In 1907, the man who would soon devise a city plan for Hartford spoke with regret about what had happened to American cities and streets. "In our cities, and in fact in our whole mode of life, we separate work from pleasure, the practical from the beautiful, instead of blending them as is so skillfully done by the older nations of the world," said John M. Carrère in an address to the Twentieth Century Club in Hartford. "A street is apt to be nothing but a thoroughfare, so that we must go and come and travel upon it without enjoyment, which we must seek elsewhere at given points laid aside for this particular purpose. . . . But there is no reason why our streets should not be thoroughfares and breathing spaces and pleasure grounds all in one."  

Carrère, a prominent New York architect, shared with Hartford's progressive reformers a belief in the potential of attractive environments to uplift people and enrich their lives, a belief that had shaped the local reform tradition since Horace Bushnell's efforts at civic improvement in the 1850s. In 1912 this common faith in environmental influences led Carrère's firm to devise a city plan that bore important similarities to Bushnell's own planning proposals. But Carrère's speech and city plan also showed how far students of city life had traveled from mid-nineteenth-century concerns about public space. Unlike Bushnell, Carrère and the Hartford progressives had come to care less about the environment's power to encourage social interaction than about its direct effect on the individual. Carrère bemoaned the streets' degeneration into traffic routes not because he was worried about the disappearance of play or commerce there, but because a traffic route did not offer individuals a healing encounter with beauty. "The beauty of a street induces beauty in buildings and adds beauty to life, whereas the confusion of streets and jumble of buildings that surround us in our American cities contribute nothing valuable to life," he told the Twentieth Century Club. "On the contrary, it sadly disturbs our peace of mind and destroys that repose within us which is the true basis of all contentment." By treating public space as part functional and part artistic composition — and ignoring its value as what Bushnell had called "a social exchange" — Carrère's superficially similar planning proposals were subtly at odds with what Bushnell had intended. The pursuit of efficiency, refinement, and inner repose led Carrère to favor a more thoroughly differentiated system of public space that would actually further the trend toward segregating activities within the city, and thus separate different kinds of people. As his comment on the confusion of the streets indicates, he was happy with thoroughfares as long as they were beautiful and uncongested.

The 1912 city plan stood midway between Bushnell's city-planning proposals and the land use zoning of the 1920s. The old hope of uplifting city dwellers by improving their environment, still alive in the 1910s, withered away in 1920s Hartford. Instead, civic leaders embraced the empty shell of one of the two trends in the progressive reform of public space: segregation. No longer hoping to spread gentility throughout the city, no longer even so concerned with protecting or advancing it in certain areas, the men who controlled the reform of urban space in the 1920s were interested above all in separating conflicting activities for reasons of economic efficiency. They sought a traffic system that would speed the circulation of goods, employees, and customers within the city. Similarly, they sought a system of private land use that would prevent
concerns about the quality of life from interfering with profitable real estate investment—a system that would encourage rapid and orderly development without destroying the neighborhoods where they made their homes. This system was based on zoning regulations, which divided the city into districts reserved for specific activities and imposed restrictions on the size, height, and placement of buildings. By making zoning the centerpiece of city planning, the civic leaders of the 1920s distorted the principle of segregated land use pioneered by Bushnell and applied by some progressive reformers to the use of parks and streets. Domestically still had an influence on the use of urban space in the 1920s—in fact, it was now protected in certain legally defined residential neighborhoods—but it was no longer the model for citywide reform.

**Municipal Art**

Fifty years after Bushnell helped form the Society for Public Improvement and wrote “City Plans,” issues of city planning returned to the forefront of the local reform agenda. At its formation in 1904, the Municipal Art Society declared that its object was “to conserve and enhance in every practicable way the beauty of the streets, buildings and public places of Hartford; to stimulate interest in the scenic, artistic and architectural development of the City; and to encourage a greater civic pride in the care and improvement of public and private property.” It was a rather broad goal, and the diversity of the society’s leadership opened the possibility for a wide variety of activities. The society’s founding officers, directors, and committee chairmen were drawn from throughout the spectrum of elite and middle-class civic life in Hartford. The founding leadership included the artist Charles NéIL Flagg; the state librarian, George S. Godard; the Civic Club president, Dotha Bushnell Hillyer; the city engineer, Frederick L. Ford; the attorneys Charles A. Goodwin and Walter S. Schutz; the future suffragist Josephine Bennett; the retired industrialist Louis R. Cheney; the Keney Park superintendent, George A. Parker; Mayor William F. Henney; and the Daughters of the American Revolution regent, Emily S. G. Holcombe.³

The society was held together by a common interest in beauty. In separate essays in the society’s first publication, Flagg and Parker wrote of the need to preserve and enhance the city’s beauty in the face of challenges created by what Flagg called “the spirit of commercialism.” Parker added that part of the task was opening the eyes of the public to the beauty that was already there. “Mankind is apt to be art blind and to see only commercial values, when they might add much to their pleasure if they would see the aesthetic value and spiritual truth as impressed in material things; for after all art is but the expression of the spirit and mind of man.” The sensitive souls who could feel the transcendent power of beauty had an obligation to provide beautiful surroundings for those dull plodders who could not, in the hope that at least the children could benefit. Flagg and Parker both linked the society’s work with Bushnell’s legacy, which neither defined very clearly. Flagg suggested that the society’s efforts to beautify Hartford would extend “the good work already accomplished by . . . Dr. Horace Bushnell, and continued by our Park Board, the Civic Club, and various commissions and public and private enterprises.”⁴

The society’s rather hazy ideology allowed its leaders blithely to deny what others might consider significant distinctions. Parker argued that enlightened city planners would not have to choose between beauty and economic efficiency: “One definition of an engineer is a man who does something quickly, systematically, scientifically, and with the least expense . . . and a definition of an artist might be a man who can do all that the engineer does, but, in addition to it, he writes into the heart and soul of a man in loving sympathy with the higher life; and as it is the greatest economy for the city to employ the best engineer, so the investment that will pay the city the greatest dividend is Municipal Art.” Further erasing the distinction between aesthetics and finances, William Henney declared in 1905, “The beauty of our city is an asset of commercial value, and money spent, within reasonable limits, in making it an attractive place of residence, is prudently spent. For it will draw to us people of wealth and refinement, seeking congenial homes, whose possessions will find their way into the grand list of the city.”⁵

