middle-class downtown workers and residents of its new “residential concentrations,”\(^b\) including retired middle- and/or upper-class persons.

The downtown urban design plan of 1964 and its preservationist philosophy sailed through city council as a scheme drawn up without reference to its relationship to other neighborhoods and as one endorsing the most recent views of the design and function of a modern downtown. It discarded the vision of the plan of 1948 for downtown, which reserved it for business and amusements only and deplored mixed land uses there as well as elsewhere.\(^c\) Instead, the plan of 1964 promised to create a downtown of enormous diversity, mixing historic charm with modern architecture, mass with respect for the human scale, big business with smaller entrepreneurs, money making with pleasure, recreational and cultural facilities with business enterprises, and pedestrians with vehicles. These features, combined with the commitment to the creation of new and the conservation of old residential housing in the Frame and the Fringe, underscored the commitment of the planners to a downtown that combined vitality by day with liveliness by night.

In these ways the plan of 1964 represented the final step away from the plan of 1948 and the intellectual apparatus on which rested its approach to downtown and the slums around it. Yet the urban design plan of 1964 did not raise the question of the compatibility of the predominantly poor people who occupied Over-the-Rhine with the residential functions envisioned for the two-shift central business district. And the planners had neither confronted nor even acknowledged the question of what to do if leaders of the low-income or desperately poor residents of
Over-the-Rhine rejected rehabilitation and conservation on the grounds that their supporters preferred not to move into public housing, into Corryville or Avondale, or into some other neighborhood where they might prove unwelcome to residents seeking to conserve their vision of their neighborhood as a haven for people with more affluent cultures and life styles.