To some extent, the society’s advocacy of street cleaning and billboard removal put it in harmony with the Civic Club and other groups seeking to purify the urban environment. But its ideology cannot be so narrowly defined, since the society’s members also believed that beautifying
the city went hand in hand with creating an efficient street system. Flagg urged Hartford reformers to follow the example of Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann, the French city planner responsible for tearing new boulevards and avenues through Paris in the 1850s and 1860s. By creating "an intelligent lay-out of streets and avenues," Flagg wrote, Haussmann accomplished great things "for the proper sanitation and beautifying, as well as for the civic economy of Paris." The society's Committee on the City Plan added in a 1904 report that new transportation technologies made such changes more important than ever in early twentieth-century Hartford. This report, written by Parker, the committee's chairman, argued that Hartford should be seen as a unified organism, a living thing with a vital need for good circulation. "This unity is made up of composite parts within its borders the same as our body is made up of many organs and functions within our skin. This comparison could be carried still further. For instance, that the avenues are its arteries, the residential streets, [its] capillary system, homes, its corpuscles, and the parks its lungs. This comparison might be carried on until we find in the city a counterpart for every organ and function of the human life." The health of the city as a whole must take priority over the defense of petty private interests. It was not easy, Parker acknowledged, to discern this structure in the chaos of the modern city. The urban landscape had grown to such an extent that few individuals attempted to understand it in its totality, rather, they developed cognitive maps of the streets they used regularly. "How many do you suppose there are in Hartford that have passed even once through all these streets?" Parker asked, noting that there were 455 different streets in the city at that time. "Is it not true that with nine-tenths of the people, Hartford consists of simply a few streets, a few stores, a few shops and a few homes, that being the limit of their actual knowledge of the city?" Switching metaphors, Parker argued that the reformers on his committee had a responsibility to go beyond this fragmented understanding, for "what would you think of a housekeeper who ... had been in only a few of the rooms of her house?"

After spending a year studying Hartford's anatomy (or exploring its rooms), the committee reported in 1905 that the city's radial street plan was basically a good one. "Yet Hartford is growing so rapidly and the demands of travel will become so great that our present street plan will not meet them, and other main avenues should be provided," wrote Parker, during the growth spurt that was pushing the city's population from about 80,000 in 1900 to 138,000 in 1920. To ease the westward flow of traffic from the Connecticut River bridge then being built, he urged the creation of a new downtown street linking Morgan Street with Farmington Avenue. He also recommended the construction of a thoroughfare that would run along the Park River from the factory district to the railroad station and then bend to the northeast away from downtown. "These avenues would probably divert some of the through travel ... from the center of the city, leaving that section freer for local business. It would seem as if some relief would have to be given to the fast growing congestion on Main street near the City Hall." In 1906 Parker's committee further urged that narrow downtown streets be widened before the construction of new retail buildings made the cost prohibitive. The Municipal Art Society continued to urge street improvements until the end of its active existence in the late 1910s.

A rationalized street system was not the only form of differentiated public space the Municipal Art Society sought. From its very beginning, the society called for the creation of a "civic center"—a beautiful cluster of impressive public buildings. City Beautiful reformers nationwide were showing a similar interest at this time, with works on the subject being written by Charles Mulford Robinson, Charles Zueblin, and (collaboratively) Daniel H. Burnham, John Carrère, and Arnold W. Brunner. The most impressive civic center plan was the one included in Burnham's 1909 Plan of Chicago, which proposed enormous administrative and cultural buildings along a boulevard west and south of the commercial district. "In this impressive reorientation of the city, the commercial district would occupy a decidedly secondary position," observes the historian Daniel Bluestone. "Much like the separate domestic realm anchored by parks, bolstered by churches and centered in residential enclaves and eventually suburbs, the proponents of a monumental civic center conceived of a separate realm for civic and cultural life." Civic centers nationwide were conceived as alternatives to the commercial hubbub and individual acquisitiveness typical of the business districts. For this reason, and because of their association with culture, refinement, and social harmony, they might seem to fall within the traditional gender dualism that Americans had long used for categorizing
urban space. But the parallels with the feminized spaces of the home and nineteenth-century park should not be carried too far. Burnham and other early planners ascribed to civic centers the power to create a new form of social order. This power was not based on any friendly feeling that might be cultivated there by fleeting personal encounters between rich and poor. Rather, the splendor of the architecture was supposed to awe the viewer and instill a deep respect for the impersonal ideas of community and polity. In this way the civic centers were envisioned as having quite a different effect from the naturalized parks of the nineteenth century. They raised power above sentiment and abstractions above human warmth, so they were not so strongly rooted in “feminine” values. The central administration building proposed in his Plan of Chicago, Burnham wrote, would be “surmounted by a dome of impressive height, to be seen and felt by the people, to whom it should stand as the symbol of civic order and unity. Rising from the plain upon which Chicago rests, its effect may be compared to that of the dome of St. Peter’s at Rome.”

The desire to raise the idea of the city to a level of moral and almost religious authority received intellectual justification during the Progressive Era from such works as Edward A. Ross’s Social Control and Newton M. Hall’s Civic Righteousness and Civic Pride. Progressive intellectuals shared with City Beautiful reformers a hope that this vague civic religion would provide a new basis for social order in a metropolis so riven by class and ethnic divisions that face-to-face relations had lost their power. The promotion of this abstract, impersonal faith reflected a larger trend during the Progressive Era and 1920s toward a reassertion of male cultural power—a trend embodied in such diverse examples as Theodore Roosevelt’s celebration of masculine strength, the muscular Christianity of Billy Sunday and the Men and Religion Forward movement, the popularity of aggressive sports, the fixation on the androgynous flapper, and what the historian Ann Douglas has termed the “matricidal” swagger of 1920s modernist fiction.13

Somewhat like Burnham, Parker spoke of ways to promote what in 1910 he called “that immaterial, immeasurable, imponderable spirit of the city which in olden times might have been personified by a god, or genius, but which our modern scientific age prevents us from naming.” He feared that the spirit of Hartford was “in danger of being weakened by commercialism,” and he warned also of the need to teach immigrants about Yankee traditions and institutions. “One of the most efficient ways for such a training is by monuments and memorials, which appeal to their sight,” he wrote in 1911, urging that the Old State House (which served at that time as city hall) be preserved even after it ceased to house municipal offices. The half-apologetic way in which Parker sought to promote the civic religion, however, suggests that he may have been dimly aware of the hollowness of this artificial faith, which lacked the core of oppositional, feminine values that had given life to earlier environmental reform movements. He indicated in 1904 that a civic center should be placed apart from the business center not because separation would assert its superiority, but because “it must not interfere with that... which our modern cities represent, commercialism and industrialism. It must be subordinate to them.”13

Parker may have been half-hearted in his promotion of the spirit of Hartford, but other city planning advocates treated the civic religion almost as an embarrassment. The Municipal Art Society chose to base its support for civic centers on arguments similar to later utilitarian rationales for zoning regulations. In an essay in the society’s 1904 publication, The Grouping of Public Buildings, the city engineer, Frederick L. Ford, discussed both the economic and the aesthetic advantages of creating a civic center focused on the state capitol building at the west end of Bushnell Park. The purpose of the essay was to persuade the state to locate its proposed new armory on Capitol Avenue immediately west of the capitol, at a site then occupied by six tenement houses and an obsolete roundhouse owned by the Consolidated Railroad. At this time, in the decades around the turn of the century, impressive new armories were being built in cities throughout the United States to house volunteer militia units and to serve as deterrents to workers’ uprisings.14 If any such fear of class war influenced the Municipal Art Society’s advocacy of an armory separating the factory district from the capitol, however, Ford chose not to mention it.

Ford wrote instead of the need to protect the value of the “prominent group of public and semi-public structures” around western Bushnell Park, specifically to protect the capitol “from the encroachment of private interests and objectionable surroundings,” whose obnoxious influence already included tarnishing the capitol’s exterior with soot. The capitol was protected on the north by the park, on the east by the
construction of new insurance buildings, and on the south by the state's acquisition of land for the future Connecticut State Library. Only at the roundhouse site was it exposed. Ford argued, "The artistic grouping of public buildings in and around beautiful parks with harmonious surroundings, accomplishes more to bring a city nearer to the ideal than any other form of municipal development." Art made good financial sense, since "with all of the money which has been invested in public and semi-public buildings in and around Bushnell Park, I believe it would be an unpardonable mistake to neglect to take advantage of the opportunity which the roundhouse site offers." The clustering of state buildings would also make for more efficient state business, Ford argued. In response to the society's urging, the state built the armory at the roundhouse site instead of near the train station at the edge of downtown.  

The Municipal Art Society's proposals for street improvements and its arguments for civic centers reveal a stronger fascination with building rationalized systems than with beautifying the urban environment. The value of these systems was understood in financial terms: well-designed streets and civic centers would encourage the optimal growth of property values. Despite rhetorical flourishes about the inspiring influence of landscape beauty and fine architecture, the society chose to soft-pedal its initial noise about the conflict between commercial and spiritual matters. It sought to reassure property owners that increased municipal interference in property rights would end up working to their financial advantage. Beauty paid, whether in a system of beautiful streets or a system of beautiful land use. Everyone would benefit financially in the long run, and the spirit of Hartford would soar alongside the spirit of commercialism.  

Parker edged toward open advocacy of zoning in his reports for the society's Committee on the City Plan. He mentioned in the 1905 report that the committee had studied "the subdivision of the city into natural neighborhoods of business, manufacturing, and social circles," and had "been deeply impressed with the need of pleasant and comfortable homes for people of small means, or of the earning power of workmen and mechanics in manufactures." A proper city plan should include some means of encouraging both the development of such homes and other forms of land use. "We should strive to have such a plan that will give to every foot of its territory the greatest use and value to its present owner, its future owner, and the city as a whole." Planning could benefit everyone. The 1906 report specifically stated that zoning rules would be a part of this effort. "The solution which seems promising is the creation within the territory of Hartford, [of] what is known in some cities as 'residential districts,' granting to such 'districts' certain privileges and imposing certain restrictions." 16

Such a division of the city would have obvious parallels with Parker's division of parkland by function and by social class. Parker even explicitly stated that, by creating parks that appealed to the affluent, city governments could sort out urban residential patterns and maximize property values. Parks, he wrote, "have the effect of localizing certain classes and attracting near them a high-grade class of residences and thereby directly increase the valuation of land in their immediate neighborhood." Nevertheless, Parker did not see residential segregation as benefiting only the wealthy and swelling the tax rolls. In fact, he suggested in the 1906 report, the creation of residential districts would primarily benefit workingmen in need of housing. 17

There is little evidence, however, that Hartford's working classes felt much affection for the Municipal Art Society or shared its passion for landscape beauty and rising property values. The society's opposition to the public market proposed for Main Street stirred up strong class antagonisms. The armory proposal was not quite so explosive an issue, but it did provoke a blistering, if poorly spelled, denunciation from an elderly, self-styled "plebeian" named H. G. Loomis. "The Municipal Art Society may be beneficial to the millionnaire's who should know to appreciate the value of money earned by Plebeians, who are compelled to pay all bills if they own anything more than a mortgage," Loomis wrote in a letter that was evidently sent to the society in 1904 or 1905. "The city was formerly conducted by practical men [who had] learned by experience to live within their means. The present time it is run by inexperienced juveniles matured very young, who do not appreciate the difference between a small coin from a million dollars." The roundhouse, Loomis continued, "was considered a mark of great improvement for Hartford until someone smelled smoke. Then everything must be moved out of town, no shops to work in, no taxes to collect, no place for Plebeians to live. Freeholds to be converted into a jungle of wilderness for Parks, arrest and convict Plebeians as tramps should they be found
thereon without work.” Loomis ended by alluding vaguely to satanic corruption “practiced by Life Insurance Managers, Commissions etc. to deceive Plebeians without any recourse.”

The Commission on the City Plan

It took nearly twenty years for the city government to act on Parker’s ideas about regulating land use. In the meantime, the current of city planning meandered along a different bureaucratic channel. In January 1907, shortly after Parker issued his call for zoning and increased city planning, a former Municipal Art Society president, Charles A. Goodwin, asked the city to form what was perhaps the first municipal planning commission in the United States. Goodwin explained in a short essay in the Hartford Times that such a commission was necessary in order “to aid in building up Hartford in an orderly fashion, to sift the good from the bad, the necessary from the impractical and generally to make the city’s resources count to the utmost.” The commission could ensure efficient, wise, and cost-effective decisions about municipal projects, could lead a major urban renewal project in the East Side, and could devise a tentative planning map to guide Hartford’s growth. Support for the idea came from Mayor William F. Henney, another member of the society, who predicted that the commission “would mean the development of the city in an orderly and systematic manner, having in view both utility and attractiveness and [would] have much to do with the appearance of the Hartford of 1950.” Goodwin, who represented part of Asylum Hill in the Common Council, secured the council’s backing for the necessary charter revision, which was approved by the legislature in March. The newly formed commission held its first meeting in May.

Parker hoped that the commission could realize his dream of residential districts for workingmen. He further believed that it had the opportunity to help build up a most substantial City, one in which the weakest and least of its people shall have full opportunity in their own way to receive all of life, liberty, and happiness they are capable of absorbing, where the environments of everyone shall be such that whatever they have received from inheritance shall be strengthened and the best development possible comes from it, where there shall be little or no poverty unless one deliberately chooses it, no sickness due to environments, where labor shall not be exhausted, and the joy of work and the spirit of life abound.

Compared to these rosy visions, the real Commission on the City Plan was pretty drab. For one thing, although its high-powered membership included the mayor and other top city officials, the commission had only limited powers. The Common Council could direct the commission to carry out certain public improvements, and it was required to ask the commission’s advice on all questions concerning the location of streets and public spaces. The commission could make maps showing advisable locations for public buildings, streets, and parks. Its greatest power was to appropriate private real estate for public improvements, including surplus land, which it could sell for a profit to fund the work. Commission members, however, acknowledged that this last provision was of dubious constitutionality and hesitated to use it. The commission’s powers were soon expanded slightly by the requirement that developers secure its approval for all subdivisions of land before obtaining the city’s approval for any new streets. This additional provision effectively gave the commission the right to determine street layouts, block size, and building lots in newly developing areas.

The commission seemed to apologize for how little it accomplished. “It has felt that during the first year of its work it was best to proceed slowly and cautiously so as to gain the confidence of the public, without which it could hope to accomplish but little of real value to the city of Hartford. No attempt has been made to take advantage of the broad powers conferred upon the Commission by the charter amendments creating it,” the commission explained in its first annual report. Evidently caution continued to be necessary, for the commission gave a similar explanation for its apparent inactivity in its third report.

The bulk of the planning commission’s work consisted of approving developers’ proposed street layouts and advising the Board of Street Commissioners on street widenings and extensions. In this way, the commission continued the city government’s established practice of influencing development by improving certain streets. The difference was that, instead of letting developers haphazardly plat streets to suit their own
economic interests, the commission now took an active role in creating an orderly system. "Hartford like many American cities, has suffered from the destructive work of outside real estate speculators, who have purchased areas within the city limits and subdivided them with little or no reference to the layout of adjoining city streets or the customary or proper size of building lots," complained Ford. The planning commission's influence over street and subdivision plans, he said, would help "avoid this practice, which did more than anything else to injure the development of our street system along rational lines." Without such intervention, individual developers would supposedly make decisions that could result in short streets and a concomitant inefficient traffic flow. Examples of the effects of the new policy in the planning commission's first few years can be seen in the approval of street layouts and extensions that turned Greenfield Street and Tower Avenue into east-west arteries in the quickly developing North End. The commission also devised and secured the adoption of a street plan for what is now the Blue Hills neighborhood, which it declared to be superior to developers' plans that would otherwise have been enacted "without regard to . . . the convenience of the travelling public."23

Decisions about street layout did not have to be guided simply by a desire for rapid travel and lucrative real estate investment. Parker, who joined the planning commission in 1909, hoped these decisions would help achieve his ambitious reform goals. He believed that wise use of the commission's power would stop the creation of oversized blocks which had encouraged landlords to build tenement houses in rear lots. He also supported a private developer's request that the city build a new thoroughfare to provide access to vacant land southwest of Pope Park on the grounds that this would allow the construction of homes for workingmen.24

For the most part, however, the commission's idealistic and aesthetic side came out only in its advisory work. Among other recommendations it called for the construction of public bathhouses and restrooms, the cleansing of the Park River, a continued ban on illuminated signs overhanging the sidewalks, and the extension of Bushnell Park to Main Street as a memorial to Horace Bushnell. The park extension would offer an attractive entrance from the business district, allow the construction of a main artery from the south part of the city to the railroad station and the west," and let the city control and clean up both banks of the filthy Park River. It would be another way in which beauty, cleanliness, and traffic circulation could be promoted simultaneously.25

The commission placed its most ambitious hopes in the hands of Carrère and Hastings, the architects it hired in 1909 to prepare a city plan. The commission gave the architects a list of forty-three matters on which it wanted advice, including the design of the grounds around the Old State House, the armory, and the state library; the choice of sites for a new city hall, a new technical high school, a new train station, and new playgrounds; a plan for better downtown street lighting; the construction or improvement of numerous streets to ease travel in and around the downtown; the widening of major avenues; the extension of Bushnell Park to the Connecticut River; a plan for a railroad tunnel under Asylum Hill; methods of Park River pollution control; ways to limit fire hazards; ways to improve housing conditions; ways to regulate billboards, air pollution, and street noise; and "the advisability of dividing the city into zones for different uses and with possibly different restrictions regarding height of buildings, and the percentage of area which can be built upon, etc., following the practice which is being introduced in several German cities."26

Following three years of work, in 1912 the firm of Carrère and Hastings (John Carrère having died in the interim of injuries sustained in an automobile accident) issued a report that called for an almost utopian transformation of Hartford. The architects began by describing the general principles behind good urban planning, diagramming the structure and transportation systems of the ideal city. Eager to emphasize efficiency over aesthetics, they avoided the anatomical metaphor in favor of the mechanical one: "A city, in the light of modern civilization and modern science . . . must be considered as a great machine having a most intricate organism and a most complex function to perform, and it must be so well planned and put together and run, that as an engine it shall produce the maximum amount of efficiency in every direction and the least friction."27

The ideal urban machine displayed a radial structure, with an "industrial and manufacturing zone" and a separate "commercial zone" following the rail lines leading out from the administrative and financial center
at the city’s heart. Parks and parkways would also radiate from the center, or rather would bring the countryside in to meet the urban core. The parks and parkways would separate the industrial and commercial zones from two residential zones, one for working people and one for the well-to-do. Fortunately, the architects wrote, Hartford already had a rather efficient structure that reflected some aspects of the ideal plan, particularly the good park system and the radial avenues. Ideally the city would adopt zoning regulations to control the use of private land, but the architects regretfully supposed that Americans would not tolerate such interference with private property rights. Nearly as effective in producing a well-organized city, they said, would be the creation of a more efficient street system. “If the lines of traffic are the shortest in any direction and ample for all purposes, if the relation of width to length and purpose of the streets, avenues and parkways is well planned, the matter of developing the practical features of a city on this groundwork becomes a mere detail.”

For this reason the architects devoted most of their report to recommending changes in street patterns, which they claimed was the most important part of urban planning anyway. “Primarily a street is a means of circulation and as such should afford the most direct connection between any two given points,” they wrote, adding that in the future this traffic would consist more and more of automobiles. But different streets had different functions and should be designed accordingly: Major arteries should be long, wide, and direct; secondary streets—particularly in residential neighborhoods—should be narrower, shorter, and curved. Residential streets should have macadam pavement to cut down on noise. New residential neighborhoods with short, curving streets would bring even workingmen into closer touch with nature and insulate them from the rush of traffic. To ease the flow of traffic through the city, the architects proposed opening new radial thoroughfares, building parkways along the Park River and its branches, widening existing downtown streets to ease the traffic on Asylum Street, and running new streets and parkways through Bushnell, Pope, Riverside, and Rocky Ridge parks and the South Green. One of the most important improvements, they urged, would be the construction of two concentric beltways. The inner one would embrace the downtown, the capitol area, and the most densely developed part of the factory district. The outer one would arc out near the city line and link the more distant parks.

Carrère and Hastings subordinated beauty and social welfare to transportation efficiency. They even made the peculiarly inaccurate claim that “throughout the report not a word has been mentioned about the beauty of the city and . . . particular stress has been laid throughout on organic and practical considerations.” There was no conflict between the different goals anyway, the architects argued, since beauty as well as appropriate land use would result inevitably from improved street design. To impress this idea on the reader, they included pairs of photographs contrasting Hartford’s streets unfavorably with those in European capitals. One of the most striking pairs juxtaposed a view of the Champs-Élysées with one of Morgan Street in the East Side slum. The architects
designed their new avenues to end at points of visual interest as well as to provide convenient access. For instance, the street that would slice diagonally through Bushnell Park to the state capitol "would not only be an ornamentation to the park with the fine vista of the capitol that it would give, but would greatly increase and assist access to the southwest quarter of the city." The architects proposed taking another swath of land from Bushnell Park to create "a dignified Mall or Parkway" connecting the civic center at the state capitol with the planned new municipal building on Main Street. They further proposed the construction of numerous traffic circles at major intersections, where monuments could be placed for maximum visibility. Also included in the report were brief nods to some of the aesthetic and social issues that had already been pet projects of the Municipal Art Society and various other reformers: cleaning up the streets, building public restrooms, banning billboards, constructing playgrounds, suppressing unnecessary street noise, and strengthening traffic regulations.39

The claim that efficiency was the mother of beauty today seems disingenuous or even perverse, but the architects may well have been sincere. They thought that the experience of uninterrupted travel through a well-designed street system could expose the viewer to a series of pleasant sights. These would compensate for unavoidable urban eyesores and produce a favorable impression of the city as a whole. That was why it was so important to have the streets lead toward points of visual interest. "What should be aimed at, in the remodelling of our cities, is the creation of as many centers of interest throughout the city as possible," Carrère had said in 1907. "Certain sections of every city must of necessity be ugly and forbidding, and such centers are a refuge and a relief. We must then aim at an interesting and attractive and beautiful way of getting from any one important point in the city to the next point of interest, so that in whatever direction we may travel we may find recreation and rest." Similarly, the concentric belts would be a way of physically integrating the diverse sections of the city. Like the parkways proposed earlier, they would allow the viewer to perceive the city as an attractive, coherent unit despite the contrasts in the passing landscape.40

The Carrère and Hastings plan shows both important similarities and profound differences from what Bushnell had envisioned in writing "City Plans." The similarities can be seen in the recommendations for public buildings and monuments at the intersections of major streets, for wide traffic thoroughfares, for curving and diagonal streets to break up the rectangular grid, and for major avenues along low valleys. Both Bushnell in the 1850s and Carrère and Hastings in the 1910s sought to create visual unity out of a seemingly chaotic landscape. They also minimized the conflict between aesthetic and functional considerations. The architects' status as trained experts may also seem to fulfill, in part, Bushnell's hope for a city-planning profession.

But the architects saw the purpose and effects of planning much differently from the way Bushnell had seen them. The theologian had hoped above all to unite different kinds of people and to give them a common sense of being gathered together into city life. He wanted to encourage "the sense of density and a crowding, rapid, all-to-do activity" in the streets, and "life and vivacity" in the parks. The parks were places through which rich and poor would stroll and "make acquaintance through the eyes." By the time Carrère and Hastings wrote their report, however, the city and its public spaces had been radically transformed. No longer the pleasant little town of the 1850s, Hartford had grown into a more diverse and industrialized city. Residents were now more likely to ride to work in a streetcar or an automobile than to walk. The parks where they took their pleasure were being divided into systems of recreational facilities that attracted people of different interests and class backgrounds. The bustling activity of the streets had remained confined to the central city while quiet residential neighborhoods sprawled out to the city line. Even in the central city, street activity was being moderated or displaced by crackdowns on peddlers, expressmen, prostitutes, and newsies. Progressive reformers and city officials shared Bushnell's faith in the power of the environment, but they had different goals. They wanted order, not social unity, and many of them were eager to split up urban space in order to achieve that order. Carrère and Hastings, like the Hartford progressives of the 1910s, said little about encouraging interclass encounters within public space. In fact, they said little about human interaction at all. They imagined citizens in their improved city riding in automobiles from one beautiful spot to another, soothed by the ease of travel and the well-designed vistas, unperturbed by the squalor
and ugliness of certain sections they passed. The problem with the unimproved urban environment was not that it had a divisive effect on society, but that it was inefficient and could disturb one’s inner peace.

The Carrère and Hastings plan certainly had its appeal at this time, but even optimists acknowledged that "perhaps it might be called visionary." Despite its wealth, Hartford could not possibly afford such an extensive reconstruction project. The Commission on the City Plan wrote, "However idealistic these plans seem, whatever difficulties may interfere with carrying them out in detail, however strongly they may be objected to, they yet illustrate the important principles of city planning and afford us a broader and clearer vision of what our city needs." The commission supported its own modified grid design for the Blue Hills neighborhood over the architects' unusual web of crooked streets. Parker claimed that a private developer planned to follow the architects' similar plan for a working-class neighborhood in the southern part of Behind the Rocks, but this never materialized. All of the plan's recommendations were ignored except for a few relatively minor street improvements. "While the desirability of all its features is recognized, the practicability of them has been doubted, because of the expense to be incurred and the radical destruction and reconstruction required," the Hartford Daily Courant editorialized several years later.

After issuing the plan, the commission gradually assumed a lower profile. It continued to meet to consider developers' proposals for streets and subdivisions and to make occasional planning recommendations, mainly for easing traffic congestion. But the need for such work diminished as the city reached its geographic limits without being able to annex suburban territory. The commission also focused more exclusively on the traffic system, abandoning the attempt to balance efficiency with a supposedly complementary concern for beauty. This shift was in keeping with national developments in city planning during the 1910s, often described as a change from the City Beautiful to the City Functional. Advocates of the City Functional sought to base planning on such "facts" as traffic flow. Such an approach gave the movement an aura of scientific authority and enhanced the professional status of city planners. "When the city planning movement was young, too much emphasis was laid upon the usefulness of beauty," wrote a Hartford commission member, W. A. Graham, in 1916. "Now-a-days the emphasis is laid on the beauty of usefulness." 13

Zoning

Reform efforts slowed considerably in Hartford in the late 1910s and 1920s. Some of the major reform leaders—Dohi Hillyer, Mary Hall, Emily Holcombe, and George Parker—were winding down their activities because of age. The Municipal Art Society, already in decline by the time of its last publication in 1912, held no more annual meetings after the death of Charles Flagg in 1916. The society's directors continued to meet and found enough energy to protest the Main Street market plan in 1918 before beginning to discuss disbanding late in 1919. President William Honniss blamed the society's suspension of activities on "war conditions, the influenza epidemic, etc." The society survived in name only until its official dissolution in 1940. The scarcity of new activists and new reform organizations was at least as damaging as the decline of the old ones.

The decline of the local reform spirit reflected a larger national trend after World War I. Many progressives were disillusioned and discouraged by Woodrow Wilson's exploitation of altruistic impulses during the war, by the suppression of pacifists and radicals, and by the powerful conservative reaction that followed the armistice. The unchecked conservative reaction did not overthrow the governmental powers exercised during the Progressive Era and the war, but only because businessmen recognized that the government could increase economic stability and ensure more reliable profits. Reformist businessmen ignored the utopian hopes that had shaped much of progressive reform and appropriated only those regulatory and administrative mechanisms that suited their purposes. Similarly, businessmen, real estate interests and bureaucrats gained greater power over city planning in the postprogressive years, shifting the purpose of planning more exclusively to supporting economic efficiency. 13

City-planning efforts in Hartford in the late 1910s lagged as a result of the inactivity of the Municipal Art Society and the limited scope of the work done by the Commission on the City Plan. Without the energy of
the progressive reformers, Hartford was no longer the fore in American city planning. In 1924 Mayor Norman C. Stevens criticized the planning commission for having "lain dormant for fifteen years while over two hundred other cities and towns have created City Plan Commissions which are very active and have established their rights and duties." He proposed reviving the commission and assigning it to work on zoning, housing, and regional planning. "In my opinion Zoning is one of the greatest needs of Hartford today," he said, adding nothing further about housing or regional planning.\(^6\)

Zoning, which meant very different things to different people, was gaining support throughout the United States in the late 1910s and 1920s. It appealed to a broad constituency that included conservative ideologues who wanted to segregate the classes, business leaders eager to ensure predictable growth in real estate values, efficiency-minded advocates of expanded governmental authority, and idealists seeking to improve slum conditions. Inspired largely by the example of German cities, Americans interested in city planning had begun promoting the idea energetically in 1909, with the publication of Benjamin Clarke Marsh's *Introduction to City Planning* and the convocation of the First National Conference on City Planning. At that conference, Henry Morgenthau of New York praised zoning as a way to mitigate the evils in the urban environment that he believed were sapping the vigor of the lower classes and breeding disease, depravity, and socialism. Other speakers supporting the idea included the younger Frederick Law Olmsted and Hartford's Frederick Ford. Ford described zoning as part of the effort to secure "healthful, orderly, and symmetrical development" and to prevent excessive population densities. He freely acknowledged that zoning meant unprecedented restrictions on the use of private property, but he argued that American city planners had only to look at the flawed development of older urban neighborhoods to see the need for efficient governmental control. "We should realize more than ever before that [new] development must be along radically different lines from the older work if we are to attain the highest ideals," he told the conference.\(^7\)

In addition to producing improved housing and reducing density, the Municipal Art Society believed that zoning could help the community overcome individual greed and produce a more tasteful urban landscape.

In 1911 a group of Municipal Art Society members, including Flagg and Hillyer, asked the planning commission to seek an ordinance limiting the height of buildings facing parks, open spaces, and thoroughfares throughout the business district. The society was concerned that skyscrapers would destroy the beauty of the city's public spaces, particularly Bushnell Park. "Hartford is no longer a village," warned Hillyer. "The haphazard system of building is no longer possible for a city the size of Hartford."\(^8\)

Zoning also had exclusionary implications that Hartford reformers did not discuss so openly. Parker wrote publicly of being inspired by German city planning, and he was undoubtedly guided by his own experience in dividing park space, but his private letters suggest that he was at least as influenced by the racial segregation laws of southern cities. As an official of the American Park and Outdoor Art Association and of the American Civic Association, he traveled extensively through the South in the first decade of the twentieth century, visiting numerous cities and their parks. Having once worked as an overseer of black farmhands on a Maryland plantation, he was sympathetic to the South's effort to maintain white supremacy, an effort that was aided by the Jim Crow laws being adopted and strengthened at this time. The Jim Crow laws rested on a broad base of political support among southern whites, ranging from progressives who believed legal segregation would produce a more harmonious racial order to radical racists motivated by hatred. Parker sympathized with both the reformers and the racists. In the course of his travels, he even befriended the savagely negrophobic U.S. senator, Benjamin R. Tillman, of South Carolina, advised Tillman on the landscaping of his home, and began a fawning correspondence with him.\(^9\)

Parker favored zoning regulations as a way to apply the Jim Crow philosophy to the entire urban landscape, as he indicated in a 1906 letter to a fellow advocate of city planning. "Your method of segregating the white and colored population in units distributed over the city is all right," he wrote, referring to the other reformer's plan for Greenville, South Carolina. "But for some time I have been more and more impressed that it will become necessary for cities to have the right to set aside and designate certain parts of the city's territory for such purposes. For instance, designate a certain section, as the commercial or business section of the
city, and one or more other sections for manufacturing, and especially to be able to designate certain sections as residential districts of the first, second, or third class."

Parker believed that it would not be necessary to write race into the zoning regulations explicitly. The regulations could "allow buildings of much cheaper construction in the residential districts of the third class and have the rate of taxation so low that naturally the colored people would be separated in sections designated for them." He thought that such methods were applicable to northern cities as well. "I look to the South to be leaders in the many lines of civic improvement which is hardly in the embryotic state at present. I have great faith in the South." Parker was correct in thinking that southern cities would be innovators in city planning. Although Boston imposed height restrictions in 1891, and Los Angeles established industrial zones in 1909, southern cities took the lead in adopting zoning regulations in the 1910s. Baltimore enacted a racial zoning ordinance in 1910, inspiring imitations in Richmond, Atlanta, Birmingham, Louisville, and other southern cities. Housing reformers in Baltimore and Richmond provided crucial support for racial zoning campaigns. Throughout the South racial zoning drew support as a way to prevent the spread of housing blight, to prevent black encroachment on white neighborhoods, and to create an orderly system of differentiating and stabilizing the use of urban space. The racial zoning movement suffered an ultimately fatal injury when the U.S. Supreme Court struck down Louisville's ordinance in 1917, but additional cities, including Charleston, Dallas, Indianapolis, and New Orleans, continued to pass such ordinances for years. And zoning ordinances without racially specific language were used deliberately and quite effectively in promoting segregation.14

In Hartford, where in 1910 less than two percent of the population was black, class issues were more important than racial issues. Carré and Hastings explicitly sought to promote class segregation by arguing that the ideal location of the "working people zone" was at the opposite side of town from the affluent "residential zone." Notwithstanding Parker's philanthropic advocacy of housing for skilled workers and the lower middle class, the Municipal Art Society was anxious to prevent the invasion of multifamily housing into Asylum Hill. In 1913 Flagg and other members of the society's board of directors discussed their fear that the spread of ugly apartment buildings was ruining the best residential districts and views.15

Though this peculiar mix of idealism, aestheticism, and snobbery lay behind Hartford reformers' early support for zoning, different motivations led to zoning's ultimate adoption. The business leaders and politicians who secured the passage of the necessary regulations in the 1920s sought to end the conflict between beauty and efficiency not by denying its existence, as the Municipal Art Society had done, but by segregating different land uses. In this way, they argued, they would make each neighborhood congenial for a specific use and protect real estate investments. "Among the results of 'zoning' are stabilizing of land values, protection of home neighborhoods, adequate and suitable space for industrial and commercial developments, relief of traffic congestion, improvement in conditions of health and morality, improved fire-fighting conditions, conservation of investment in public works, etc.," reported the planning commission in 1922. The commission made its report at a time when American business leaders and men of property were becoming reconciled to the idea of increased governmental intervention in economic life. Such intervention stifled some of the opportunities present when entrepreneurial competition was unrestricted, but at the same time it offered greater stability and safety for those already established in business or real estate. It benefited those who desired orderly economic development—at the expense of startup businesses. Mayor Norman C. Stevens told the Common Council in 1925, "Zoning is the scientifically planned development of a city. It brings order out of disorder, removes conditions which have become obstacles in the way of economic value, use and development of the City, and prevents desirable residential sections from being exploited by small business ventures."16

Other cities had adopted zoning regulations because of similar concerns about secure property values and the need to balance orderly development against quality of life. New York City enacted the first comprehensive zoning law in the United States in 1916, largely in response to Fifth Avenue property owners' concerns that the construction of industrial loft buildings would undermine the avenue's status as a prestigious shopping district. Zoning advocates did not try to stop the construction of skyscrapers in congested lower Manhattan even though these raised serious health and public safety issues. Instead, they devised a zoning map
for the city that accepted much of the status quo. The zoning map and the accompanying regulations codified existing patterns of development considered beneficial to real estate investors, prohibiting those deemed threatening. They aimed to replace risky speculation with stability and to create a city in which developers could undertake construction projects with no fear that later, incompatible development would destroy the buildings’ value. The New York zoning ordinance proved to be extremely influential both in its technical provisions and in its underlying philosophy. By the end of 1916 seven other American cities had enacted zoning ordinances, and by the end of the 1920s nearly eight hundred municipalities had done so. During this period of zoning’s rapid expansion, however, the concept lost some of the reformist aura that had earlier surrounded it. It was transformed into the cause of business-minded men who believed that regulating development would be financially advantageous without threatening the quality of life.44

Perhaps fearing that the metaphors of the machine and of science would repel voters, later zoning advocates sought to explain their ideas by using the house as a metaphor. Unlike Bushnell, who had thought of the home as a place that drew people into warm interactions, such zoning advocates as Herbert S. Swan of New York thought in terms of the orderly differentiation of functions. “Just as we have a place for everything in a well-ordered home, so we should have a place for everything in a well-ordered town,” Swan wrote in a 1920 article in American City magazine, in which he emphasized order as an essential aspect of gentility. “What should we think of a housewife who insisted on keeping her gas range in the parlor and her piano in the kitchen? Yet anomalies like these have become commonplace in our community housekeeping.” Swan’s comments were quoted in a pro-zoning article issued by the U.S. Department of Commerce and reprinted in the Hartford Chamber of Commerce’s Hartford magazine in 1922. The Hartford article went on to describe the unzoned city as a dirty and déclassé household “in which an undisciplined daughter makes fudge in the parlor, in which her sister leaves soiled clothes soaking in the bathtub, while father throws his muddy shoes on the stairs and little Johnny makes beautiful mud-pies on the front steps.” Such a household was clearly not the home of the better sort of people, the article implied, and such a city would not project the image desired by the affluent members of the chamber of commerce. As the zoning advisor to Hartford in the mid-1920s, Swan undoubtedly had many opportunities to repeat this point.45

The zoning of the city could have been made part of a larger planning vision, a “subdivision of the city into natural neighborhoods,” which, Parker had suggested, might promote a sense of community on a smaller scale. Indeed, the historians Zane L. Miller and Bruce Tucker suggest that a somewhat similar desire to promote neighborhood cohesion, ethnic community, and cultural pluralism influenced city planning in Cincinnati. But such a vision seems to have been lacking in Hartford in the 1920s. Following the disappearance of the progressive reformers, the vacuum in city planning was filled by the business-minded, Republican politicians who ran Hartford for most of the decade. The pattern of alternating party rule that had begun in the early 1890s ended in 1920. Except for a two-year interruption by the mayoralty of a conservative Democrat, Republicans controlled city hall throughout the 1920s, holding to a more narrowly probusiness agenda than had previous Republican mayors like William F. Henney and Louis R. Cheney, both members of the Municipal Art Society.46

The Republican Norman C. Stevens, a young Aetna Casualty and Surety executive who lived in the suburban West End, had made zoning his pet project even before his election as mayor in 1924. In 1923 he had persuaded fellow members of the Common Council to set up a committee to consider the matter. After assuming the mayoralty, he reorganized the Commission on the City Plan as a group of private citizens led by a local real estate agent, Herbert F. Fisher, and directed it to prepare a zoning ordinance. Swan assisted the commission in its work. A council subcommittee, headed by an alderman who worked as an attorney for Aetna Life Insurance, then presented the ordinance for public comment at a series of contentious hearings. Following some revisions, Mayor Stevens energetically sponsored this legislation to its passage by a vote of 28–0 in February 1926. Stevens and his supporters declared that zoning aimed to create a healthy environment both for home life and for real estate investment. In a debate on an interim zoning measure in 1925, one alderman argued, “If it is not passed our residential districts will suffer; if it is passed we will protect our residential districts.” The editors of
the Times added in 1926, “The purpose of zoning is to control the physical development of the city, insure against the erection of buildings where they do not belong and against the improper invasion of business and industry into residential districts. The purpose is to enhance property values and not to destroy them.”

The nearly interminable public disputes over the zoning ordinance in 1925 and early 1926 centered around how best to balance the goals of enhancing property values and establishing stable patterns of land use. They did not consider whether these goals were the appropriate focus of city planning. One point of controversy was whether to allow further business development on Asylum Avenue and Farmington Avenue, both major thoroughfares in Asylum Hill and the West End. Some Asylum Hill residents were anxious to preserve the residential character and fading grandeur of that area, while others thought that the character of their neighborhood was doomed anyway, and that Asylum Hill’s brightest future lay in commercial development. “Asylum Avenue, if kept residential, will in the near future deteriorate into a cheap boarding house district,” warned one man who wanted it zoned for business. Another controversial question was how strictly the city should limit the height of buildings. The early advocates of zoning had been particularly interested in restricting skyscraper construction, largely for aesthetic reasons, but some downtown property owners in the 1920s argued that Hartford should take pride in its rising skyline and do nothing to stop its growth. The few Hartford residents who were wholly opposed to zoning argued that it interfered with private property rights.

The ordinance as finally adopted established a hierarchy of land use. The strictest protections were applied to the elite A residential zone, which was limited to the northern part of the West End, two small pieces of Asylum Hill, and some incompletely developed land in Blue Hills. Greater densities were permitted in the B and C residential zones, which included less prestigious areas of houses and multifamily buildings outside the core of the city. Most working-class and immigrant districts, however, were more leniently zoned for business or light industry. The ordinance was quite tolerant of new commercial development, as long as it followed established patterns of growth. By this time the concentration of traffic on certain streets had already encouraged intensive commercial development there. Recognizing the evolving pattern, the zoning map designated the radial thoroughfares as business streets, with the exceptions of Asylum Avenue, most of Blue Hills Avenue, and most of western New Britain Avenue. Washington Street was also zoned for business. The city officials who reached these decisions were not simply preserving the status quo. For example, before the adoption of the zoning rules, there were many houses and small tenements on Wethersfield Avenue, but few businesses; the city chose to zone the area for business anyway. Buildings as high as sixteen stories were permitted in an area extending from the South Green to Clay Hill and from the Connecticut River to eastern Asylum Hill, including nearly all the streets bordering Bushnell Park, even though skyscrapers could be found on only a few blocks in the downtown. Developers who felt too restricted by the height limit or any other clause in the ordinance could request an exemption from an appeals board.

The preamble to the ordinance included a rhetorical acknowledgment of zoning’s roots in progressive reform, declaring that zoning would help prevent overcrowding, ensure adequate light and air, and promote “the public health, comfort and general welfare in living and working conditions.” But the ordinance itself undercut these stated goals by allowing housing densities as high as 140 families per acre throughout most of Hartford, as well as permitting continued construction of all but the most offensive heavy industries in many working-class areas. It gave businessmen a relatively free hand in developing much of the city—while protecting their own residential neighborhoods from commercial or industrial encroachments. There was little in the ordinance to indicate how zoning might help achieve Parker’s vague dream of cottages for workingmen. Zoning, after all, could not tell property owners what should be built, it only told them what could not. It divided Hartford’s private land into seven clearly defined grades analogous to the grades of a commodity like wheat. Zoning took some of the chance out of real estate investments and elevated the power of money, helping the buyer or developer ensure that he got more or less what he paid for. Workingmen could buy cottages in southwest Hartford if they had the money to do so, just as they could before zoning was adopted. The main difference was that they could now do so with greater confidence that poorer people and businesses would
not follow. With zoning, neighborhoods would become and remain more homogeneous.  

In contrast to the planning proposals of Bushnell, the Olmsteds, and Carrère and Hastings, the new zoning ordinance and accompanying map did not seek to stem the fragmentation of Hartford. Zoning emphatically encouraged the ongoing segregation of the city by function and class, and it greatly enhanced central authority over urban development. The result was supposed to be a harmonious balance between diversity and unity. The city would remain a divided landscape—split into areas of poverty and wealth, production and consumption, masculinity and femininity—but its divisions would be controlled and codified under the unity imposed by municipal government. The theory was that zoning would manage diversity by arranging it spatially.

The coherence zoning provided was easier to see on a map than on the ground. Zoning thus marked a shift from the earlier goal of making the urban order visible. Even Carrère and Hastings, though favoring class segregation, had seen the need for greenbelts and scenic vistas to tie Hartford's disparate neighborhoods together; but there were no greenbelts, no parkways, and no vistas on the zoning map. Such aesthetic amenities were foreign to its purpose. Instead it served up a collection of neighborhoods and the same old radial thoroughfares (now frankly declared to be commercial strips), all centering on a commercial downtown. Discarding the reformist dream of teaching social unity, Stevens and the other city officials who devised the map sought primarily to impose administrative order on the patterns of growth that had been splitting Hartford since the late nineteenth century.

Nevertheless, they were not acquiescing helplessly in existing conditions. Their zoning map, by designating areas for uses that were not dominant at the time, was as much a value-laden blueprint for change as Carrère and Hastings's plan had been. It was innovative, even radical, in replacing the unbridled competition of the real estate market with a new, regulated system under municipal authority. It was also much more successful in effecting change than the previous plan had been, since it relied on the city government's police powers rather than its far more limited spending powers. Despite property owners' many requests for exceptions to and changes in the zoning rules, development in the next fifteen years generally followed the mandated patterns, and the configuration of land use in Hartford today shows striking similarities to the seventy-year-old zoning map.

Hartford city officials of the 1920s adopted a new planning philosophy that, while incorporating the familiar principle of segregating the use of space, transformed its meaning. Though the decision represented a major change, progressive reformers had been inching in that direction for some time. The segregation of the park system had established a precedent for dividing urban space into units reserved for specific social groups and functions. The city's role in creating a differentiated street system had also shown how government could segregate the use of public space and, in addition, influence private development. The Progressive Era shift toward segregating the use of space had been supported by reformers partly as a way to maintain order and preserve a cluster of values associated with the middle-class home, much as the shift toward stricter racial segregation had been viewed in the South.

Hartford reformers had forthrightly invoked values associated with gentility and Victorian womanhood in their campaigns to restrict newsgirls, expressmen, and peddlers; in their conflicts over the segregated vice district; and in the movement to reform play. They hoped to ensure that middle-class ideas of morality, order, courtesy, and self-restraint would be fostered by the environments in which Hartford's people lived. Reformers invoked the same ideas to justify the segregation of parks and the creation of a differentiated traffic system, but they gradually shifted their emphasis to efficiency, describing both the park and street systems as machines.

In applying the principle of segregated space to planning a modern city, reformers drifted ever further from Bushnell's concern for environmental influence. The Municipal Art Society had tried to have it both ways. It sought to minimize the distinction between sculpting a beautiful environment to nurture gentility, on the one hand, and engineering a physical setting for the efficient acquisition of wealth, on the other. Flagg and Parker at first seemed to acknowledge the difference but then retreated, perhaps fearing that beauty would lose in any direct
confrontation with efficiency. They argued instead that the segregation of urban space would serve both purposes. The emphasis in Hartford's city planning gradually turned from the usefulness of beauty to the beauty of usefulness until the older values finally faded away. Following the decline of the Municipal Art Society and the Commission on the City Plan, the segregation of space was no longer used as a tool to better the influence of the environment on the community or the individual. Instead, in the hands of Herbert Swan and Norman Stevens, it became a way to balance conflicting impulses in order to protect both the residential neighborhoods and the investment interests of prosperous citizens. A beautiful environment became an amenity feasible only in neighborhoods with the proper zoning designation. Through zoning, Hartford's tradition of environmental reform was coopted by those who were preserving and managing the social divisions that Bushnell had tried to overcome.

For those who mourn the vitality and diversity of American streets, it is tempting to point an accusing finger at the public officials who facilitated automobile use. In parts of downtown Hartford, as in many other urban centers, one of the few signs of street life today is the engineered pulse of the traffic artery. Sidewalks are almost wholly abandoned to the derelict poor at the close of each workday, while torrents of automobiles surge past on their way to suburban safety. A pushcart peddler returning to sell tomatoes on Front Street would be flattened by thousands of tons of metal rushing down what is now called Columbus Boulevard.

Some of the most significant changes in the use of American streets took place in the Progressive Era, those energetic decades of reform around the turn of the century. Public officials transformed certain streets from multipurpose social spaces into transportation routes. City governments literally paved the way for increased automobile use as they restricted street activities that interfered with traffic. Mid-twentieth-century civic leaders, influenced by modernist planning theories, further promoted automobile traffic. Modernist architects like Le Corbusier